

On Poems Published in *Ahana and Other Poems*

On Two Translations of *Revelation*

The rendering of *Revelation* is even better than the two others, well inspired from beginning to end; the colouring is not quite the same as in my poem, but that is hardly avoidable in a poetic version in another language. To alter it, as you propose, would be to spoil it. There is no point in rendering literally “wind-blown locks”, and it would be a pity to throw out *দিশিময়ী*, for it is just the touch needed to avoid the suggestion of a merely human figure. It *is* needed—for readers are often dense. An Indian critic (very competent, if a little academic) disregarding all the mystic suggestions and even the plain statement of the closing couplet, actually described the poem as the poet’s memory of a girl running past him on the seashore!!

25 January 1931

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The translation is very good poetry. It is perhaps not quite the original, for what you describe is an obviously superhuman figure while the details in the poem might be those of a human figure and it is something subtle and not expressed but only hinted which gives the impression expressed only at the end that it is someone of the heavenly rout. That however does not matter; your version can be taken as an adaptation of the idea in the poem and not a strict translation of it.

On Two Translations of *The Vedantin’s Prayer*

You have made a very fine and true rendering of the *Vedantin’s Prayer*. Perhaps so hard and rocky a person as the Vedantin, who is very much of a converted Titan, would not have thought of such a sweet and luxurious word as *কুসুমি* in the midst of his

ascent and struggle, but these few alterations do not make any real difference to the spirit. There is a quite sufficient nobility and power in your translation. With that, it seems to me as literal as it can be.

6 May 1932

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Kshitish Sen's translation of the opening lines of the *Vedantin's Prayer* are magnificently done. He has quite caught the tone of the original, its austerity and elevation of thought and feeling and severe restraint of expression with yet a certain massiveness of power in it, — these at least were what tried to come out when I wrote it, and they are all unmistakably and nobly there in his rendering. If he can complete it without falling from the high force of this opening, it will be a *chef-d'oeuvre*. I notice he has got the exactly corresponding verse movement also.

24 June 1932

On a Translation of *God*

It is not a very satisfactory translation, but your changes improve it as far as it can be improved.

Why তবু in the fourth line? The idea is that work and knowledge and power can only obey the Divine and give him service; Love alone can compel him — because, of course, Love is self-giving and the Divine gives himself in return.

As for the second verse it does not give the idea at all. To have no contempt for the clod or the worm does not indicate that the non-despiser is the Divine, — such an idea would be absolutely meaningless and in the last degree feeble. Any Yogi could have that equality, or somebody much less than a Yogi. The idea is that, being omnipotent, omniscient, infinite, Supreme, the Divine does not scorn to descend even into the lowest forms, the obscurest figures of Nature and animate them with the divine Presence, — *that* shows his Divinity. The whole sense has fizzled out in the translation.

You need not say all that to the poetess, but perhaps you might very delicately hint to her that if she could bring in this

point, it would be better. Then perhaps she would herself change the verse. 25 December 1930

On a Word in *In the Moonlight*

What is the meaning of the word “ground” in these two lines from your poem *In the Moonlight*? —

. . . Are Nature’s bye-laws merely, meant to ground
A grandiose freedom building peace by strife.

Does “ground” mean “crush”?

“Ground” means here not to crush, but to make a ground or foundation for the freedom. What Science calls laws of Nature are not the absolute or principal laws of existence, but only minor rules meant to build up a material basis for the life of the Spirit in the body. On that has to be erected in the end, not a rule of material Law, but an immortal Liberty — not law of Nature, but freedom of the Spirit. The strife of forces which is regulated by these minor laws of Nature is only the battle through which man has to win the peace of Spirit. This is the sense.

February 1929

James Cousins on *In the Moonlight* and *The Rishi*

I hear that James Cousins said about your poem *The Rishi* that it was only spiritual philosophy, not poetry.

I never heard that. If I had I would have noted that Cousins had no capacity for appreciating intellectual poetry. But that I knew already — just as he had no liking for epic poetry either, only for poetic “jewellery”. His criticism was of *In the Moonlight* which he condemned as brain-stuff only except the early stanzas for which he had high praise. That criticism was of great use to me — though I did not agree with it. But the positive part of it helped me to develop towards a supra-intellectual style. As *Love and Death* was poetry of the vital, so *Ahana* [*Ahana and other Poems*] is mostly work of the poetic intelligence. Cousins’

criticism helped me to go a stage farther.

11 November 1936

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Amal says Cousins ignored *The Rishi* while speaking of the others. Isn't that far worse?

Neither worse nor better. What does Cousins' bad opinion about *The Rishi* matter to me? I know the limitations of my poetry and also its qualities. I know also the qualities of Cousins as a critic and also his limitations. If Milton had written during the life of Cousins instead of having an established reputation for centuries, Cousins would have said of *Paradise Lost* and still more of *Paradise Regained* "This is not poetry, this is theology." Note that I don't mean to say that *The Rishi* is anywhere near *Paradise Lost*, but it is poetry as well as spiritual philosophy.

13 November 1936