

Raja Rao and World Literature

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I

Raja Rao is rightly recognised as one of the three founders of the Indian novel written in English. His later writing, however, moves beyond India and takes a quite different direction from that of R K Narayan or Mulk Anand, to the point where it seems right to ask whether it has become in some sense world literature. To bring this question into a manageable form I will ask it in relation to *The Serpent and the Rope* (Rao, 1960) and *The Cat and Shakespeare?* (Rao, 1965), with some reference in the last section also to *The Chessmaster and his Moves* (Rao, 1988). Defining the term world literature is itself not a simple task, and I will therefore focus my argument through two contrasting definitions drawn from David Damrosch's stimulating book, *What is World Literature* (Damrosch, 2003).

In the first chapter, as part of a survey of ways of thinking about the topic which I will draw on heavily, he offers the following definition,

I take World Literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language ... In its most expansive sense, World Literature could include any work that has ever reached beyond its home base ... [but] ... a book has only an *effective* life as world literature whenever ... it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture (p.4)

Both *The Serpent and the Rope* and *The Cat and Shakespeare* fall within this definition. The evidence here comes first from Rao's own life. In the 1950s he was a traveller, retaining his roots in India, he was familiar with France and England and had published in Britain and the US. In 1958 he travelled in India with Andre Malraux, a grand old man of European letters but at that time also President De Gaulle's emissary to India. Alongside this I put more immediate evidence from the copies of the texts I use in the preparation of this paper. Thus my copy of *The Cat*

and *Shakespeare* was published and printed in the US, where Rao was based. But like its author it gravitated back to India and carries a bookseller's stamp from Prabhu Book Services, Gurgaon. Somehow it found its way then to a second hand bookshop in London, from whom I bought it so as to prepare a paper for delivery originally in Bangalore. My copy of *The Serpent and the Rope* tells a similar story. Published and printed in the UK, it was sold in Delhi and then brought back to the UK.

This is not a matter just of publishing and book selling history but of the way we read and interpret Rao. We might note, for example, that although *The Cat and Shakespeare* was published in 1965, it actually began life in the *Chelsea Review* in 1959. From a text set in provincial India, then Rao moved to the cosmopolitan setting of *The Serpent and the Rope*. From this one might construct a critical story whereby the two texts show Rao moving from Indian settings to Western settings as his ambitions move from a canonical place in writing in India to a canonical place in world literature. Keeping the two novels in the order of their publication in finalised form produces a counter story, in which Rao produces his cosmopolitan narrative - *The Serpent and the Rope* - but the return with *The Cat and Shakespeare* to his 'home' culture and values.

Here I begin with *The Cat and Shakespeare* but with a different aim in view, namely to introduce my second notion of world literature. I take my cue here from the prominence of Shakespeare in the title and the story. In *What is World Literature* Damrosch attributes the phrase 'world literature' to Goethe; he quotes the following from *Conversations with Eckermann*,

the daemons, to tease and make sport with men, have placed among them single figures so alluring that everyone strives after them, and so great that nobody reaches them (Damrosch, 2003, p.2)

For Goethe Shakespeare, along with Raphael, Mozart, and Napoleon, is in this category of 'figures so alluring that everyone strives after them'. In *The Cat and Shakespeare* Rao has a character, Govindan Nair, deliver a kind of pastiche of perhaps the most famous of Hamlet's soliloquies

To be or not to be. No, no.
A kitten sans cat, kitten being the
diminutive for cat. Vide Prescott
of the great grammatical fame.
A kitten sans cat, that is the
question (Rao, 1965, p.80)

Nair is placed as a sage-like foil to the puzzled and enquiring narrator, and the scene in which the pastiche occurs is crucial to the message of the book. The comedy of the scene suggests that it would be a leap too far to argue that this is evidence that Rao believed he belonged in the company of those cited by Goethe, but it does seem plausible that in the story Rao is in pursuit of the example of a figure so alluring that everyone strives after him, even though the prospect of reaching him is remote. Rao acknowledges this irony by making a gap between his attempt to follow Shakespeare and Shakespeare's work itself. Thus we have a pastiche and a complex rewriting and echoing of Hamlet's words rather than simply quoting them in a direct or slightly mangled form. Rao's writing here *is* clever; for example in the lines

Asthma is
the trouble that Polonius reveals
for food; he hid behind the
curtain asthmatic

Rao is surely suggesting some affinity here. One can argue perhaps also that as he pastiches Shakespeare so he also indicates an updating of Goethe's canon which adds James Joyce to the pantheon. The fragmentary style that Rao adopts corresponds to the allusive shifting style of *Ulysses* in which Hamlet figures extensively as an analogue for Stephen Daedalus.

In this understanding of world literature it is only logical to extend the notion of writers who universal in their excellence to the notion that their subject matter itself is universal. The other term in the title of *The Cat and Shakespeare* contributes to this, suggesting a text which is world literature because it expresses an archetypal contrast (such as we might find in an Aesop fable. World literature is, in this definition based on 'common literary patterns [which] must provide the necessary basis for any truly global understanding of literature'. Damrosch

draws his definition here from a work by the French cultural historian, René Étiemble, citing his work *Overture(s) sur une comparatisme planétaire* (1988). Damrosch professes himself rather critical of this view, writing that 'such universals quickly shade into vague generalities that hold less and less appeal today, at a time when ideals of melting pot culture have faded in favour' (p.5). But we need to remember that Rao was writing in the late 1950s and early 1960s when the climate of opinion was more amenable to this kind of idea. Common literary patterns, for example, could be seen as providing an aspect of a universal humanity which could stand as an idealised counterweight to the divisions in a world dominated by the Cold War – they created perhaps a kind of 'non-aligned' literature.

The 'common pattern' in Rao's novel takes something of the form of a fable, albeit in an extended form – something most commonly known in the Fables of Aesop such as 'The Fox and the Crow' or 'The Lion and the Mouse'. Rao's fable turns on the contrast of Shakespeare/Hamlet and the cat, and as in Aesop there is a reversal in that the apparently inferior partner in the title turns out to be superior. In the late 1950s, Hamlet's character was often seen as an archetype of an over intellectual view of the world. When an actor delivered the soliloquy 'To-be or not to be ...' he would project an image – in the words of a scholar of the time – of 'the scholar, the intellectual, pondering a problem of moral philosophy' (Harrison, 1961, p.100). That problem of moral philosophy was likely to include still the problem of evil – the lingering memory of Nazi atrocities. Against this Rao sets the image of the cat and particularly the cat and the kitten. In the scene when Govindan Nair echoes Hamlet, Rao writes

Govindan Nair cannot keep her [the cat] in the cage any longer. He opens the cage and the cat leaps into his lap. It is a trained cat. It knows what is right from what is wrong. (Rao, 1965, p.79)

This is certainty as opposed to Hamlet's uncertainty. But the meaning of the cat goes beyond that, particularly in the more regular references to a cat with kittens, and to kittens

What is death to a kitten that walks on the wall? Have you ever seen a kitten fall? You could fall. I could fall. But the kittens walk on the wall (Rao, 1965, p. 66, see also p.42)

The aim here is to invoke a universal pattern of unerring certainty. Something which goes beyond Damrosch's grudging phrase 'melting pot harmonies' to a deep truth, and something that is not conditioned in the way the Hamlet's soliloquy is by a particular culture.

Rao does in the end directly involve the narrator in this. When the cat has kittens he sees her on the wall, and describes how 'she carried them from one spot to the

other, lifted them by the scruff of the neck'. Inspired now by her he too crosses the wall – something before only Govindan Nair and the children had done and finds a world he did not know existed – 'That was the first time I went across the wall. I found a garden all rosy and gentle' (p.112). For much of the novel Rao depicts the narrator as passive, demonstrating the instinctual self of the cat or the kitten. Rao points this up in the preference he makes the narrator feel for his newly beloved Shantha rather than his wife Saroja. Saroja is always depicted as intent on logic and facts; for example Rao has the narrator say early on 'Saroja wants two and two make four, and if I say, "what about your dreams, there do two and two make four?"', she says, "It always makes four"' (Rao, 1965, p.28). The narrator's action in crossing the wall is quite distinct from this; decisiveness leads to something 'rosy and gentle' that might well find more place in a dream. There is other evidence in the novel for the conclusion that Rao is intent on universal – by inference, world-wide – patterns. For example, there is the way he represents masculinity and femininity. This is especially evident in the depiction of the narrator's relationship with Shantha. Rao's categories seem very much essentialised

Wonderful is man. He needs to be told he *is* [by woman]. Then he knows he is ... Thus the world goes moving on its pivot ... Man is protected. You would not be without a mother. You are always a child. The wife is she who makes you the child. That is why our children resemble us men (Rao, 1965, pp. 32-3).

II

Turning now to *The Serpent and the Rope* it is worth mentioning that Hamlet figures in the novel. Rao has Savithri write to Rama:

what is this India we are building? Oh, Rama, it makes me sad, sad! Some want it to be like our neighbour China, and others like their foster-mother white England. And nobody wants India to be India. And Nehru is the Hamlet, who knows his madness is intelligent, while others see only ghosts (Rao, 1960, p.345)

In the context only of *The Serpent and the Rope* the reference seems a passing detail but in the context of the two novels discussed here it seems hardly incidental. At the least, we may note it supports the inference above concerning Rao's understanding of the meaning of Hamlet. There is a much more living continuity between the two books in the reference to and evocation of universal patterns. In *The Serpent and the Rope*, however, Rao deploys not the kind of decontextualised universal of the cat and the kitten but an elaborate religious and philosophical structure which I cannot now avoid dealing with in a little more detail.

Hindu ideas and teachings provide a base layer in the novel, and this is evident from the title of the novel. In her discussion of the novel, Meenakshee Mukherjee saw the sense of an ambiguous of reality conveyed here, whereby the serpent may or may not be a rope and vice-versa, as part of Brahmanism and plainly central to the creation of the narrator; she wrote

Brahmanism in India, and especially in the south, is perhaps more than a caste distinction: it is a special mode of apprehending reality, an experience that pervades all aspects of a man's life, going beyond his conscious mind (Mukherjee, 1993, p.179).

That 'special mode of apprehending reality' involves seeing it in what is described as a non-dualist way. This way of thinking is easily understood as aligned with the unifying and universal view of the world which for many characterises World Literature, and here can be seen as dissolving the separateness of East and West. Thus at key moments Rama is certainly presented as essentially Indian. He describes his state of mind on two occasions, for example, as 'washed clean and whole by the Ganges' (Rao, 1960, p.348; see also p.115). But these moments are noticeable because rare, and the more comprehensive image is of a character whose mind and imagination flow fluidly across dualities, across the serpent and the rope. Similarly although Hindu beliefs and culture have a major influence, plainly, in the scenes in India itself, they also suffuse scenes in other locations. Madeleine sees a stone in their garden in France as like a Nandi Bull, for example, and it becomes an altar for her. (The French sections of the novel might be called 'the stone and the altar' as readily as 'the serpent and the stone'.)

The references to other cultures, though briefer than the Hindu ones, work in the same way and are similarly strikingly universalising and blurring of East and West. Wagner's music drama *Parsifal* (1882), for example, is quoted directly once and alluded to at other points, in one case in the form of anonymous Grail music (Rao, 1960, pp. 198, 291, 370). In *Parsifal* (as in his other operas) Wagner creates a specific religious or mythical world but at the same time evokes other myths and legends so that his imaginings appear a manifestation of a near universal culture¹. The message of his operas can be read as aspiring to a non-dualist world; the end carries the audience back to the beginning - in the *Ring* cycle the mysterious unity of the flow of the Rhine and in *Parsifal* the mystery of the Grail.

Rama's research is a consistent reference throughout the novel, and this too has a strong universalising quality, a sign of a world culture that is embodied in a world literature. The detailed significance of the novel is not

spelt out in detail but there is enough from which to draw a reading. It relates to those who – according to the orthodoxy of the Catholic Church - advocated the Albigensian heresy. The movement flourished in the South West of France towards the end of the 12th century; it was violently repressed by the Church in the early 13th century but survived until the end of the 14th century. For the purpose of my discussion here the key point is that in its doctrine the Albigensians refused the dualism inherent in the separation of a divine God and a human Christ. They saw Christ as always ‘of celestial essence’ (Online Catholic Encyclopedia, 2009a) and therefore not suffering as a human being on the cross. It is also relevant to note that many scholars have seen the Albigensian beliefs as originating in influences from the East and part of some deep and broad Gnostic belief system. Gnosticism is defined as follows:

Gnostics were “people who knew”, and their knowledge at once constituted them a superior class of beings, whose present and future status was essentially different from that of those who, for whatever reason, did not know. A more complete and historical definition of Gnosticism would be:

A collective name for a large number of greatly-varying and pantheistic-idealistic sects, which flourished from some time before the Christian Era down to the fifth century, and which, while borrowing the phraseology and some of the tenets of the chief religions of the day, and especially of Christianity, held matter to be a deterioration of spirit, and the whole universe a deprecation of the Deity, and taught the ultimate end of all being to be the overcoming of the grossness of matter and the return to the Parent-Spirit, which return they held to be inaugurated and facilitated by the appearance of some God-sent Saviour.

(Online Catholic Encyclopedia, 2009a)

It would be dangerous to see these definitions of Gnostics and Gnosticism as providing an exegesis of *The Serpent and the Rope* but they do seem to carry echoes of the character of Rama and the pre-occupations of the book. It is tempting to see Rao almost as intent on imagining in religious beliefs something equivalent to Proto Indo-European in languages. Rao’s experience of French culture seems clearly important here alongside the more important weight of his Hinduism. A synthetic vision has been characteristic of French traditions since the Enlightenment and the *Encyclopedie* – indicated here, for example, in the way Damrosch’s source for the notion that world literature involves ‘common literary patterns’ and a ‘global understanding of literature’ is French (see above).

Damrosch, however, it will be remembered is not in

favour of this way of defining world literature and, not surprisingly one of his own preferred alternatives can prompt an interesting and quite different reading of the novel. Damrosch writes that in his discussion of world literature he,

will be centrally concerned ... with tracing what is lost and what is gained in translation, looking at the intertwining shifts of language, era, religion, social status, and literary context that a work can incur as it moves from its point of origin out into a new cultural sphere (Damrosch, 2003, p.34).

Our interest lies now not in seeking universal meanings in the text, or - to put it another way - understanding how national and cultural boundaries are blurred in *The Serpent and the Rope*. Instead the aim is to understand if and how the meaning of the book shifts as it crosses borders, or – again to put it another way – to understand what is lost and what is gained ‘in translation’.

There is space here only for two examples but they are interesting contrasting. First, then, reading the novel within a European literary context, and noting the interaction with Rao’s flowing style and his insistent focus on his narrator, brings the work of Marcel Proust to mind and his great novel sequence *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (1913-1927). The relation is fixed by a small detail – the use of the name Madeleine for Rama’s French wife – for this is the name of the little biscuit, the taste of which sets Proust’s narrator’s memory running. Rao’s novel gains a resonance here; his narrator is as much in search of ‘lost time’ (*le temps perdu*) as Proust’s narrator, some kind of integrative memory which can hold experience together regardless of difference. The memories caught in the fiction repair the separation which the end of the novel records.

My second example of translation is more difficult and calls into question the assumption implicit in the argument of Damrosch and others that a novel will gain in translation. In a European context it is disconcerting to many if not most readers that the universal patterns that Rao evokes – Wagner’s music, *Parsifal* and the Grail myth, and the Albigensians – collectively have associations with right wing politics in France in the early part of the 20th century and with Nazi ideology in Germany. After the debacle of the first World War, French right wing intellectuals took up the Albigensian heritage. They valued the purity of faith of the Cathars, and paradoxically also the heritage of attachment of the land and culture of South West France (the Occitan) through which France might be revived. Through the archaeologist Otto Rahn’s book *Crusade against the Grail*, originally published in the 1930s, interest in the Cathars became linked to Nazi beliefs – again the association of

myth, purity, race and land were important (Rahn, 2006; Goodrich-Clarke, 2004, p.188 ff.).

The references to *Parsifal* and the Grail – and thus Wagner – tend in the same direction. The exact relationship between Wagner's music and the Wagner family and the Nazi elite remains contentious but few doubt that there was a strong connection, and Wagner's anti-semitism was notorious. By the late 1950s when Rao was writing, Wagner's music was in the process of being rehabilitated from this association in Europe. The resulting productions, particularly at the Bayreuth Festival where Hitler had been a frequent and enthusiastic visitor, were marked by this process. Productions emphasised general mythic qualities in a highly stylised way that removed them from the German nationalist past and drained them of specific anti-Semitic references but these things did not disappear; the new productions perhaps even reminded people of what had been as they showed something different. Rao's references to *Parsifal* can hardly avoid bringing this whole world into a European 'translation' of *The Serpent and the Rope*. Other elements in the novel translate within the same frame, the comments on women in the book consistently evoke some kind of essential femininity (see for example Rao, 1960, pp. 357-8). Essentialised notions of masculinity and femininity were very much part of these right wing ideologies. Separateness was idealised; women were valued as mothers. The presentation of Madeleine seems to fit too readily into this frame. She is presented from the beginning as a worker but as a teacher – work suitable for women in the right wing ideologies because it was a kind of parenting. More striking is the trajectory of her character. For much of the novel Madeleine is pregnant but loses the child. From then on she pursues an ever increasingly austere ascetic Buddhism. The alternatives – not presented with the ambivalence of the serpent and the rope – seem to be exclusive, femininity requires motherhood and non-motherhood means death.

If these readings are valid, and they do seem to follow from the text, they will surely have an impact on estimates of Rao's standing as a writer for those in the West who read him in translation. His technical skills may still be applauded but at the least he may be thought naïve about the implications of his philosophical argument or to be getting into unfortunate company. The matter raises a broader issue in relation to World Literature and the ideas of it to which I have referred (and also potentially to Post-colonial Literature). In the West at least after the Second World War and during the Cold War it seemed axiomatic that World Literature had a moral value. This seems the case whether one holds the view that World Literature is a universal literature or (as in Damrosch's

definition) literature which crosses borders. World Literature was a force for harmony, producing common understandings which would prevent further world conflagrations. It is possible, however, especially within the terms of Damrosch's definition to suggest a different conclusion, namely that as literary texts cross borders so they allow readers to see more forcefully the differences between cultures. There is no doubt, for example, that Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (Rushdie, 1988) was 'actively present' within the literary systems of the Islamic world, but the result was to highlight difference rather than promote harmony. In a quite different way, might *The Serpent and the Rope* have a similar quality, highlighting the difference between the values of Indian and Western cultures?

III

The last section of this paper considers whether Rao's only subsequent novel, *The Chessmaster and his Moves* (Rao, 1988) published when he was 80, can illuminate the potential dilemma raised in *The Serpent and the Rope*. More than twenty years separates the two novels, but *Chessmaster* readers who know his earlier work could hardly have avoided a sense of continuity wherever they read. One gets a sense that Rao had been brooding over this book (and its projected two companion parts, see Paranjape, 1998) for all of the intervening period. Its length, over 700 closely printed pages in the most commonly available edition, and its complexity reinforce the sense that this is a work that has consumed the interests of the author, and which in turn embodies his whole interests. The sense of continuity to which I refer is a matter of subject and style. What has been referred to as non-dualism suffuses *The Chessmaster and his Moves*. As before words struggle to express this notion; it is not that categories merge but that they are always undifferentiated and this is seen not just in matters of ideas and beliefs but in matters of everyday life. Places, for example, on a large and small scale are ultimately undifferentiated; India and Paris run together and the individual named streets of Paris run together into a single fictionalised street. Time is treated in a similar way; the particularities of the past and the present of the novel run together into a single undifferentiated time. Equally, if not more, importantly, the body/mind or body/soul distinction seems not to pertain in this world. Physical and sexual life runs together with the world of beliefs and ideas. The idea of Mathematics is at the centre of the novel and can be seen as expressing this non-duality, being at once and in an undifferentiated way a matter of something highly discrete – 1 is different from 7, for

example – and also a world in which entities are undifferentiated.

To gauge the value of a comparison of *Chessmaster* with *The Serpent and the Rope*, it is appropriate to ask if and how the latter novel fits within the frameworks of World Literature discussed so far – in essence, can *Chessmaster* be described as ‘World Literature’? Let us first consider the novel within the ‘universal’ notion of literature which I suggest above has its origins in Goethe. Few would deny the novel’s claims here; the attempt to present a unified world view which positions itself within a range of high cultures seems evident. The Parisian setting, for example, allows Rao to evoke a cosmopolitan world in which French, Indian, Jewish and Russian cultures come together, and in turn positions Rao (writing presumably mostly in Texas) as part of the Romantic and Modernist tradition of writers, musicians and painters who worked there². The ideas in the novel present a world view which if not capable of entirely synthesising different philosophies at least projects them as part of a continuous whole. The ‘problem’ *Chessmaster* addresses, for example, is set out in Book 1 as follows:

Mireilla, the only equation that now remains and remains to be solved, is the hindu-hebraic one, the vertical or the horizontal, I repeat, the zero or the infinity, historylessness or chronicling: Krishna or Moses (Rao, 1988, p.260)

Whether Rao solves this problem intellectually, or indeed whether it is appropriate to speak of an intellectual solution seems to me open to doubt. But imaginatively Rao works certainly to create a sense of a resolution, without that being quite a conclusion, in the last part of the Book 3 of *Chessmaster* drawing on a whole range of religious and cultural reference points:

We tread now, knowing there are no dead in the world. The Messiah’s portal, a l’Etoile, look, it’s all lit. At the altar the perennial fire burns. And on either side of the Champs Elysée, see, see, the ancient dead are awake, their heads raised, the families reunited, handing the unleaven bread of the Passover, one of the other. Everybody, as anyone can see, is saved.

Halleluja, Halleluja ...

And the procession moves on.

I alone stand apart, without movement of sound – the fourth brahmin at the Vedic hearth.

yajnena yajnamayajanta deva³ (p.682)

If one turns then to the other definition of World Literature which I am using here, that defined by David Damrosch in *What is World Literature*, there is evidence again of Rao’s work being apparently active in different literary systems. When *The Chessmaster and his Moves* was published, Rao was firmly based in Texas and in the same year was awarded The Neustadt International Prize for

Literature (a biennial award sponsored by the University of Oklahoma and the journal *World Literature Today*). *Chessmaster* was however first published in India, and circulated through the world from there rather than the USA. There are also, for example, echoes of illustrious writers. Reading the passage just quoted and remembering that it was written in English, a reader in the English cultural tradition will surely feel a shadowing of T S Eliot forming the meaning of the novel, and read it particularly in the context especially of *The Waste Land* published in 1922 with its final evocation of ‘an Upanishad’ (Eliot, 1963, pp.79, 86). *Chessmaster* works also for the Western reader too because again it so evokes Proust in the Parisian setting and even more the narrative style. There is no pretence, for example, as there is in classic realist texts that the world in the novel exists outside the character, or to put it another way that the world and its observer form any kind of duality.

Having established these congruities with *The Serpent and the Rope*, and the further aptness of World Literature frameworks for readings of Rao’s work, it is time to return to the disquiet on which my discussion of the earlier novel ended. Again there are continuities in that there are some references to Hitler (see, for example, Rao, 1988, p.510) but more significantly Rao seems to do a volte-face in his use of this frame of reference through the character of Michel. Universalising elements here come now not through links between Indian beliefs and ideas and Fascist and Aryan ideologies but through links between Indian beliefs and Jewish and Hebraic thinking. The Western reader can then see Rao linking the cycle of life expressed in Sivarama with the cycle of life whereby Europe emerges from World War II and the Holocaust, as Michel emerges alive from the piles of bodies in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp. The Western reader might also be tempted to put this element into another more literary frame, seeing Rao within the typology established in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* as, in effect, transferring his meaning from the Wagner quoting romantic idealism of Stephen Daedalus to the world of the Jew, Leopold Bloom. But Michel lacks the centring in the everyday which is the mark of Bloom, and inhabits the same highly philosophical and ideal world as Sivarama Sastri.

The importance of Michel in the novel is indicated however in that the dialogue between he and Sivarama occupies most of the last section of the novel. The dialogue is intricate, aiming perhaps both to express a final meaning but also to convey a sense of a conversation which ebbs and flows and in which meanings are won and lost. After reference to the Holocaust and to terrible aftermath of the Partition of British India, we read:

"[Michel] So you mean there is no paradise!"
 "[Sivarama] None. None, despite Madame LaFosee and her great guru, René Guénon."
 "So you mean we shall never find what we seek."
 "Never. Never the way we seek it. Indeed there is no paradise. But – but – there must be – the Truth."
 And this time we both stood still, staring at pure, concentric space. And Michel then ran his fingers on my back, enfolding me, with a tenderness, a concern, I had never known before, and never known since, of any man (Rao, 1988, p.665).

It would be over-interpretation and wrong to think that one can see here Rao somehow providing a response in these kinds of detail in *The Chessmaster and his Moves* to the right wing ideologies that haunt parts of *The Serpent and the Rope*. But if we think in terms of what Damrosch calls the 'effective life' of a book, that is to say its life within a particular culture and a particular reading situation, the link seems more possible. It seems a reasonable assumption that readers will meet the two books in the order in which they are discussed here and in that respect that *Chessmaster* in all its complexity will – as it were – rehabilitate *The Serpent and the Rope*, constructing in retrospect a reading experience that for most will downplay the implications of the religious and political right wing references.

NOTES

1. See Donington (1969) for a classic account.
2. It is not easy to identify Rao with a particular movement but – almost at random – the example of Kandinsky comes to mind as one bringing together cultures and aiming for a comparable synthesising vision.
3. Translated by Rao as 'With the sacrifice the gods sacrificed to the Sacrifice' (Rao, 1988, p.719)

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