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Global Narratives

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The Reformatting of Mrs Das' Affair as a story from The Lais

The Reformat

In India, amidst warm summers,

from some yonder, new travellers.

Unfamiliar attire they sport,

in foreign tongue spoke the lot.

Mrs Das, so was named the wife

of the family filled with strife,

found elegant, radiant even,

there did desire awaken.

Mere guide Kapasi was despite

strong smarts and loftier goals in sight,

failed his family, his ambition

lost. Longing for new attention,

did the lady naught but provide,

now he desired her as bride.

On vacation, the group traversed
to ancient grounds, where the well-versed
Kapasi shared rich history.

Stealing glances at the lady,
whilst entranced with the temple,
taking in those arches, gentle
carvings and beautiful sculptures.

There was not any shared culture,
yet present was an understanding,
as if their thoughts were in sync.

As the group strolled, the father lagged
behind for photos to be snagged,
as the children meandered on
searching for sights to glance upon.

Giving space to the fine lady
he walked on respectably,
Still, she followed suit, quite subtle,
both walked along like a couple.

“In ten days” she responded then,
a hopeful inquiry as to when
her departure was imminent.
Still Kapasi felt quite content
for the two had earlier exchanged
contacts, a new chance was arranged.

“By joy! Oh, how I shall await,
I may even stay up till late.

In six weeks, by air, her letter
with pictures, I shan’t forget her!
This trip will be well remembered
whilst our daily words conferred,
surely my wit she will regard,”
he dreamed naively with his heart.

Visit concluded, they drove back
but ideas, our guide did not lack.
“A quick suggestion if you will,
perhaps some time for dazzling hills?”
Kapasi piped up hoping for

just more time, a little bit more.

“Well worth the trip,” he expanded,

“Left, left,” the young ones chanted.

On arrival, the lady said

“Leave me be, the monkeys I dread.”

Her husband blamed, persisted, still

he could not change her iron will.

Away he went, children in hand,

leaving the duo, lady and man.

In deep silence they sat, watching

the little ones playing and gawking

at the monkeys, who loitered near.

“Brave little souls, they have no fear”

Kapasi remarked striving for

conversation with whom he adore.

The lady looked solemn and serious

like she had something to discuss.

“He’s not his,” she revealed, her sin

now shared, the confession begins.

“We met as youths and married young,

an early proposal that he sprung.

Lived for him I did, the things we

experienced, we were so carefree.

But time together, meant no friends

from college to now, to what end?

Neither close to my parents, nor

my family even though I swore.

One day, he brought back a friend,

briefly, our house he would spend

some time. Bobby was thus conceived,

and to my fright I still felt pleased.”

The truth revealed, emotions stirred,

Kapasi felt naught but absurd.

“Why, dear lady, burden me so

with heavy secrets you let flow?”

“I seek healing, change, remedy

for sins since from then I carry.”

He looked away, hole in his heart,

try as he might, he had no part.

Advice he offered, was it guilt?

And off she stormed, this relation wilt.

The lady walked, towards the hill

where her family stood quite still.

In shock she saw, Bobby was gone

panic spread, and thus they searched on.

A scream, a cry, Bobby was found

with monkeys scratching, flailing around.

“Help Him!” the lady pressed on sight

of Kapasi who had the might.

He stomped hard, hissing and shooing

the monkeys, who withdrew dashing.

An endless shower of concern

and care on the frightened last-born.

With haste, the group retreated fast,

“Back to the hotel, quick!” they asked.

Finally, was it now observed,

the familial bond, thus preserved.

Justification

Both *The Lais* and *Interpreter of Maladies* feature love as a core theme. In particular, the subject of marriage, affairs as well as the bond between parent and child is present in many stories of *The Lais*. Marriage and affairs are seen in the lines “[...] ruined, betrayed, by his own wife” (*Bisclavret*, line 126) and “When she notices our love, she will tell her lord about it” (*Yonec*), while the bonds of parent and child are expressed in “Never have I known happiness like this. Our daughter has been found!” (*Le Fresne*, line 486). Similar themes are present throughout the entirety of the *Interpreter of Maladies*. We observe Mrs Das’ dissatisfaction with her current marriage “[...] a woman not yet thirty, who loved neither her husband [...]” (*Interpreter of Maladies*, Page 137), and yet still show unconditional love and concern for her son ““Come here a second, let Mommy fix your hair”” (*Interpreter of Maladies*, Page 139). Likewise, Mr Kapasi is seen to admire and even covet Mrs Das, a married woman, for the duration of the trip as seen from the line “[...] compliment her strawberry shirt, which he found irresistibly becoming [...] he would take her hand” (Page 133), just like the Hawk Knight from *Yonec*. With both texts sharing so many core themes, it makes *Interpreter of Maladies* a good fit for translation into the style of *The Lais*. Therefore, I decided to adhere to the format of *The Lais* by using rhyming couplets and eight-syllable lines, although seven or nine syllable lines are occasionally used and even permitted for the sake of fluidity.

In terms of style, an idealistic lens is used to portray both the stories of *The Lais* and *Interpreter of Maladies*, although this ideal differs slightly for both texts. Within stories such as *Yonec* and *Milun*, characters who are shown to have pure affection for each other are portrayed as the heroes, even if their relationship was considered illicit. For instance, in *Milun* we observe from the line “Her husband was dead, he must now make haste! [...] it seemed quite wonderful to him” (*Milun*), that upon the death of the lady’s husband, she

immediately reunited happily with her beloved. In contrast, for *Interpreter of Maladies*, the story is instead viewed from the perspective of Mr Kapasi, where we gain insight into his feelings for Mrs Das. As seen from “She would write to him [...], and he would respond eloquently [...]

(*Interpreter of Maladies*, Page 130), Mr Kapasi frequently fantasizes on his future interactions with Mrs Das, viewing their relationship as a purer love than what was shared between her and her husband. In order to promote both idealistic viewpoints in my text, I have made several stylistic choices for my reformat. Firstly, only Mr Kapasi and Mrs Das are introduced by name at the start to establish the duo as the primary focus of the narrative. Mr Kapasi is referred to without a title, to help frame the story from his point of view. Similarly, beyond the first paragraph, I only ever refer to Mrs Das using “the lady”. Not only does this reflect the idolisation of Mrs Das by Mr Kapasi, but it also follows the style of *The Lais* which employs the same strategy when referring to the female protagonist.

In addition to this idealism, another quality shared by both *The Lais* and *Interpreter of Maladies* is the in-depth descriptiveness of the text, although once again both texts focus on different aspects. Within *The Lais*, characters are introduced with traits that define their role in the story. The lady in *Laustic* is “an excellent lady, wise, courtly, elegant; a marvel was she, so soignée,” (*Laustic*, line 13) thus resulting in her being pursued by her neighbour, despite being married. Likewise, the mother of Le Fresne in *Le Fresne* starts out as “Full of pride, haughty, deceitful, envious, a slanderer”, (*Le Fresne*, line 26), and culminates in her turning over a new leaf for the sake of reuniting with her daughter. Conversely, *Interpreter of Maladies* chooses to focus on the visual qualities of characters and their environment. We see from “[...] red and white checkered skirt [...] close-fitting blouse styled like [...] calico appliqué in the shape of a strawberry,” (*Interpreter of Maladies*, Page 124) a detailed description of Mrs Das’ attire for the day. Similarly intricate descriptors are used for other characters and locations. To better fit the style of *The Lais*, the visual appearance of the

characters is intentionally toned down in lieu of their traits. I described Mrs Das as “elegant, radiant even”, to fit with the warped perspective of Mr Kapasi who would view Mrs Das with a strong bias. This also serves to subvert expectations in the conclusion, where she is revealed to have none of those traits. As for Mr Kapasi, he is styled as smart and ambitious. By supplementing his current lack of motivation with the failing of his own family, it provides me the opportunity to hint at how he now fills that void with Mrs Das, which explains his obsession with her throughout the story.

Works Cited

Marie de France. "The Lais." Global Narratives Course Pack, compiled by Kevin Goldstein, National University of Singapore, 2022.

Lahiri, Jhumpa. "Interpreter of Maladies." *Interpreter of Maladies*. Houghton Mifflin, United States, 1999, pp. 122-139.