

Shifting Multilingualism: Jhumpa Lahiri's Expansion from (Multilingual) Author to (Self-)Translator

Sandra Vlasta

Abstract: This article traces Jhumpa Lahiri's trajectory from writer to (self-)translator from the perspective of multilingualism. I am particularly interested in Lahiri's transition from English to Italian and her return to English, this time as a translator. Indeed, it was not until she began writing in Italian that she became a translator. At the same time, the new language revealed her former bilingualism (English–Bengali). I analyse how Lahiri positions herself as a multilingual poet/translator and how she is positioned through paratexts.

Keywords: Jhumpa Lahiri, translanguaging, translation, self-translation, English, Italian

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Introduction

Jhumpa Lahiri – born in London to Indian immigrants and raised in the United States – was a successful writer from the very start of her career. Her first book, the short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), was very well received by both critics and the wider public. In fact, she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2000 and was recognised for her subsequent works as a major American author.

After a prolonged stay in Rome with her family at the beginning of the 2010s, she made a surprising and audacious decision: she decided to change her language of artistic expression from English to Italian and resolved to write only in Italian from that point on. Unlike other authors – both contemporary and historical – who had switched from one language to another because of exile or flight (such as Milan Kundera, Ágota Kristóf and many others) or because their first language(s) did not allow them to address a wider readership (such as Nobel laureates Wole Soyinka and Adulrazak Gurnah), Lahiri, without any particular external pressure, switched from English to Italian. In this way, she turned her back on the dominant language of world literature in order to write in Italian, a much smaller language both in terms of speakers (i.e. potential readers) and in terms of literary translations (compared to more common source languages such as English and French).

In what follows, I trace Lahiri's expansion from (supposedly, as we will see) monolingual writer to multilingual writer and translator/self-translator. This development, I argue, was greatly influenced by her experience of literary multilingualism. Indeed, it was not until she began writing in Italian that she became a translator.

As I will show, Lahiri was a translingual writer from the start. In fact, she moves between at least three languages: Bengali, English and Italian. We could also add Latin and Greek to the list, as she engages with these classical languages in her recent translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (mainly Latin, but also Greek). While her literary work has always been highly influenced by multilingualism, this has only been acknowledged by critics since her turn to Italian. Her multilingualism recently led her to become a translator, first of works by others and then also of her own texts. Alongside this development, Lahiri has begun to position herself as a multilingual poet and translator in her poetological comments in journal articles and lectures (which were recently compiled in a volume entitled *Translating Myself and Others*, 2022).

In this paper, following a brief introduction of the author, I analyse her trajectory from writer to self-translator. I ask whether we can speak, first, of a translingual turn in general and then, second, of a translational shift in Lahiri's career as a writer. I am particularly interested both in how she positions and fashions *herself* as a multilingual poet and translator and in how far she is positioned as such by the publishing industry and critics.

Jhumpa Lahiri

Jhumpa Lahiri was born in London in 1967 and grew up in the United States. Her parents had emigrated from West Bengal, a state in the northeast of India. Ever since she received the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, Lahiri has been acknowledged as an important author, for instance for the novels *The Namesake*, 2003, and *Lowland*, 2013, as well as her second short story collection *Unaccustomed Earth*, 2008. She is now an internationally acclaimed writer; in 2009, she was awarded the Premio Gregor von Rezzori by the Italian City of Florence for *Unaccustomed Earth*.¹

Lahiri started learning Italian in her late twenties, after a stay in Florence, where, as she says in her language memoir *In altre parole* (2015; *In Other Words*, 2016), she fell in love with the Italian language. As she writes, it was “un colpo di fulmine” (21; “love at first sight”, 13). After learning Italian for years, Lahiri decided to move to Rome with her family in 2011, where she stayed for three years and eventually wrote a book in Italian about her experience with the Italian language, the above-mentioned *In altre parole*.² She resolved to write only in Italian from that point on and abandoned the English language to write an essay (*Il vestito dei libri*, 2016; *The Clothing of Books*, 2016), a novel

1 The *Premio Gregor von Rezzori – Città di Firenze* (Gregor von Rezzori Prize – City of Florence) is an Italian literary prize that is awarded annually in Florence to the best Italian translation published in the preceding year (see the prize's website: <http://premiogregorvonrezzori.org>).

2 For a detailed presentation of *In altre parole* see Dagmar Reichardt (2017), who reads Lahiri's text as part of modern transcultural Italian literature.

(*Dove mi trovo*, 2018; *Whereabouts*, 2021), short stories (*Racconti romani*, 2022 (Roman Stories)), and poems (*Il quaderno di Nerina*, 2021 (Nerina's notebook)) in Italian. It is important to stress that during this time Lahiri refrained from producing anything original in English in order to concentrate on Italian and "to protect" it (Lahiri [2016] 2017, xiii), as she put it.³ In her language memoir, she recounts her experience of reading only in Italian, a project she had started even earlier. As a consequence of her refusal to write in English, her Italian books were translated by others: Ann Goldstein, a renowned translator who has translated Elsa Morante, Primo Levi and, most famously, Elena Ferrante translated Lahiri's *In altre parole* into *In Other Words*. *Il vestito dei libri* was translated by Lahiri's husband, Alberto Vouvoulis-Bush. In an essay in 2018, Rainier Grutman (2018, 5) in fact complimented Lahiri on her decision not to translate *In altre parole* herself and on her acknowledgement of her own limitations as a translator, saying that she "belies the widely held view (by both writers and literary critics) that self-translators can per definition do more and better" (Grutman 2018, 5).

Lahiri has recently returned to English, not so much as a writer (even though she has published some shorter non-fiction texts in English), more in the role of a translator from Italian. To date, she has translated three novels by the Italian writer Domenico Starnone into English (*Ties* (2017), *Trick* (2018), and *Trust* (2021)). In 2019, she edited the anthology *The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories*, which includes forty short stories, some of which she translated herself. In addition, she translated her own first Italian novel into English (*Dove mi trovo*, published as *Whereabouts*, 2021).

Jhumpa Lahiri's latest book, *Translating Myself and Others* (2022), is a collection of previously published or presented essays on translation, written in both English and Italian. Her focus in these texts is her experience as a (self-)translator and her approach to translation. In describing the latter, she often makes reference to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and stresses the transformative character of translation. As she tells us, she is currently working on an English translation of the *Metamorphoses*, together with her colleague at Princeton University, Yelena Baraz (see Lahiri 2022b, 147–155). Thus, she does not restrict herself to translation between Italian and English and seems to have taken on the role of translator in a more extensive way that includes ancient Latin as well as what might be called contributions to translation theory.

With the above sketch of Lahiri's journey through languages and translations from the different languages in hand, let us return to our question concerning the possible transitions or shifts in the course of her career. Did Lahiri become a translingual author only when she started writing in Italian? That is, can we speak of a 'translingual turn' in her career at that point?

3 The short introduction Lahiri had written for the English translation of *In altre parole* is an exception to this, but even there she states that "it [Italian] is the sole language in which I continue to write" (Lahiri [2016] 2017, xiii).

From English to Italian: Lahiri's translingual turn?

Lahiri states in *In altre parole* that her first language, her 'mother tongue' ("lingua madre", 2015, 110), is actually Bengali. However, she never wrote or read in this language and is unable to do so, as she reports on the same pages (109–110). She started writing in her second language, English, which she refers to as a stepmother ("una matrigna", 110). This was the language of instruction in her early school years and later education and the language she was surrounded by in the United States outside the family home.⁴ As she stresses in *In altre parole*, however, neither Bengali nor English were actually *her* language. Rather, these languages were chosen by her parents (in the case of Bengali) and by the context in which she lived (in the case of English). Lahiri indeed presents these two languages as tongues with which she was 'filiated',⁵ to use Edward Said's term, but which she did not consciously choose herself. Rather, they were chosen for her by her family and her surroundings, a fact that she describes in a negative way when she states: "Non riuscivo a identificarmi con nessuna delle due"⁶ (110). Importantly, though, Lahiri used English as her literary language, and very successfully so. In addition, she stresses that English is the language in which she is most competent (which, however, has not prevented her from writing in other languages). In any case, her reflections on her different languages reveal that even though she was not initially perceived as such, she has always been a translingual author – that is, using Steven Kellman's (2000) definition, a writer who writes in a language that is not her first (or in several such languages) or who writes in many languages. Although her Indian cultural background has always been appreciated by the critics, not least because of the topics of many of her earlier books, her multilingualism has received comparatively less attention.

At about the age of twenty-five, Lahiri discovered Italian: "L'arrivo dell'italiano, il terzo punto sul mio percorso linguistico, crea un triangolo"⁷ (113). Lahiri reminds us that the triangle is a dynamic figure: "Il triangolo è una struttura complessa, una figura dinamica. Il terzo punto cambia la dinamica di questa vecchia coppia litigiosa. Io sono

4 Here, I quote what Lahiri herself writes about her own L1/mother tongue. I am aware that in linguistics, L1 or 'mother tongue' is defined differently and is a nuanced rather than a clear-cut concept. Lahiri's language biography is in fact a very good illustration of how L1 is perceived in studies of multilingualism: L1 depends on different criteria, such as origin (in Lahiri's case, the ethnolinguistic background is Bengali), competence (Lahiri most likely never received a formal education in Bengali but only in English) and identity (affiliation). These three aspects can coincide but they can also contradict each other. See Hewitt, R. 2003 (1992).

5 I use this term with reference to Edward Said, who in his book *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1983) distinguishes between having a filiated and having an affiliated relationship with a text (see, in particular, 20–23). I would like to thank Daniele Monticelli for pointing this out to me.

6 "I could not identify with either of the two." If not stated otherwise, translations from the Italian are mine.

7 "The arrival of Italian, the third point in my linguistic itinerary, creates a triangle."

figlia di quei punti infelici, ma il terzo non nasce da loro. Nasce dal mio desiderio, dalla mia fatica. Nasce da me”⁸ (113).

Lahiri uses this model to explain the relationship between her languages and to illustrate her relationship with them. She first sees them as the corners (“punti”, as in the quote above) and then as the sides (“lati”, Lahiri 2015, 115) of a triangle. Here, again, English is given weight through its position at the base of the geometric figure, it is the language on which everything else is built: “L’inglese rimane la base, il lato più stabile, fisso”⁹ (Lahiri 2015, 115).

Furthermore, the triangle is a figure that is associated with the number three and with the Christian model of the Trinity, one God in three persons (God the father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit). It also represents the nuclear family: mother, father and child. For Lahiri, languages and family are closely linked, another instance that recalls Said’s concept of filiation. Her own language history is defined by her parents and their migration, and Lahiri’s children and husband would later accompany her to Rome. In addition, her husband has translated some of her books. Finally, the triangle is also a percussion instrument: metaphorically, Lahiri’s musical instrument comes into being and can thus be played only once the third language – Italian – arrives. Lahiri stresses the element of choice that was part of this arrival (“It is born by me”), thus underscoring that her relationship with Italian is an affiliation rather than a filiation, to return to Said’s terms. It is something she brings to her language biography that also changes her view of her former language relations. The sense of wholeness that the triangle implies is coupled with linguistic insecurity, in particular in Italian. This is especially true insofar as Lahiri does not use an experimental style in the new language, as Tomer Gardi does in German and Katalin Molnár in French (see Vlasta 2019; Murphy 2019; Öri 2019), instead aiming for correctness and idiomatic accuracy.

Lahiri was not forced to learn Italian for either migration or political reasons, but it is her language of choice. This choice was kept private for a long time, until Lahiri decided to switch to Italian for her public engagement with language in her role as a writer. Rather than her origins and circumstances (such as family, work, school, environment, location, etc.), which commonly affect language choice and use, it was will and self-determination that led her to choose Italian.

Furthermore, as a writer she established an additional affiliation by choosing Italian, namely that with the Italian literary realm. In her Italian books, Lahiri attempts to

8 “The triangle is a complex structure, a dynamic figure. The third point changes the dynamic of this old quarrelsome couple. I am the daughter of those unhappy points, but the third is not born by them. It is born by my desire, by my effort. It is born by me.”

9 “English remains the base, the most stable, firmest side.”

stress this affiliation, for instance by referring to Antonio Tabucchi, whom she quotes in the epigraph to *In altre parole*: “.. avevo bisogno di una lingua differente; una lingua che fosse un luogo di affetto e di riflessione”¹⁰ (Lahiri [2016] 2017, no page numbers). Antonino Tabucchi was a well-known Italian writer and scholar of Portuguese literature who decided to write his novel *Requiem (uma alucinação)* (1991; *Requiem: A Hallucination*, 1994) in Portuguese. By citing Tabucchi, Lahiri is referring to a renowned Italian writer, positioning her own work in relation to his.¹¹ On the other hand, with this particular choice and the meaning of the quote, she underscores an aspect of translingualism that she shares with Tabucchi, i.e. the search and need for a different language. She also does this in her non-fiction texts, for instance when she puts her own work in context with other writers who wrote in different languages, such as Samuel Beckett, Joseph Brodsky, Juan Rodolfo Wilcock, Jorge Luis Borges and Leonora Carrington (see Lahiri 2022b, 71). A similar reference can also be observed in a more recent case: Lahiri and Igiaba Scego, an Italian writer with Somali roots, were invited to publish a conversation in the Italian newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera* on the question of language(s), in particular Italian, and belonging to Italy and Rome (Rastelli 2023). This also includes belonging to Italian literature (although it is not discussed explicitly), and the conversation thus has a similar effect on Lahiri’s positioning: as part of Italian literature and as part of a newer corpus of translingual Italian writers.

Both Lahiri and Tabucchi had the aesthetic and political freedom to change the language of their writing. Their choice was not without risk: both Lahiri and her critics have underscored that changing one’s language is a hazardous choice for a writer to make. The difference between Lahiri and other translingual writers is that her (and Tabucchi’s) choice was not influenced by migration, flight or exile, the need to address a new readership, or the fact that her other languages were not sufficiently popular. This is often the case with authors from African countries who choose to write in English or French because writing in their other, less-published language(s), would not win them any recognition. In many such cases, English or French is also the language of a former colonial power; this choice is therefore a difficult one in terms of culture and politics as well (on this see, most famously, Derrida 1996). Choosing English or French as a literary language gives the writers in question access to the global literary market and to a wider readership. In Lahiri’s case, the choice of Italian decreased her readership and the market in which she could be present. Her choice meant a step down to a

10 “.. I needed a different language; a language that was a place of affection and reflection.”

11 See also Grutman (2018) who stresses this connection, underscoring the fact that, like Lahiri, Tabucchi wrote (only) one work in another language and translated text by others (mainly Fernando Pessoa) into Italian. At the time, Lahiri had not yet embarked on the project of self-translation.

smaller literary scene. At the same time, however, the literary field in which Lahiri entered with her Italian publications is a prestigious one. Her move is therefore not necessarily in opposition to those (postcolonial) writers who opted for a language change for reasons of visibility. Due to her past career and her public presence in the Italian literary scene from the start, Lahiri is still granted a high level of prominence.

As Lahiri never wrote in Bengali and never seems to have considered this an option, it was her decision to write in Italian which caused her to reflect on language change and to make this a topic of her writing (which is the case in *In altre parole* and in many essays). Although she can be viewed as a translingual or multilingual writer, Lahiri is in fact an exophonic writer only when it comes to her Italian works. As a writer, English was never a foreign language to her, even though – chronologically speaking – she did not learn it as her very first language. It is only with regard to Italian that she can be said to be writing ‘outside’ of her own language, as the German-Japanese author Yoko Tawada describes exophonic writing.¹² When Lahiri started to write in Italian, she also began to reflect on her earlier bilingual upbringing, which thus became known to her audience. Therefore, if we can speak of a translingual turn in Lahiri’s career, this is only true of her reception: since she began writing in Italian, she has been received as a multilingual writer.

From writer to (self-)translator: Lahiri’s (self-)translational shift

Lahiri’s second book written directly in Italian, the novel *Dove mi trovo*, appeared in 2018. In 2021, the book was published in English, entitled *Whereabouts* and translated by the author herself. This translation was accompanied by several comments by Lahiri on her decision to self-translate, for instance in the essay “Where I Find Myself” (first published in the online magazine *Words Without Borders*, April 2021, and later published in the collection *Translating Myself and Others*, 2022). In this text, Lahiri tells of why she chose to translate the text herself rather than enlisting a translator, as she had with her first book written in Italian, *In altre parole*. She recounts the effect the translation process had on her view of the Italian book and the English translation, of her writing in Italian and her future work, both as a writer and as a translator. The self-translation and Lahiri’s reflections led to her being perceived not only as a writer who had switched languages but, increasingly, as a translator.

However, her activity as a translator had already started earlier, with the publication of *The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories* (2019), some of which Lahiri translated. In addition, she translated two of Domenico Starnone’s books, before translating

¹² The concept was later taken up by German studies scholars Susan Arndt, Dirk Naguschewski and Robert Stockhammer (2007) and introduced into literary studies.

her own novel, *Ties* (2017; translation of *Lacci* (2014)) and *Trick* (2018; translation of *Scherzetto* (2016))¹³. The author herself stresses the importance of “gaining experience translating other authors out of Italian before confronting” (Lahiri 2022b, 83) her own novel. Thus, at the point of her translation of *Dove mi trovo/Whereabouts*, we can speak of a self-translational shift rather than a turn to translation in Lahiri’s career.

Lahiri has written extensively about her relationship with the Italian language and about how speaking a different language changes one’s view of the world. However, in her view the act of translating seems to confront one even more with what Wilhelm von Humboldt called a *Weltansicht* (world-view), a different view of the world that each and every language possesses (see Humboldt 1999).¹⁴ For Lahiri, translating and translations “permettono di sconfinare, capire altri mondi, tempi, Paesi, culture”¹⁵ (Rastelli 2023, no page).

Adrian Wanner’s analysis (2023) provides a detailed comparison of the Italian and the English versions of *Dove mi trovo/Whereabouts*. He shows that Lahiri’s English translation is contaminated by Italian and “displays some features of linguistic foreignness that one also encounters in her occasionally English-inflected Italian” (Wanner 2023). Here, I will focus on other aspects of Lahiri’s multilingual self-translation.

Lahiri and self-translation

Self-translation has been defined as “the phenomenon of an author producing an additional text by translating their own written work into another language” (Gentes and Van Bolderen 2022, 369).¹⁶ This definition is also applicable to Lahiri’s case and to her self-translation of *Dove mi trovo*.

Furthermore, translingual writing can be understood as self-translation per se, as Kristine Anderson reminds us when she states that “the mere act of writing in a language not one’s first is, in a sense, a type of self-translation” (2000, 1251). According to this definition, Jhumpa Lahiri assumed the status of self-translator when she composed her first work in Italian, *In altre parole*. Perhaps she took on this status even earlier, at the time she composed her very first texts in English, as chronologically speaking her first language (L1) was Bengali and not English.

Rather than viewing Lahiri as having been a self-translator from the very beginning, however, perhaps we should reconsider how we define languages and language

13 The third text, *Trust* was published in Lahiri’s translation in 2021.

14 I would like to thank Marko Pajević for this and other valuable suggestions.

15 “allow one to cross borders, to understand other worlds, times, countries, cultures”

16 For similar definitions, see Popović 1976 and Lamping 1992. Rainier Grutman underscores the polysemy of the term *self-translation* when he states that “the term ‘self-translation’ can refer both to the act of translating one’s own writings into another language and the result of such an undertaking” ([1998] 2009, 257).

proficiency. In fact, in making her relationships with her different languages' public, Lahiri addresses aspects of language learning and language use that are part of many people's daily lives. She shares an experience with many immigrants whose first language (L1), while perhaps their most intimate one, the one in which they feel most at home, is not necessarily the one in which they are most proficient in all spheres. Lahiri's critical assessment of this situation challenges the idea that the sequence in which we learn languages (usually referred to as L1, L2, L3, etc.) necessarily reflects our competence in them, that is, that we are inevitably most skilful in our first language, often referred to as our mother tongue, and less so in other languages (a belief that is also shared in the practice of translation). Rather, the classification of languages into L1, L2, etc., may express the chronology of language learning (though this also gets tricky when languages are learned in parallel) but says little about language use, language proficiency and, finally, about our emotional relationship with a language.¹⁷ Furthermore, this illustrates what Vivian Cook has called multi-competence: the fact that speakers of more than one language are multilingual individuals rather than speakers who have simply added another language to their repertoire. The different languages in a speaker's mind affect each other, the languages are connected to each other and have an effect on the person's cognitive skills.¹⁸

One of the questions that arises in the context of self-translation concerns the direction of translation. Translation – that is, allographic translation, translation undertaken not by the author but by another – is commonly assumed to proceed from the translator's L2 (or L3, L4, etc.) to the translator's L1, that is: L2 → L1. There are of course many examples of translators who translate into their L2, L3, etc., and thus exceptions to this 'rule'. In addition, this assumption becomes tricky with translators whose L1 is not clearly distinguishable or whose competence in their L1 may not be as high as their competence in the other languages they know. Nevertheless, it is commonly believed (and standard practice in the translation business) that translation, in particular of literary texts, works best if the translator translates into what is (or is perceived to be) their L1.

In the case of self-translation, the direction is less clear from the start. Translation takes place, but it is not necessarily clear which position the languages have within the translator's language biography: L? → L? In Lahiri's case, she translates from her L3 (Italian) into her L2 (English). At the same time, she self-translates from a less commonly spoken to a more dominant language. Rainier Grutman (2011) calls such translations "supra-self-translations" (as opposed to "infra-self-translations", which take the

¹⁷ See also my reference to Hewitt in footnote 4 above.

¹⁸ See Cook (2016).

opposite direction, that is, from a dominant to a less common language). In her own self-translation projects, the direction thus seems to be the opposite of that taken when she began writing in Italian. While she has chosen to turn to a more minor language in her recent original writing, she is translating and self-translating for a much larger community of readers.

Furthermore, if we think of the difference between simultaneous self-translation (which, following Anderson's definition, could be any form of translanguaging) and consecutive or "delayed" self-translation (see Grutman 2016), Lahiri's work is a form of delayed self-translation that took place only after the original had been published. What is more, Lahiri did not originally plan to translate her own work; as she explains, she was about to commission someone else to do the translation and then took over (see Lahiri 2022b, 73–74). Self-translation in her case is closely connected to her own activity as a translator of works by other authors. Translating other authors' Italian texts into English made her want to do the same with her own Italian text. The experience of translating and teaching translation (at Princeton University) was accompanied by an intense reflection on translation (not least expressed in her essays on the topic and in various articles and interviews) that eventually led to her own efforts at self-translation.

Lahiri herself poses questions that came to her in the process of self-translation and that are typically addressed in the literature on self-translation: Which text is the original? Does the text that was published first remain the original? Which text will be the basis for further translations? The latter is not an insignificant question in the case of texts that, through self-translation, have been published in both major and minor languages. Although *Dove mi trovo* had already been translated into other languages (such as German, Spanish and Dutch) from the Italian, this does not mean that future translations will also be based on the Italian book. Publishers could turn to the English version instead – a more common language for which it is easier to find translators. Furthermore, because it is a self-translation, the English version might be perceived as an original (or at least something close to it) anyway. This is also the view that the UK publisher seems to have taken, as I will discuss below.

Lahiri's self-translation brings into question the relationship between the original and the translation. Do they stand in a hierarchical relationship or a democratic one? Do they have the same 'value' since they were written by the same author, or is there an original that is of higher 'value', as critics often conclude in the case of allographic translations? As a reflective author-translator, Lahiri herself addresses these questions. She takes them even further when she addresses the hierarchy "between what is authentic and what is derivative", which influences not only how works of literature – original texts and translations – are perceived but also "how we regard one another": "Who is original, who belongs authentically to a place? Who does not? Why are those

who are not original to a place – migrants who did not ‘get there first’ – treated as they are?” (Lahiri 2022b, 49–50). Although her essay leaves it at this, she makes it clear that such questions give the act of (self-)translation political significance.

Lahiri continues to speak of the Italian original and the English translation, a view shared by Adrian Wanner (2023). Lahiri acknowledges that the translation had an effect on the original, mentioning several small corrections, and states that she will consider the Italian paperback, in which these changes will have been taken care of, the final version of the novel (see Lahiri 2022b, 85). Lahiri herself refrains from comparing the value of the two texts, but questions about the relationship between the two texts remain particularly relevant to their reception, which brings us to the final point I would like to address.

Questions of reception

Critics and readers presume that self-translations are different from allographic translations. Whereas allographic translations are expected to strike a balance between adequacy and acceptability (see Toury 1995), in the case of self-translation the author's intentions remain in the foreground. These intentions may have a more aesthetic quality, for instance in the sense of a rewriting of the text. Alternatively, self-translation can aim at the adaptation or accessibility of a piece for a particular audience (see Gentes and Van Bolderen 2022, 372–373). Self-translators are granted more authority and agency than allographic translators.

How are these aspects of self-translation presented to the reader in a work's paratext? How (if at all) does the act of self-translation become visible to the audience? In Lahiri's case, we find two different strategies: The American edition acknowledges that the novel was written in Italian and self-translated into English by the author on the book's inner title page:

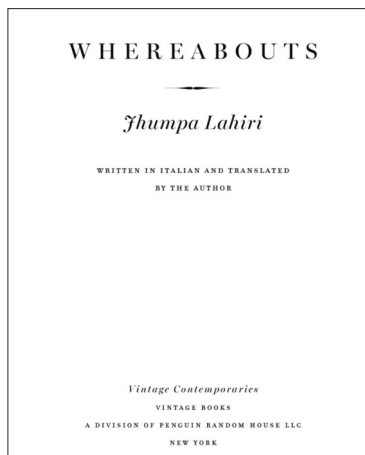


Image 1: Title page of the American edition of Jhumpa Lahiri's *Whereabouts*.

In the British edition, this reference is missing:

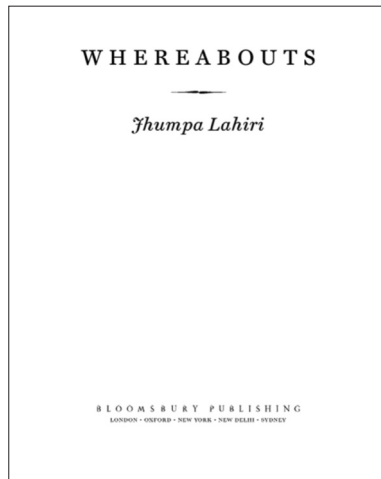


Image 2: Title page of the UK edition of Jhumpa Lahiri's *Whereabouts*.

Here, Lahiri is simply presented as the author of the English text. Readers find out about the Italian origin of the text only on the credit page – which the general reader usually does not consult – where it reads, in fine print: “Originally published in Italy in 2018 as *Dove Mi Trovo*” (*sic*).

This wording does not clearly state that the text is a translation. Rather, the transformation into English seems to have happened miraculously. The act of self-translation remains opaque, nearly invisible (see Dasilva 2011). In the American version, on the other hand, it becomes transparent; the self-translation is made explicit.

Perhaps the American publisher anticipated that readers of the English translations of Lahiri's books may have been prepared for her turn to self-translation. Although the first book she wrote in Italian, *In altre parole*, was translated by someone else (Ann Goldstein), it was published as a bilingual facing-page edition, with the Italian text on one side and the English text on the other. In addition, it includes an introduction by Lahiri that briefly explains her decision not to translate her first Italian book herself. Self-translating her second book may thus, *ex negativo*, be seen as a consequence of a decision she had since reconsidered. The UK editor did not seem to be as confident about Lahiri's choice, however, and obscured her decision to self-translate. In contrast, the publisher of Lahiri's translations of Domenico Starnone's novels, Europa Editions, used her well-known name on the covers of *Ties* and *Trick* and made her role as translator explicit: “Translated and with an introduction by Jhumpa Lahiri”. We can thus observe different strategies when it comes to positioning the writer/translator/self-translator in the literary field.

Conclusion

In this article, I have tried to delineate Jhumpa Lahiri's expansion from seemingly monolingual (but multicultural) writer to multilingual translator and self-translator. I referred to the supposed changes in her career as Lahiri's translanguaging turn and her (self-)translational shift, respectively. A closer look at the author shows that she has been a multilingual writer from the start, a fact that was acknowledged by critics only when she switched to Italian as her literary language, not least because Lahiri herself addressed her relationship with her different languages in *In altre parole*.

How will Lahiri's transition develop from this point? The triangle she uses as a model to explain the rapport between Bengali, English and Italian seems to have already taken on new forms. At this point, she could add Latin, and perhaps Greek, as a further element of her linguistic profile. Indeed, she is no stranger to exploring new forms of writing, shifting from author to translanguaging author, from translator to self-translator, and, most recently, to co-translator of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Lahiri has repeatedly mentioned that this last text, with its theme of constant transformation, has been deeply meaningful to her own work as a writer (Lahiri 2022b, 147–155). This is given concrete expression in the female Janus by Amanda Weiss featured on the cover of Lahiri's book on translation. Given what we've seen so far, readers and critics can expect to see further metamorphoses of this versatile writer.

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Sandra Vlasta – an assistant professor at the University of Genoa, Italy. Her research interests are literary multilingualism, literature and migration, and travel writing. Her publications include the monograph *Contemporary Migration Literature in German and English: A Comparative Study* (Brill | Rodopi, 2016) and *Immigrant and Ethnic-Minority Writers since 1945: Fourteen National Contexts in Europe and Beyond* (Brill | Rodopi, 2018; co-edited with Wiebke Sievers).

e-mail: sandra.vlasta[at]unige.it

Nihkuv mitmekeelsus: Jhumpa Lahiri kasv (mitmekeelsest) kirjanikust (enese)tõlkijaks

Sandra Vlasta

Võtmesõnad: Jhumpa Lahiri, keeleülesus, tõlge, enesetõlge, inglise keel, itaalia keel

Jhumpa Lahiri sündis 1967. aastal Londonis ja kasvas üles Ameerika Ühendriikides. Tema vanemad olid emigreerunud India kirdeosas paiknevast Lääne-Bengali osariigist. Tema esimene raamat, novellikogu „Interpreter of Maladies“ (1999, eesti keeles „Murede mõistja“, 2007) leidis nii kriitikute kui ka laiema lugejaskonna seas väga head vastuvõttu. Nii pälvis ta 2000. aastal Pulitzeri kirjandusauhinna ning ka järgmiste teoste, romaanide „The Namesake“ („Nimekaim“, 2003) ja „Lowland“ („Madalmaa“, 2013) ning ka teise novellikogu „Unaccustomed Earth“ („Harjumatu Maa“ 2008) eest on ta vääerinud kiitust kui oluline Ameerika kirjanik. Nüüdseks on temast saanud rahvusvaheliselt tunnustatud autor; 2009. aastal omistas Itaalia Firenze linn talle raamatu „Unaccustomed Earth“ eest Gregor von Rezzori preemia.

Itaalia keelt hakkas Lahiri õppima kahekümnendate eluaastate lõpus, olles viibinud Firenze, kus, nagu ta ütleb oma keelememuaaris „In alter parole“ („Teisisõnu“, 2015; inglise keeles „In Other Words“, 2016), ta itaalia keelesse armuski. Nagu ta kirjutab, oli see „un colpo di fulmine“ (‘armastus esimesest silmapilgust’, otsetõlkes ‘välgulöök’, lk 21; ingliskeelses tõlkes „love at first sight“, lk 13). Pärast aastaid kestnud itaalia keele õppimist otsustas Lahiri 2011. aastal kolida oma perekonnaga Rooma, kuhu ta jäi kolmeks aastaks, ning langetas üllatava ja hulljulge otsuse: ta otsustas inglise keele kui kunstilise väljenduse keele vahetada itaalia keele vastu ning edaspidi kirjutada üksnes itaalia keeles. Erinevalt teisest autoritest – nii nüüdisaegsetest kui ka ajaloolistest – kes on läinud üle ühelt keelelt teisele kas maapao või põgenemise tõttu (nt Milan Kundera, Ágota Kristóf ja paljud teised) või seepärast, et nende emakeel ei võimaldanud neil kõnetada laiemat lugejaskonda (nt Nobeli laureaadiid Wole Soyinka ja Abdulrazak Gurnah), lülitas Lahiri inglise keelelt itaalia keelele ümber ilma igasuguse välise surveta. Sel kombel keeras ta selja maailmakirjanduses domineerivale keelele, et kirjutada itaalia keeles, mis on palju väiksem nii selle kõnelejate (s.t potentsiaalsete lugejate) arvult kui ka sellest tehtavate ilukirjandustõlgete poolest (kõrvutades tavalisemate lähtekeeltega, nagu inglise ja prantsuse keel). Lahiri kirjutas oma itaalia keele kogemusest itaaliakeelse raamatu, keelememuaari „In alter parole“. Lisaks on ta itaalia keeles kirjutanud essee („Il vestito di libri“, 2016), romaani („Dove mi trovo“, 2018), lühijutte („Racconti romani“, 2022) ja luuletusi („Il quaderno di Nerina“, 2021).

Kuna ta keeldus inglise keeles kirjutamast, tõlkisid tema itaaliakeelseid raamatuid teised inimesed: tuntud tõlkija Ann Goldstein, kes on inglise keelde vahendanud Elsa Morante, Primo Levi ning kõige kuulsamana Elena Ferrante teoseid, tõlkis Lahiri „In alter parole“ raamatuks „In Other Words“. „Il vestito dei libri“ tõlkis Lahiri abikaasa Alberto Vouvoulas-Bush.

Lahiri on hiljuti inglise keele juurde naasnud, mitte niivõrd kirjanikuna (ehkki ta on inglise keeles avaldanud lühemaid mitteilukirjanduslikke tekste) kui võrd tõlkijana, sh enesetõlkijana itaalia keelest. Nüüdseks on ta tõlkinud inglise keelde kolm Itaalia kirjaniku Domenico Starnone romaani. 2019. aastal toimetab ta itaalia novellide antoloogia „The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories“, mis sisaldab neljakümme novelli, millest mõned on ta ise tõlkinud. Lisaks tõlkis ta inglise keelde omaenda esimese itaaliakeelse romaani („Dove mi trovo“, pealkirja all „Whereabouts“ („Asukoht“, 2021), olles seega pöördunud enesetõlkimise juurde – tegevuse juurde, mida ta varem vältis.

Jhumpa Lahiri viimane raamat „Translating Myself and Others“ („Tõlkides ennast ja teisi“, 2022) on varem avaldatud või ette kantud tõlketeemaliste esseede kogu, mis on kirjutatud inglise ja itaalia keeles. Need tekstid keskenduvad tema kogemustele (enese)tõlkijana ning tema lähenemisele tõlkimisele. Viimast kirjeldades viitab ta tihti Ovidiuse „Metamorfoosidele“ ning rõhutab tõlkimise transformatiivset olemust. Nagu ta meile räägib, tegeleb ta koos oma Princetoni ülikooli kolleegi Yelena Baraziga parajasti „Metamorfooside“ inglise keelde tõlkimisega. Seega ei piirdu ta tõlkimisega itaalia ja inglise keele vahel ning näib täitvat tõlkija rolli avaramalt, hõlmates nii antiikset ladina keelt kui ka seda, mida võiks nimetada panusteks tõlketeooriasse.

Käesolevas artiklis järgin Lahiri kasvu (nagu näeme, siis oletatavalt) ükskeelsest autorist mitmekeelseks kirjanikuks ning tõlkijaks/enesetõlkijaks. Väidan, et seda arengut mõjutas tugevasti tema kirjandusliku mitmekeelsuse kogemus. Tõepoolest, temast sai tõlkija alles siis, kui ta hakkas kirjutama itaalia keeles. Oma analüüsis tunnen erilist huvi selle vastu, kuidas Lahiri positsioneerib ning kujundab iseennast mitmekeelse kirjaniku ja tõlkijana ning kuivõrd teda sellena positsioneerivad kirjastamismaailm ja kriitikud.

Sandra Vlasta – abiprofessor Genoa ülikoolis Itaalias. Tema uurimishuvideks on mitmekeelsus kirjanduses, kirjandus ja migratsioon ning reisikirjandus. Tema publikatsioonide hulka kuuluvad monograafia „Contemporary Migration Literature in German and English: A Comparative Study“ (Brill / Rodopi, 2016) ning „Immigrant and Ethnic-Minority Writers since 1945: Fourteen National Contexts in Europe and Beyond“ (Brill / Rodopi, 2018; kaastoimetaja Wiebke Sievers).

e-post: sandra.vlasta[at]unige.it