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Author's Preface

Alisher Faiz

It seems to me that the author of a literary work, unlike a critic or reader, has very few things to say about his or her creation since everything he or she wanted to say is expressed in the work itself. And what is more, the creation is a mystery and the author does not necessarily understand the reason, logic and character of his or her work. That is why it is always interesting for me to get some feedback from critics and readers, because it helps me better understand my creation. But amazingly, everybody understands and gives his or her own very subjective interpretation of the literary work, so in fact any literary creation is a sort of Rorschach test: comments and reflections tell more about the reader's than the author's insights. This is the beauty and mystery of literature.

In a way, the same process applies to a translator, since any translator, first of all, is a reader. This means that any translation is a new interpretation of a literary work and not only the translator's understanding the work, but also his or her personality, attitudes and inner condition play a great role. Of course, one of the supreme tasks of a translator is being congruent with the author, conveying the spirit and the aura of the creation. Here, language plays an important role because each language has its own spirit, own way of presenting things.

Any way, I enjoyed the translation of my little short story by Barbara Laughlin. She not only conveyed my thoughts and mood, but also gave me a chance to look at the idea of connection by using an English language framework. I feel connected. English itself is a global connection tool. Its current status is also a product of a global connection. Connection connects.

Now I am sitting in my apartment in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Barbara, who lives in England, is travelling in Australia, and Stacey Van Dahm, who is preparing the journal, is working in Santa Barbara, California. When I met Barbara a couple years ago in Cambridge, England, I could not imagine that her translation of my short story would appear in the journal "Translation" in Santa Barbara. And suddenly a few months ago a friend of mine, Tanya Shadieva from Bukhara, who proposed that I send her

translations of my short stories to this journal, miraculously connected Barbara, Stacey, the journal and me. There is the internet – another global connection tool. Indeed, everything is connected, or may be connected. Even disconnection is a form of connection. So what is next?

Alisher Faiz is a writer, scholar and former diplomat. He lives in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and writes in Russian. Two of his short story books, *Tabula rasa* and *Circulation*, have been published in Tashkent.

Translator's Preface

Barbara Laughlin

What is next? Alisher's thoughts on the nature of connection have reconnected me, the translator, with the now somewhat distant experience of translating his delightful story, creating new connections in my own mind as I read his thoughts on what it is to be a writer, a translator and a reader. A translator is indeed first of all a reader, but a special kind of reader, who embarks on a journey unlike that of any other, be it the author, critic or reader for pleasure. The translator of a work reads that work more closely and with more intense focus than is ever brought to bear by the casual reader, or indeed by the critic, no matter how close their analysis may be. For the translator reads every single word, in the most literal sense, absorbing it, turning it over, looking at it every which way, rolling it around the tongue, savouring it, feeling it from the inside, as it were – and then connects to another world, another language, where the same connections must be made, but the connections are not the same. The translation must connect to the original in the most organic way, but connect at the same time to the new language, in which the original connections must be expressed, and it must connect with a new body of readers, who may have no connection with that original language.

For the translator then, as for no other reader, the language of the work is paramount. In this, the translator is more closely connected to the author, since for the author too (albeit in a more directly creative way), language is the tool by which he or she connects with the reader. So the

translator also creates: a new interpretation, new understanding, new connections and a new connection to new readers.

My task as translator was made both easier and more difficult by what I felt to be the dominant feature of Alisher's writing: the extraordinary, lucid simplicity of the language and the striking contrast between that simplicity and the complexity of the connections of which he writes. Any translator hopes to be invisible, transparent, an unseen and unheard medium, through which the author can connect directly with new readers. How much more so in this case, where the transparent lucidity and gently prosaic quality of Alisher's language so wonderfully complements the subtly fantastic connections, woven in the banal setting of a most ordinary life.

Alisher and I were both astonished at how closely his language connected to the medium of English. As translator, I consciously strove to stay as close as possible to his original Russian, without violating the English language, and, most importantly, without adding any stylistic coloration of my own. This, I hope, has allowed the contrast of the prosaic and the fantastic in Alisher's story to come through and preserved something of the limpid quality of his prose.

"Connection" by Alisher Faiz

Translated by Barbara Laughlin

After much reflection it became clear to Thornton Zhou that everything in the world was interconnected. In time he began to understand the connection, for example, between leaves falling in London's Holland Park and a volcano erupting in Kamchatka or his wife's mood and the world sea level. Recently, seeing a photograph of a weeping woman in an old magazine, he grasped in some mysterious fashion that had she smiled at that moment, the destructive force of a powerful hurricane which occurred twenty years later in the Atlantic would have been much weaker. Thornton's investigations led him eventually to the point where he could foretell next week's weather or the next grain harvest by looking at the pattern of sugar or salt spilt on the table.

Zhou could only suppose what complex chain of associations lay between, say, a shaving kit in a shop window, the snows of Kilimanjaro and his great-great-grandfather, who never shaved and never went to Africa. Still, time and again, he was convinced there was nothing in the world that was not somehow connected.

Thornton was very pleased with his discoveries. Sometimes, from the singing of birds or the serves of his favourite tennis player, Pete Sampras, he could work out which London shop had cheaper beer. In time he even found it exciting to think he might be able to influence the course of events. Indeed, if two objects were somehow connected, anything affecting one of them must influence the other.

But in his heart Zhou knew he should not attempt to influence things by exploiting his talent for capturing hidden connections between them. He sensed vaguely that interfering in the course of events could have an infinite multitude of uncontrollable consequences. Ordinarily, there was no problem, if a person acted naturally in their daily life, making and breaking bonds between objects and phenomena. After all, even the most ghastly actions spawned by life itself were woven organically into the fabric of the universe in a chain of cause and

effect. A sailor sets his sail to the wind, not to a breeze that has already died down or not yet swelled.

Once, for some reason, Thornton drank coffee after dinner instead of his usual tea, then slowly began to sing a long forgotten tune. Right then he understood that his favourite nephew would do badly in his math exam the next day. The lad was finishing school and his chances of a place at Oxford depended on his results. Zhou was very upset, but still, he restrained himself and did not ask his nephew to postpone the exam. Sadly, he was right: the boy's grades were not high enough for Oxford. But Thornton did not regret his actions. He was glad he had been able to keep the genie in the bottle.

Today, Manchester United was playing Arsenal. A fanatical ManU supporter, Zhou managed to get the day off work and went home early, buying a pack of his favourite Boddingtons on the way. He hastily opened the door of his south London flat, dumped the pack of bitter in the hall, threw off his work clothes, kicked off his shoes and tossed them in a hurry - the match was due to start in twenty minutes. Zhou could never foretell the results of games, in fact he didn't actually want to, because he liked just to enjoy the match.

Grabbing two cans of beer, he headed for the television room. As he ran, by chance, he glanced at the corner of the hall where his trousers, socks, jacket and shoes lay in a heap. He was struck by what he saw: it dawned on him that the allied forces were just about to launch an attack on Yiraq. War was going to break out in a few minutes! Forgetting about the football, Thornton stood transfixed by the items of clothing lying in a chaotic pile on the floor. What should he do? Go and watch the long awaited match as if nothing had happened or change the shape of the heap which had formed in the corner and thereby prevent war? Zhou hated the Yiraqi tyrant, Bearded Soul-Destroyer, but as a pacifist he opposed war on principle.

The match was about to start and there was no time to lose. Bracing himself, Thornton sprinted across the hall and like an ace footballer, kicked the trousers away in one strike. Yes, he had broken his golden rule and intervened in the course of events. But this was special case and Zhou felt, with a sense of relief, that the threat of war had passed.

Happy, Thornton switched on the television, settled down comfortably in his chair, took a sip of refreshing beer, held his breath and waited. But just before kick-off, a news-flash interrupted the report from the stadium. The agitated presenter announced that literally a few minutes ago, allied troops had launched a missile strike on the Lesser Barbarian archipelago. The new presenter wondered why allied forces, which had been preparing so long for war with Yiraq, had suddenly attacked a group of God-forsaken islands inhabited mostly by peaceful shepherds?

Zhou blanched. He ran straight into the hall with his unfinished can of beer and stared in desperation at his trousers, sprawled limply on the floor between the telephone and the pack of bitter. Thornton saw clearly that the Allies' missiles had landed unceremoniously on the Lesser Barbarian archipelago and exploded in its green pastures. But something put Zhou on his guard. He looked more carefully at one of the trouser legs, which was bent awkwardly at the knee. Oh God, one of the missiles had changed direction and was heading for America!

He must act quickly to prevent a catastrophe. But Zhou realized, anything he did to the missile could have other, terrible consequences. What should he do? No, he must save innocent people! Thornton threw the beer can at the trouser leg, calmed down immediately and ran back to the television. He knew that the missile would not hit America now and he was glad. He preferred not to think about what would happen to it and where it would go. Zhou understood that the more he interfered with events, the more unpredictable they could become.

The explosion was so sudden that Thornton had no time to admire the beautiful football manoeuvre which should have ended in an absolutely superb goal.