

Romantic ideal in which the artist would make art that would unconsciously express one culture with its audience. As such, it is a dream that appeals to anti-elitist demands for popular art and cultural demagogues alike.

Rainey's notes to these essays are detailed and helpful, and people who have not slogged their way through every reference in the poem will find that his reprinting of Eliot's sources alongside the poem saves them a good deal of tedious riffing. It is not a comprehensive list—there is no reference to Eliot's important allusions to Tennyson's "Maud" or to Whitman's "When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd," for instance—but then, it could not be, since the very idea of producing a fully annotated version of the poem begs the question raised by Christopher Ricks's extraordinary edition of *Inventions of the March Hare* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997), namely, where would you stop? Eliot's sources include poems, sermons, philosophies, letters, advertisements, conversations, travel documents, people he once knew, phrases he heard from someone else, and so on ad infinitum; it is one of the poem's characteristic ironies to mock the kind of critical scholarship displayed by its own notes, carefully disentangling origin from influence. A hypertext edition of the poem awaits only a very confident editor. In the meantime, the full-text sources Rainey provides (including, wonderfully, the sheet music for "That Shakespearian Rag") and Eliot's lively essays make *The Annotated Waste Land* a great choice for anyone without immediate access to copyright libraries, and the annotations summarize many of the best points of scholarship in *Revisiting "The Waste Land."* *Revisiting "The Waste Land,"* on the other hand, feels like a work still in progress, although perhaps this is appropriate for a book whose astonishing appendix of 166 unpublished Eliot letters and their locations will only remind less diligent scholars how much Eliot we have yet to read.

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Guru English: South Asian Religion in a Cosmopolitan Language. Srinivas Aravamudan. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005. Pp. xii+302.

Srinivas Aravamudan's first book, the widely and deservedly praised *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688–1804*, centered on eighteenth-century British and French literature. In *Guru English*,

which runs from just about 1804 to the present, Aravamudan presents a new scholarly concept: “Guru English,” both language and theological message, claims access to a core Indian wisdom that it then offers as a gift, or as a retailable commodity, to the world. This witty and learned book avoids the prefabricated binaries of metropolis and periphery and analyzes instead the knotty particularities of the ongoing if unequal dialogue that stretches from the “arch-orientalist” William Jones’s Sanskritology in the 1780s to Adolph Coors’s Transcendental Meditation infatuation in the 1970s. Who could fail to be dazzled by a work that, in the midst of a sweeping genealogy of guru-think, guru-speak, and the South Asian diaspora, still takes the time to explain Madame Blavatsky’s stuffed baboon?

This is the tenth offering in Princeton’s consistently impressive “Translation/Transnation” series, edited by Emily Apter, a series that also includes Isabel Hofmeyr’s stunning *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of “The Pilgrim’s Progress.”*¹ That book shows how Bunyan’s form of ecstatic millenarianism made his text a free-floating, even deracinated Christian touchstone—and it anatomizes succinctly the late-imperial “nationalization” process that, by the early twentieth century, came to mark Bunyan as a distinctly English visionary. The collateral connection between Hofmeyr’s and Aravamudan’s books is a revealing one. Rather than trace the narrowing and nationalizing of a worldwide religious figure, *Guru English* inverts the paradigm by exploring what happens when knowledge that once belonged to a single region, South Asia, is turned into a kind of “religious cosmopolitanism” with the potential to reach a worldwide audience.

Aravamudan’s interest in how Indian thinkers have conceptualized intercultural exchanges about rationality, universalism, and religious belief makes for a very interesting comparison not only to Gyan Prakash’s *Another Reason* and Gauri Vishwanathan’s *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* but also to Amartya Sen’s recent work.² The great accomplishment of *Guru English*, which will be recognized by literary scholars, historians, and social scientists alike, is to crystallize a single concept—Guru English—that convincingly

1. Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of the Pilgrim’s Progress* (Princeton University Press, 2004).

2. Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton University Press, 1999); Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton University Press, 1998); Amartya Kumar Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture, and Identity*, 1st American ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2005); Amartya Kumar Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, Issues of Our Time (New York: Norton, 2006).

connects the Romantic Orientalism of the early nineteenth century (from Rammohun Roy to Ralph Waldo Emerson) with the syncretic but avowedly “Eastern” Theosophy of Madame Blavatsky, Annie Besant, and J. Krishnamurti in the early twentieth century, and with the brilliantly marketed commercial guru machinery of Deepak Chopra today.

The core of Aravamudan’s insight is that teachings delivered in the low puns and high music of Guru English paradoxically come across as universal wisdom precisely because they remain redolent of the subcontinent. Aravamudan captures this paradox nicely in describing the fin de siècle success of the traveling sage Vivekandar, which depended upon “the close fit between cosmopolitan universalism and racial essentialism—each playing a designated role—at this late Victorian moment” (55). One of Aravamudan’s most useful insights—though he never puts it in exactly these terms—is that the deployment of Indian spiritual wisdom in this vatic, oracular mode can take two distinct rhetorical forms. Indian “wisdom” can be called a “local” knowledge, the logic of the auraticized holy place gone universal; or wisdom may belong to a binary, in which the spiritual East instructs the materialist West. In that case, the teachings of the master, rather than seeming an enigma from far off, seems already quintessentially part of a greater global order.

The root of *Guru English*’s great strength, but also of its small weaknesses, lies in the exceptionally far-ranging account Aravamudan offers of the phenomenon. He defines Guru English four ways: as “register,” “discourse,” “transidiomatic environment,” and “commodifiable cosmopolitanism.” A linguistic “register” is something like a professional vocabulary: think of medical jargon or legalese. It is on this linguistic basis that Aravamudan proposes to call Guru English a “theolinguistics”—though it has the capacity to intrude on extrareligious discussions in much the same way that legal terms can infiltrate everyday parlance. Somewhat more broadly, Guru English is a “discourse” because “this form uses multilingual puns, parody, and syncretism that tend to open-ended and indeterminable features that can influence the religiously inclined and also those not so disposed” (6). For instance, John Lennon spent eight weeks with TM propounder Maharishi Mahash Yogi. But when he came to report the experience, he riffed on the title of Yogananda’s 1946 best seller *Autobiography of a Yogi*: “this is turning into *autobiography of a yogurt*” (242). Would you want to call that Guru English or a parody? The interplay between humor and sincere guru-speak is one of Aravamudan’s key points.

More capacious still are Aravamudan’s final two categories: “Commodifiable cosmopolitanism” helps Aravamudan describe how, in the

modern market environment, the old binary of “Eastern spiritualism and Western materialism” is turned into cash for the Chopras of the world. However, the other key term—“transidiomatic environment”—goes deeper: “the passive background that informs and enables other cultural and linguistic activity” (6–7). Aravamudan uses this phrase to ground his discussion of J. Robert Oppenheimer’s famous quote from the Bhagavad Gita at the Los Alamos nuclear tests: “I am become death, the shatterer of worlds” (146).

Aravamudan also argues that Guru English is the “passive context” within which “the Indian and Pakistani military establishments manipulate religious vocabularies into state-sponsored nuclear rhetoric while naming weapons systems or taunting each other during their recent nuclear standoff” (7). In a chapter called “The Hindu Sublime,” Aravamudan argues that “nuclearism can go cultural through Guru English” (145) because “theolinguistic discourses provide the hermeneutic or transidiomatic background against which the national recognition of various tendencies take place. Both Indian and Pakistani nationalists aggressively use religious nukespeak” (144). In a climate where Indian missiles can be named after “the Vedic sky” and “Shiva’s traditional weapon” (179), “religious nukespeak” seems just right.

However, this particular brand of “neotraditionalism” seems distinct in ethics and intent from the “local” cosmopolitanism that Aravamudan elsewhere describes as the core of Guru English. I almost expected Aravamudan to make the opposite case: that such ardently patriotic use of religious discourse highlights how truly distinct Guru English’s ardent if fuzzy cosmopolitanism is from the fierce nationalism that “religious nukespeak” justifies. Guru English, after all, seems aligned with claims of denationalized transcendence, while the rhetoric of the nuclear arms race belongs to a discourse of Indian exceptionalism that discourages international camaraderie.

Also somewhat puzzling is Aravamudan’s blurring of the line between religious devotees of guru argot and its satirists. There are several hilarious parodies of Guru English analyzed here: R. V. Desani’s neglected masterpiece *All about H. Hatterr* (1948), V. S. Naipaul’s *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* (1988; Aravamudan is interested in whether “mullah English” too can be a type of Guru English), and a host of other satirical texts. Aravamudan’s analyses on the microscopic level are, for the neophyte and the well-versed reader alike, illuminating. But his macroscopic account of the place of those parodies is odd.

By Aravamudan’s account, there is a “transidiomatic” similarity between guru phraseology and the parodies and satires that have arisen to laugh at it. The debunking that aesthetic texts can do to

elaborated belief structures, though, is well explained by Peter Knight's point that Thomas Pynchon's novels about conspiracy thinking are not themselves conspiratorial, that by penetrating the language of conspiracy and rendering it fictional, they undercut the devout believer's desire for a reliable conspiracy theory.³ Surely a similar case could be made here. It is hard to read James Joyce as "more of a Theosophical syncretist than a heterodox modernist" (115) when you compare Blavatskian or Golden Dawn credos with this parodic version inserted into *Ulysses* (1922): in the afterlife, a believer affirms, "abodes were equipped with every modern home comfort such as tālāfānā, ālāvātā, hātākāldā, wātāklāsāt" (121; i.e., telephone, elevator, hot and cold [water], water closet). This is Guru English gone goofy.

Aravamudan's argument about the relationship between satire and its objects varies. Near the book's end, Aravamudan suggests that "Guru English from its inception, existed alongside extensive parody, satire, and general criticism of the phenomenon by Indians as well as others" (230). That reading of parody's place credits Joyce's, Desani's, and Rushdie's intent: to ridicule the religious claims and the political ambitions of (Eastern and Western) practitioners of guru discourse. However, Aravamudan's assertion that there is a "dialectic of dreamers and debunkers" (141), and that Joyce or Rushdie may be of the syncretist party without intending it, risks minimizing substantial differences between those who use the same linguistic register to criticize, ridicule, and attack one another.

This logic becomes troubling when Aravamudan presumes that Rushdie shares with Aravamudan himself a respect for religious cosmopolitanism and a reluctance to cause trouble by riling up believers: "Writing his novel in Britain, Rushdie internalizes syncretism and transidiomaticity, while unfortunately ignoring the graver dangers of circulation and incitation by transnational media from a metropolitan center" (199). Was Rushdie really ignoring those dangers, rather than working satirically inside them? Aravamudan suggests that a satire like Rushdie's inherently critiques secularism's "weak pluralism" and that satire "demystifies liberal democracy's limits as not qualitatively different from those of the positions it attacks, even if those are situationally external to liberalism" (215). However, I find it hard to see how Aravamudan's criticism of pluralism, liberalism, and democracy can be attached to Rushdie's satire on Koranic literalism.

Aravamudan's against-the-grain reading of Rushdie points up the potential dangers of theorizing a "passive" "transidiomatic back-

3. Peter Knight, *Conspiracy Nation: The Politics of Paranoia in Postwar America* (London: New York University Press, 2002).

ground” as the glue that connects seemingly diverse phenomena. When the method works, however, as with the distant link between the Romantic Orientalism of Rammohun Roy and the disastrous proselytizing of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, the connections are remarkable, and galvanizing. The fascinating quality of some of the connections Aravamudan makes suggests that the problems I have discussed in the last few paragraphs may be nothing more than necessary concomitants of an exceptionally ambitious project. Because *Guru English* aims to excavate connections that have been glimpsed neither by latter-day observers like ourselves nor by the original actors involved, Aravamudan must at times go beyond reading overt, declared intentions to analyzing the passive backgrounds that secretly connect disparate situations.

There is also another explanation for some of the most broadly conceived linkages in *Guru English*. Although it only rarely says so, *Guru English* aims to be not only widely descriptive but also modestly prescriptive. Perhaps Aravamudan does go a bit far in claiming Hindu nationalism for part of *Guru English*, in positioning Rushdie’s satire as an implicit assault on the complacencies of liberal democracy, and in collapsing the differences between the use that “dreamers” and “debunkers” make of theosophy and multilingual puns. He pushes such connections, however, because of his prediction-cum-hope that in a *Guru English*-inflected postcolonial future, “The new formations that might be anticipated involve underground religiosity without full-fledged religion, self-orientalization without colonialist orientalism, and transidiomatic universalism without the need for a foundational universalism” (264). Aravamudan is not a Believer, then, but he does want to believe, and his interest in achieving the universal without the foundational, and religiosity without full-fledged religion, has led him to map out some remarkably creative and revealing connections.

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Writing Lovers: Reading Canadian Love Poetry by Women. *Méira Cook*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005. Pp. xiii+258.

Among its accomplishments, Méira Cook’s *Writing Lovers* will introduce readers outside Canada to a group of modern and contemporary poets they could easily come to love: Dionne Brand, Kristjana Gunnars, Louise Bernice Halfe, Dorothy Livesay, Nicole Markotic,