What would most certainly be produced are scholars alive to the nuanced complexities of African languages and scholars better prepared to generate theories as yet unformed that come out of the literary-language interface with the rest of culture. This mode of language acquisition and literary study is ambitious, career building, and, most of all, collaborative. It provides a terrain on which people with different knowledge formations come together to work ambitiously as well as collectively.

That's the utopian side of my exploration. Area studies must indeed be in dialogue with postcolonial studies. In this respect, Spivak theorizes what most of us in African literature have practiced, those of us who had or have institutional connections to area studies, in the form of black studies, wherein we might help move American African studies out of the parochial or the national into the global.

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Note

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The Idiom Doesn't Go Over

Something of literature will have begun when it is not possible to decide whether, when I speak of something, I am indeed speaking of something (of the thing itself, this one . . .) or if I am giving an example, an example of something or an example of the fact that I can speak of something, of my way of speaking of something. . . . Literature can all the time play economically, elliptically, ironically, with these [quotation] marks and nonmarks, and thus with the exemplarity of everything that it says and does, because reading it is at the same time an endless interpretation, a pleasure and an immeasurable frustration: it can always mean, teach, convey, more than it does or at any rate something else.

—Derrida, "Passions: 'An Oblique Offering'"[1]

Something Else

Translation and "particularly untranslatable idiomatic words" are critical to Gayatri Spivak's work, as topics of inquiry and as critical practices ("Translating" 101). In her texts, the untranslatable idiom and critical subjectivity emerge with an affect that Denise Riley names "impersonal passion." This impersonal intellectual affect emanates from Spivak's inscription of her work *as* translation and her figuration of its subject and its readers as translators facing idioms that will not "go over" ("Translating" 100). Insisting that there is no metalanguage, Spivak engages us in the work of language as the necessity of translation. This persistent encounter in her oeuvre with "what is untranslatable as content per se" (101), with "something else," is the exemplary moment of her text.

Against Influence

My reading translates our session's title, rendering "influences" as "impact," in the sense of force: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Impact. This translation seems "not only necessary but unavoidable," even as "translation itself loses its literal sense [and] becomes a catachresis," as Spivak argues ("Translation" 21, 13). I must translate "influence" in part because of literary criticism's history, where "influence studies" connotes tracking allusions and verbal echoes. This compulsion (I am spoken by my discipline) signals a feature of translation that Spivak repeatedly underscores. Reading Melanie Klein on the shuttling "translation" from inside to outside and back that produces subjectivity, Spivak writes, "[T]ranslation in this general sense is not under the control of the subject who is translating. Indeed the human subject is something that will have happened . . . something that will have happened without our knowledge, particularly without our control, the subject coming into being" (14).

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But I am also reluctant to trace Spivak's influence because influence speaks the historicist idiom now dominating literary studies. Impact occupies another register, which Peggy Kamuf calls "historicality":

> A literary work has a historical context, as we call it, but no more nor less than any document. . . . [T]he work, if it is still read and studied when this "context" will have subsided into archival compost, has a relation as well to a future, by which it remains always to some extent incomprehensible by any given present. This is the dimension of the work's *historicality*, which is therefore not to be simply confused or conflated with historical "context." (164)

The historicality of Spivak's impact exceeds the content of her interventions. If she argues that translation is not a "translatese" "stringing together . . . the most accurate synonyms by the most proximate syntax" ("Translating" 93), her own language is never purely instrumental or transparent. Translation as "an active site of conflict" and "necessary impossibility" leads Spivak to theorize "translation as reading" (105) and to demonstrate that all language demands translation, "the most intimate act of reading" ("Translation" 20).

Impersonal Intimacy

Historicality marks what is not immediately thematizable in a text, features inspiring "the act of hearing-to-respond that is the imperative to translate" ("Translation" 22); this imperative bears affects. Spivak's "The Political Economy of Women as Seen by a Literary Critic" begins, "If I were to revise the following pages, I would have to sharpen them so much and weigh them down with such detail of documentation, that they should lose their naive passion, which I still endorse. Please read them as the first stirrings of a work that remains with no end in sight" (218). These words inscribe (inter)disciplinary boundaries and contact, revision, valorizations of passion but also of documentation, the reader's power, and an unknown future. These figures appear everywhere in Spivak's work: they constitute its historicality in the demand that her readers translate her texts and in the insight that critical subjectivity emerges in this encounter to come.

Spivak's emphases on disciplinary interpellations and breaks; a former self, written as much as writing; the reader's unpredictability; and the vanishing present and unknowable future produce a grammar of anticipation and provoke the shuttling effect of translation. The speaker is an unstable I, caught in the reading of the other or others; these readers are neither powerless nor fixed. "Although nothing I have to say is new, I believe there is something new in what I *want,*" she writes (218), privileging what her text *might do*: be heard by both theoretical and empiricist factions, readers with powers. Theirs is the crisis of untranslatable idioms. Spivak's conclusion mentions "melancholy," but the affect is something else. She ends, "You will tell me where I've gone right, where wrong" (229). *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* proposes, "As I work at the end of a book that has run away from me, I am of course open to your view. You will judge my agenda in the process" (357). *Death of a Discipline* remarks, "Here, for me, is the enigmatic fictive moment that I can generalize into that inelegant and imprecise phrase, 'open-plan fieldwork,' with unanticipatable results, if any" (50).

Untranslatable idioms breed discontinuity and interruption; their opening to the future is fraught. As text, invitation, and goad, they stress uncertainties and demand erudition, rigor, and commitment, in a process that will not be closed by detailed documents, theory, or all the good will in the world. Read the "difficult" concept metaphors of Spivak's texts: "strategic essentialism," "the other woman," "the subaltern cannot speak," "planetarity," "open-field plan." These idioms offer "prefigurations," not predictions; their power as generalizations lies in a poiesis that *depends on* their "unverifiability"; they "cannot be tied to a singular fact" (*Death* 44). Particularly untranslatable idioms, they provoke passionate, if oblique, translations and mistranslations. Riley argues, "There is a forcible affect of language which courses like blood through its speakers." Language is impersonal, yet it "constitutes the fiber of the

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personal" (1); the agon of naming (Jean-Jacques Lecercle) is at once outside and inside. Indeed, it founds that distinction but keeps it mobile, laden with historicality and force. The idiom doesn't go over. But Spivak's warning, if that is what it is, invites reader-translators into her text, where something will have happened. That something will always be something else.

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Note

1. Derrida's essay is a "response" to a collection of responses to his work and reflects on the difficulty of determining "who is the reader of whom, who the subject, who the text" (13).

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Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Influence(s): Past, Present, Future

Literature buys your assent in an almost clandestine way and therefore it is an excellent instrument of the slow transformation of the mind. For good or ill. As medicine or as poison, perhaps always a bit of both. The teacher must negotiate and make visible what is merely clandestine.

—Spivak, "The Burden of English" (*Lie*)

Rearranging desires. That is how I understand my work, as a teacher.

—Spivak, "If Only"

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has spoken and written about herself as a teacher on many different occasions. In my remarks on her influence(s), I wish to foreground her role as teacher in shaping readers who are often also teachers (and students) of literature. For the most part, I focus on her early (1992), not-so-frequently-commented-on piece "The Burden of English," published in India in *The Lie of the Land* and in the United States in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*. This does not mean that Spivak's influence on me is restricted to this essay. Far from it. The imprint of her other work is evident in virtually everything I have written and taught since the early 1990s. But this most teacherly of texts—on "the teaching, specifically, of English literature" ("Burden" [*Lie*] 275) and delivered to teachers as a lecture in memory of V. Krishna, a teacher of English literature in the college I attended in Delhi—occupies a special place in the development of my thinking on literature and, most especially, of my strategies for teaching, ironically, what Spivak identifies as a construct of "a 'new orientalism' in the discipline of English": "'third world' or 'postcolonial' literature" ("Burden" [*Orientalism*] 134).

This essay's hold on me has partly to do with the fact that as a student and teacher of English who began her career in a former colony, I am a "type-case" of the reader and teacher this essay addresses ("Burden" [*Lie*] 278). But its substantive power lies elsewhere. It stems, for instance, from Spivak's intricate, richly historicized close reading of a text in her mother tongue, a Rabindranath Tagore short story, whose "patterns of cultural values" she gives her "assent" to and, in assenting, "reads with pleasure" (278–79), even as she activates her (and her readers') critical thinking, saying no as well to its "frame of class-alliances and gendering" (284). Her insistence, however, that the critique not be allowed to trump her account of the pleasure she derives from this story is an important lesson and is one I have internalized. I urge my students to do the

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