

So Far, Yet So Close.

Kunwar Narain's Poetry in Translation

International Symposium organized by the Section des langues et civilisations slaves et d'Asie du Sud (SLAS),
in collaboration with the Centre de traduction littéraire de Lausanne (CTL)

Translating a poem means entering into a dialogue with it, responding to its complexity, even instilling a part of oneself in it. It means continually oscillating between languages, cultures, and contexts. And, at the same time, it means taking a series of very concrete decisions: how to recreate, or not, rhyme and rhythm, how to transpose the various connotations of a word or a phrase, how to convey intertextual references and the polysemy of a text?

Such questions will be at the core of the international symposium devoted to the translation of the poetic work of the Indian author Kunwar Narain (1927-2017), to be held on 21-22 October 2021 at the University of Lausanne (Switzerland). Kunwar Narain, considered by his peers, readers, and critics as one of the most perceptive and original voices in Indian poetry, has left a deep imprint on Hindi literature in the 20th and 21st centuries. Whether his poems deal with history and mythology, the moral and the socio-political, existential themes of life and death, nature and ecology, or memories and journeys, all express a profound humanism and embody a subtle blend between the apparent, outer simplicity of language and the mature, inner complexity of content.

For this meeting—the first entirely devoted to the poet outside India—researchers, artists, and translators, coming from India, Europe, and Switzerland, and working in ten different languages, will dialogue on his poetry and its translation. While the author's poems will serve as the basis and common thread for the presentations, broader considerations on the aesthetic, theoretical and editorial issues specific to the translation of poetry will enrich the content of this symposium. Beyond the scientific exchange of the speakers' contributions, it will also be an opportunity to hear the intimate poetry of the author in Hindi and in various languages.