

An Intermedial Reading of Paley's Sita Sings the Blues

Ipshita Chanda
Jadavpur University

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Volume 13 Issue 3 (September 2011) Article 12**Ipshita Chanda,****"An Intermedial Reading of Paley's *Sita Sings the Blues*"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss3/12>>

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Abstract: In her article "An Intermedial Reading of Paley's *Sita Sings the Blues*" Ipshita Chanda discusses the film text of Nina Paley's 2008 animation film, a culturally reconceptualized version of Válmíki's Sanskrit epic *Rámáyana*. Chanda discusses the film as an intermedial retextualization of the *Rámáyana* in the film where media boundaries and genres are crossed in "textual," audio, and visual media. The basic premise from which Chanda proceeds is that the condition of intermediality in film is produced by a "conceptual fusion" of different media which, in turn, are analyzed using theories of reception and contact between different media across time, space, and cultures with regard to "source" text and "received" text.

Ipshita CHANDA

An Intermedial Reading of Paley's *Sita Sings the Blues*

Chiel Kattenblatt defines intermediality as "those co-relations between different media that result into a redefinition of the media that are influencing each other and a resensibilization of perception. Intermediality, unlike transmediality, assumes not so much a change from one medium to another medium but rather a co-relation in the actual sense of the word, that is to say a mutual affect ... Time and space are still the two main dimensions by which we distinguish media from each other and determine their specificity. Such a determination of the specificity of media is usually related to their materiality, although we may notice in the media comparative discourse there is apprehensiveness about ascribing the specific features of a medium to its materiality" (6-7). Dick Higgins distinguishes between a number of different uses of the concept of intermediality: "intermediality may refer to the transposition from one media to another or the combination of two or more media" (51-52). References to one media in another may also be called intermediality. Thus, contact between different media and the reception of one by the other is the basic operation that makes the condition of intermediality possible. This contact may result in the formation of a text combining the semiotic structures of two media or changing the configuration of elements of one particular medium through the contact with another. In each case, Higgins points out, "one medium is present in its own materiality and mediality in the other" (52). This implies that the operations of contact between media and their mutual interaction or reception of one by the other regulates the production of a text resulting in intermediality.

Niklas Luhmann argues that the medium provides the conditions of possibility for creating form (105). Therefore, the condition of intermediality — since it is produced from a conceptual fusion of several types of media — results in a specific genre. Thus, I postulate that the intermedial "text" can be best studied using the framework of comparative literature (but without the discipline's traditional paradigms such as the nation approach, Eurocentrism, etc.). The approach I suggest is similar to what has been termed the "new" comparative literature (see Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Comparative Literature*). However, I would submit that the "new" is not in the method, but, rather, in bringing the multi- and interdisciplinary underpinnings of the discipline to the fore. I argue that comparative literature can and has provided a method for doing cultural studies and that this has gone largely unacknowledged. The critical and analytical emphasis in "new" comparative literature and in "comparative cultural studies" should alert us to the possibilities these approaches can offer (see Tötösy de Zepetnek, "The New Humanities").

In an application of the above referred to concept of the new comparative to study the intermedial, I begin from the assumption that aesthetic language and its use are both underwritten by the horizon of expectation (i.e., Jauss) within which the art work is produced and received. In proposing a definition of intermediality, it is reception aesthetics that Higgins invokes. I argue that the method of analysis proposed by Higgins, namely a "fusion of horizons" (*Horizons* 6) is congruent with the core of new comparative literature. The tools that are used by comparatists to understand reception underpin the study of the conceptual space inhabited by interliterariness (see, e.g., Durišin). Intermediality allows us to extend this method across various modes of transmission, i.e., across media. We assume also that intermediality may be explained through the shift and interplay of horizons of production and reception of a text. Thus we are able to explore the possibilities of constructing a reading strategy of the intermedial text. In this article I "read" the film "text" of Nina Paley's 2008 animation film *Sita Sings the Blues* through a conjunction of theories of intermediality with the tools and methods provided by "new" comparative literature and comparative cultural studies.

As Irina O. Rajewsky points out, "intermediality may serve foremost as a generic term for all those phenomena that ... in some way take place between media" (46) and therefore "intermedial" designates those configurations which have to do with a crossing of borders between media, thereby differentiated from intramedial as well as from transmedial phenomena. Current scholarship suggests two ways of understanding the concept: 1) "intermediality as a fundamental category" and 2) "intermediality as a critical category for the concrete analysis of specific individual media products or

configurations" (Rajewsky 47-48). Thus I am arguing that for film, as for literary analysis, the fundamental unit is the "text," that is, the textual system. An exact correspondence between the horizon of expectation of the artist and that of the receiver (reader) may occur at every stage because it changes with time, space, and media, even while the work as a physical object remains the same. However, I am not considering the work as a closed, finished object: "networks of meanings which 'interact,' producing a galaxy of signifiers ... the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language" (Barthes 5-6). Thus we have what Roland Barthes calls the "readerly text," wherein "the goal of literature as work ... is to make the reader no longer a consumer but a producer of the text" (6). We are thus talking of a text being consumed and "read." As George P. Landow points out, despite an exponential growth of narrative options through the rearrangement of individual lexias and the constellations of lexias, this growth is not random and if it were, one text would not leave identifiable trails in another (12). Rajewsky suggests the concept of "medial transportation" as a type of intermediality, where content travels across medial boundaries, from the source text (46). Analysis of this type of intermediality would call for an understanding of the communicative-semiotic structures of the "source" text and the "received" text, constructed from the materiality of the different media, i.e., picture / painting / animation and music and drama (Rajewsky 52) and this case cinema.

Paley's *Sita Sings the Blues* is composed of a number of overlapping intermedial structures and presentation of a written text, *Rāmāyana*, "a multivoiced entity, encompassing retellings of the Rama story that vary according to historical period, regional literary tradition religious affiliation, genre and political context" (Richman 161). To this may be added the movement of the text beyond the geographical boundaries of India. The text has also travelled across different media: performance forms across India and in many cultures of South East Asia aspects of the story remain iconic. Crown prince Rama, son of Dashrath, king of Ayodhya, is sent by his father into exile due to his jealous step mother Kaikeyi's demand that Dashrath honor the boons he had granted her when she nursed him to health after an injury in battle. One of the boons she demands is the crowning of her son instead of Rama and the second is Rama's exile into the forest. Rama and his newly wedded wife Sita and his devoted brother Lakshman go to the forest to honor Dashrath's promise to Kaikeyi. Sita is abducted by Ravana, the demon king who rules Sri Lanka. Rama, aided by an army of monkeys under the leadership of the monkey king Sugriva, rescues Sita after a battle. The three then return to Ayodhya and Rama is installed on the throne. But the people of Ayodhya begin to suspect Sita's chastity since she had lived in Ravana's kingdom after her abduction until she was rescued. In truth, Sita has never stepped under Ravana's roof, living in a grove of asoka trees, guarded by demonesses and constantly propositioned by Ravana. Yet, she is exiled by her husband to the hermitage of Vālmīki, where she gives birth to twin sons, Luv and Kush. In the Adikanda (literally, the "Canto of Origins") Vālmīki relates the story of his composing the *Rāmāyana*. Here we are told that Vālmīki, the composer of the *Rāmāyana*, selects these two children staying in his hermitage to sing the story of the *Rāmāyana* composed by him in the courts of princes. The boys are endowed with sweet voices and the poet-sage teaches them the skills required for singing the story of Rama (see, e.g., *Rāmāyana*, Balakanda Canto IV, verse 1-9). So we see that at the inception of the epic we are told of the modes of its transmission that occur across media: a written text is to be sung in the court including in the court of the hero of the text itself.

Sita Sings the Blues offers a set of readings of Vālmīki's text (I use "text" as an umbrella term thus including film and music as text, as well the written text) and the different readings are in constant interaction, one forming the threshold of another, each in dialogue with the other, thus creating a field of reception for the film. The film thus has multiple representations of the main characters, united by the same name. The different forms of visual representation of the main characters indicate narrative levels and discourses, giving the epic characters multiple locations in time and space. This indicates that the understanding of the epic as a mobile genre is only intensified as we move across media. As the title song is played, the goddess figure that arises from the waters at the beginning of the film is a faintly funny but lovingly executed ornamental drawing. The figure is that of Sri or Lakshmi, who rose from the waters when the seas were created and became the consort of Vishnu. This is Sita's prototype, her divine form, so to speak, as Vishnu is Rama's. The frame within which the Sita

of the story is fixed visually is represented from the outset by the outlined female form which exaggerates the heroine's physical attributes. This is drawn from Válmíki's description of a particular form of *nayika* (heroine) in accordance with a notion of beauty and later enshrined in all classical Sanskrit performance manuals deriving from Bharata's *Natyashastra*, including the performance of physical desire. The heroine's attributes are provided in these manuals and the specific depiction of her hair, face, clothes, jewelry, and gait identify her state of mind and the exact stage on which her relationship to the hero rests. Such elaborate descriptions of the *nayika* are contained in manuals of poetry as examples of particular kinds of *kavya alamkar* (ornamentation of language) that renders it "poetic." Of course the *alamkar* (literary device) includes *shabd* (word) and *artha* (meaning), respectively. Thus the ornamentation of poetic language through figures of speech is inherent in the concept of *alamkar* itself. However, this is a point where the materiality of the two media, i.e., the linguistic and the visual, is evident. We may consider this incident in some detail. Shurpanakha, Ravana's sister, is enamored with Rama, and proposes to him when she sees him in the forest. When he refuses saying that he is already married, she tries to tempt him. Then, her nose is cut off by Lakshman when she refuses to take no for an answer. Enraged, Shurpanakha goes to her brother, the powerful king of Lanka, and complains that she has been insulted. She demands that Ravana should abduct Sita and avenge this insult, describing the beauty of Sita. In the film, Shurpanakha uses these words: "Dear brother, Ravana, have you seen Rama's wife Sita ...? She is the most beautiful woman in the world. Her skin is fair like the lotus blossom. Her eyes are like lotus pools. Her hands are like ... from ... lotuses. Her breasts like ... big ... round. .. firm ... juicy ... lotuses." On screen we see an outline of Sita drawn in serious ornate style and lotuses keep popping up in place of the relevant body part as Shurpanakha's voice describes that body part comparing it with lotuses. While this literally visualizes the metaphor, it also draws attention to the aestheticization of the human body achieved both verbal and visual.

The use of the image and concept of lotus for the description of Sita's physical beauty is attributed to Ravana when he first sees her. Maricha, Ravana's associate, takes the form of a golden deer and appears before the cottage of Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana in the forest. Sita demands that the deer be captured for her. Giving in to her demands, Rama pursues the deer into the forest and wounds it. The deer screams for help in the voice of Rama. Hearing this, Sita, who cannot see what is happening but can only hear Rama's voice, persuades Lakshmana to go to his brother's aid. Thus she is left unprotected when Ravana, who has laid this plan, appears in the guise of a hermit asking for alms. Setting eyes upon her, Ravana says "Who are you, radiant like the glow of gold, dressed in golden clothes like a lotus tendril, auspiciously garlanded with lotuses." This is a set description for the heroine's beauty in classical Sanskrit poetics. Of note is that in the *Rámáyana* Sita is identified with Sri, the consort of Vishnu, who arises from the depths of the seas created by the gods and demons for the elixir of immortality. Both Vishnu and Sri are pictured as standing on lotuses and in some representations Sri or Lakshmi is shown as seated on a lotus emerging from the navel of the recumbent Vishnu. In fact, from the title sequence itself, the connection between Sita and the lotus is established in keeping with the source text's imagery.

However, the literalization of the metaphor into visual representation raises another question: what is the difference between literalization, i.e., taking the metaphor as "fact" or "truth" letting it remain as a metaphor? When there is a crossing of media boundaries, between verbal language and visual medium, can metaphor lend itself to visualization without being stripped of the appeal endowed by literarization? Is a metaphor meant to be visualized literally or does it open space for the human imagination, the primary function of literature? This is one of the questions of aesthetics and technique that is posed by intermediality as the condition of being of a work of art. A transposition of the construction of principles, stylistic procedures, and aesthetic conventions means that one medium takes up or imitates the representation of another (Rajewsky 52). How are the representative devices of one medium affected when transferred to another? It appears — based on the example of film — that when a metaphorical representation which allows scope for the imagination is fixed as a visual image, this undercuts the power of the metaphor. This difference is based on the materiality of the different media in question and the text that crosses media boundaries provides us an occasion to understand and further explore such intermedial crossing and the aesthetic specificities of each medium. We may thus reflect upon the results of "conceptual fusion," a process in which not only are media boundaries

crossed but a fusion of horizons occurs. Trained in the reception of one medium, when we move within the same text to another medium, do we adjust our horizons to account for the intermedial transfer or do we confuse one medium's representative techniques with those of another? What is the result of such movement upon the reception of the text which exists in intermedial space? These are questions of both aesthetics and ontology, which intermediality studies may address.

Within a particular medium the movement from one genre to another has a distinct role to play in textual construction. For example, one genre used in the representation of Sita is the cartoon, drawn in even more exaggerated outlines with overstated secondary sexual characteristics. The voluptuous cartoon of Sita's counterpart is a bare blue-bodied Rama drawn to resemble the muscled Johnny Bravo, a cartoon character who is all man and putty in the hands of women. We have already traversed two discursive visual and aural realms, both ornate, representing female beauty and male valor according to particular norms, but drawing from two different registers of visual language. In the technical language of audiovisual representation, this is called "art shift" — i.e., shifting to different styles of art within the same text for purposes of homage and/or parody. The *alamkar* (ornamentation) in the first classical Indian style with which the film begins, arises from the need to formally beautify, to create visual pleasure in proportion and design. However, the latter, i.e., the cartoon style, has a different purpose: exaggeration with a view to comic effect, as underlined by the stark resemblance between Johnny Bravo and Rama. This does not exhaust the possibilities of intermediality, however, for now we encounter a meeting across media boundaries. The visual text is a representation of a couple with exaggerated physical outlines which, in turn, define and identify masculinity and femininity, Rama and Sita. And the audio text includes the 1920s blues singer Annette Henshaw's songs. Sita, presented as located in Indian culture and as a character in a written text is brought to completion through another medium, music, from another cultural location, the twentieth-century U.S. The film text thus enacts an interpretation of the *Rámáyana* intermedially across boundaries of time and space.

How is this intermediality to be read? Can we draw inferences regarding the nature of different media and representation through them? Are these questions of aesthetics prompted by the functionality of technology and are we thus in a position to propose a new aesthetics of representation? What does this tell us about the nature of art and its relation to the medium of expression? The relation between auditory and visual media is not the only one that we encounter within the text. The story of the *Rámáyana* is narrated by a troupe of shadow leather puppets famous in Sri Lanka, where Ravana is supposed to have taken Sita after abducting her. The voices of these puppets are modern voices and they tell, discuss, and comment upon the story of the *Rámáyana* thus locating it between history and myth, fact and fiction, possibility and impossibility. The mispronunciations (e.g., Shapurnakha instead of Shurpanakha) and wrong "facts" are "corrected" and "politically correct" views emerge. Take for example the description of Ravana as a wise man whose only misconduct was the abduction of Sita. Much is made of his ardent devotion for Shiva. He is said to have played the *vina*, a string instrument, with his intestines as a form of worship. This is discussed by the shadow puppets. The discussion continues and words and phrases like "basically," "actually," "you know," etc. are used rather than arguments or references to tradition or existing texts to substantiate points. A long debate ensues about the practical possibility of Sita's throwing a string of ornaments while being carried away by Ravana in the *pushpak vimana*, a form of transport that "flies." In the source text this is done so that Rama follows the trail of the ornament and thus finds which way she had been taken. The shadow puppets, rooted in the realm of the possible, ask several questions. Would she have had ornaments? The three royal personages are supposed to have left everything behind for a life in the forest. Could Sita have even walked to the forest with so many ornaments, which, when put together, stretched from here to Sri Lanka? What is called *auchitya* (aptness) in classical Indian aesthetic theory and willing suspension of disbelief in the Western formulation, becomes a point of discussion for the shadow puppets commenting upon the story of the source text. Thus, the discussion is about possibility in art and the limitations of possibility in the real world. The difference between these is highlighted by the simple technique of visualization in a mixture of art genres: the real monkeys, the real ornaments, and the cartoon Sita taken by the ten-headed Ravana form an incongruous picture, accentuating the gap between metaphoricity that literary language is predicated upon and language as a transparent mirror of what actually happens.

The poetic conventions used in the source text are interrogated from the receptor's horizon of expectation built from different media and a different cultural context. Used to scientific realism and naturalism in art, perhaps the Western audience is puzzled by the exaggeration that is the essence of poetic language in the classical Indian tradition. There is a distance created between the text and the receptor as depicted in the text. The shadow puppets dominate the front of the frame — a misnomer here because the surface on which the frame is projected is by definition is flat and two dimensional. However, depth, or the perception of depth, is created by the dark intricately carved leather shadow puppets against the bright background of the various visual styles of representations of the Rama material, from a traditional Rajasthani miniature painting enlarged for the screen to calendar art with pictures of gods and goddesses found in the country's markets both rural and urban. The puppets are the nearest the text gets to a "narrator" or "chorus." The distance between them and the actual narrative, their comments, questions, and clarifications, and their characterization are in constant interplay with the material of the intermedial text. This interplay gives rise to multiple narrative levels, both visually and audibly, both interacting across words and pictures in order to perform the telling and the hearing of the *Rámáyana* in a specific context and at a particular time and place. And this brings us to the stories that the text contains, of which there are three. One is the story of the *Rámáyana*, the other is the "telling" of the story to a particular audience using different media, and the third is the frame story.

Analyzing the different states of time in the hypertextual narrative, Marjorie Lüsebrink points out that "if Real Time embodies the simulated 'current resolution' of the narrative mechanism, Narrative Time is the means for revealing the precipitatory causes — the conditions and events which gave rise to plot and action. In many cases the Narrative Time is concerned with backstory, or flashback, although in some cases the actual chronological location of the information is ambiguous" (110). This ambiguity does not seem to mark *Sita Sings the Blues* because the different aural and visual media genres not only provide spatial and temporal locations for the narratives linked together, but also identify the different levels of time and space in which these narratives are constructed. Different media genres therefore collaborate to establish a textualization of time. Time in *Sita Sings the Blues* is neither linear nor cyclical; rather, different time frames are traversed through the fusion of different media using the specific medium's repertoire of temporal and spatial representational devices to achieve an effect of mythic time as a "leak between actual worlds and the world of fiction, a zone that it is not possible to attribute to either of them" (Koskima 56). The frame story narrativizes the occasion for the telling of the *Rámáyana*. The animation style used here is "squiggle-vision," an animation technique patented by Tom Snyder (see *Soup2Nuts* <<http://soup2nuts.tv/about.html>>). It consists of a set of animation sequences set in a vibrating frame, the effect being the same as that of a "jittercam" (it appears as if the picture on screen is constantly shivering). The figures are those of adult cartoon strips or illustrations in graphic novels and they tell the story of a loving couple in San Francisco separated by the man's assignment to India. He gradually distances himself from his wife once there despite her constant and overwhelming fidelity and love. This is the narrative that frames the story of Sita abducted, imprisoned, threatened with violation, and then forced to undergo trial by fire to prove her chastity to assuage the suspicions of her royal husband's subjects. It highlights aspects of the story of the *Rámáyana* that have entered into "mythic time" and in which *Sita Sings the Blues* functions.

The "real time" of the text's reception is one where emotions are often expressed publicly through status updates on social networking sites. That Sita finally rejects the man she loves because he proves again and again that he cannot respect her bears the potential of becoming universal in a time when women living and working independently still retain the values of sexual and emotional fidelity. Compulsory monogamy and the exaggerated eternality of fidelity have been analyzed from the feminist position as "patriarchal" since this is seen as a duty for women. The characters of the husband and wife in the frame story are shown as loving and caring for each other, but despite this mutual affection it appears that the man moves on when his wife is out of sight, while she continues to embrace the past and in his absence waits for the past to return in the future. Sita enters the womb of mother earth disgusted with having to prove her chastity again and again for the satisfaction of others. She disappears into earth, foregrounding the rejection of eternal slavery to love as a viable option if only in the fictional world. Válmíki's *Rámáyana* was written order to describe the destruction of Ravana and to

glorify the greatness of Sita. One wonders if placing Sita as a popular feminist icon is contrary to the general depiction of her as long suffering, devoted doormat, fobbed off with the status of goddess after her self-respect had been compromised routinely by events to which she is submitted. That she suffered for her husband's inability to demonstrably "love" her enough to support her gives her a moral stature that Rama cannot undercut. And that she acquitted herself with honor from every trial and chooses finally to retire with her dignity intact rather than continue to live with the husband who had compromised her further adds to this stature. The injustice of the judgment against her and her reaction to it are highlighted throughout publicly in *Sita Sings the Blues*. When Ravana wishes to have a physical relationship with her and suggests that he can win her consent without the use of force, she says "I can destroy you with my own power, but I do not do so only because my lord Rama has not ordered me to do it." Apparently, divine/masculine/patriarchal power is balanced by the assertion of feminine power "granted" by that same divine/masculine/patriarchal agency. Sita subordinates her own power to that of Rama willingly as long as she cares to do so. When she is disgusted with this state, however, she retreats into her own, and that gives her the status of an icon. This form of re-writing of the source text in a contemporary context proves the ability of the written epic to be an omnibus genre, not only arising out of polygenesis, but giving rise to literary and performance cultures that traverse boundaries across modes of media.

One of the genres in *Sita Sings the Blues* is the everyday dialogue between the husband and wife in the frame story which locates the story towards its primary audience, US-Americans of a particular social and economic class whose location are underscored through their profession, living space, and speech and all this is reflected in the visual representation. Further, blues as a genre of music marks a particular cultural orientation identified as it is with a period of US-American cultural and social history. The thematic and formal roots of the genre are in the trials and travails of African slaves transported to the southern states of the U.S., expressing their hardship and the sorrow of injustice against which the music is itself a form of struggle for survival. It is not limited to the expression of sorrow or the acceptance of a discriminatory world: in Henshawe's style and in the history of African American struggles for equality and freedom the resistance and struggle to rise above the depressing reality of a racist society can well be extended to express the pain of rejection as well as the spirit of survival with dignity.

The title of the film joins the text *Rāmāyana* to the situation of its reception and retelling in contemporary times. This is the level of "reality" from which the text wishes to launch itself into the material of Rama, coming from a "foreign" location, temporally and spatially. The second level of narrative reality is represented visually by the stylized shadow puppets who tell and discuss the story of *Rāmāyana*. These do not represent visual reality at all; rather, the audio text is on a different register from the visual one. The shadow puppets — despite their stylized ornate appearance — use contemporary spoken language, creating a second level of reality placed in the context of the frame story. At the end of the film, Sita renounces the world that does not appreciate her not because someone forces her to do so, but because she rejects its right to rule her life: she places herself outside the power of this world. In the frame story, the woman of the couple is shown alone after her husband decides to stay on in India despite her pointing out that it is detrimental to their relationship. She is kept company by her cat and the last frame shows her closing the *Rāmāyana* which she had been reading. What she has read has been dramatized in *Sita Sings the Blues* through the shadow puppets: they share the location of reception of *Rāmāyana* by those who are culturally, temporally, and spatially distanced from its original audience, whether literary or oral. They are stylized visually, but they speak contemporary English. Moreover, the accents with which these voices speak English identify two of them as Indians speaking to someone who does not have an Indian accent. This is the third voice, perhaps of a person "foreign" to India who has seen some of the land and wants to know more about it from his friends. This is a perfect story telling situation for an orally told story being transposed to film. This oral situation does not remind us that the Rama theme was gleaned by Vālmīki from various sources and composed in meter, not prose. Oral performance had been transferred into Vālmīki's written text when in the first part of the *Adi Kanda (Canto of Origins)* we meet Kushi and Lav, two brothers who are taught the *Rāmāyana* by Vālmīki himself. This occurs before the narration of the story of Rama is even begun and only after indicating the sources for the propagation of the story through performance

does Válímiki proceed to tell it. They are instructed to sing it while going from court to court and their itinerary includes Rama's court, where they go to sing of his exploits to Rama himself. Kushi and Lav are also the twin sons of Rama borne by Sita while in exile in the hermitage of Válímiki, as we know sent there by the doubts cast upon her character by her husband's subjects. Thus the intermedial nature of the text is documented within the text itself. *Rámáyana*'s travels across media begin literally from the moment of its creation when the larger world outside the text, the future of the world, is presented and the present where the events that make up the text occur are fused together allowing the traversing of space and time through the traversing of media boundaries.

In conclusion, the story of Ravana's destruction and the narrative of Sita's glory are the burdens of Válímiki's epic. Paley takes the second one, i.e., Sita's glory, and casts it into the mould of a woman's patience in the face of emotional trauma and her final dignified choice of self-respect. This telling has already traversed time and space and Paley's intermedial technique allows some of the many *Rámáyana*-s in *Sita Sings the Blues* available to viewers of the film through the use of multiple visual and audible genres. The text of the *Rámáyana* has traversed different media using varied modes of transmission and has been accordingly recast time and again. Presented in advertisements of *Sita Sings the Blues* as the "greatest break-up story ever told," the film has acquired shifts of focus: material from a text that has been received in the culture of its production as asserting a woman's devotion and submission is presented suggesting the renunciation of worldly joys and standards. This renunciation functions as the state of freedom for the woman and the freedom from a relationship which does not bring respect and peace. The context of *Sita Sings the Blues*'s reception — contemporary San Francisco — and a global culture — provide the horizon of expectation for the reception of the text. The visual discourse — calendar art, the Rajasthani painting, ornament, cartoons, etc. — are augmented by aural representations. They do not always synchronize with the visual representation as I noted, thus providing many perspectives on a story that is part of world literature. The relation between the reception of the text in the location in which it is produced and its reception in the global context through new media generate these varied perspectives. In this context, the concept of a source text may be rethought with respect to its modes of production and re-production. Among these may be included the media used for transmission, which inflect the genres of both aural and visual representation. Thus the different levels of interacting "reality" and "fictionality" produce the film and the reading of a literary text within a particular locations.

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Author's profile: Ipshita Chanda teaches comparative literature at Jadavpur University. Her fields of interests include theory and method in comparative literature and cultures of orality and performance in India and Africa. In addition to numerous articles, Chanda's single-authored book publications include *Tracing the Charit as a Genre* (2002), *Reception of the Received* (2007), *Packaging Freedom: Feminism and Popular Culture* (2003), and *Selfing the City: Single Women Outsiders in Kolkata* (2011) and her edited volumes include *Travelling in Cultures* (with Chandra Mohan and S.C. Dasgupta, 2009) *Locating Cultural Change* (with Parthapratim Basu, 2010), and *Women Writing Gender* (with Jayeeta Bagchi, 2011). E-mail: <pixybee@gmail.com>