

## Rumination on Chronopoetics and the Political Subject: Miraji Reads Faiz Ahmed Faiz's Lyric

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Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Miraji are at two supposedly diametrically opposed ends of lyric practice in Urdu, Miraji was a so-called art for art's sake poet, the other a resolute political lyricist, so most writers or readers might not imagine them inhabiting the same space, might not see that the two poets would have something to offer one another. Miraji was known for his poetry as well as this prose on poetry and it is to his essays that I turn for another way of portraying Faiz; bringing the two writers together tenders unexpected vantage points into Faiz's aesthetic. Using the Urdu modernist poet Miraji's short exegesis of the Faiz's poem *Intebāh* (warning or alarm), popularly known only by its opening word, *bol* (speak), this paper will parse a small entry into Faiz's poetics. What did this curious imbrication of modernist exegesis with political poetics allow us to see?

In this paper I suggest that Miraji's analysis, which pries open its final unpacking of Faiz's lyric by turning it through chronopoetics allows us to see anew the ways in which romantic realism and fleshed politics come together to craft the political subject. Miraji's essay gives me the content: the material that provides the ground and theoretical impetus which lead me to thinkers whose work might be productive for this essay. Miraji's style also informs my own. His essay on Faiz's work takes the shape of an unfolding that reveals the heart of a poem rather than a linear unidirectional narrative which begins its labor by laying out a series of hypotheses on poetry that the poetry then helps to illustrate. Analysis then, for Miraji, is a way of seeing into something and opening out what is present in poetry into prose, but for him prose itself was a profoundly lyric enterprise. If theory is taken into this genre of analysis, it is theory as poetics: theoretical approaches are poetic approaches. I look at theory, in the ways suggested by Miraji, the Urdu has primacy and the theory dances off it. Urdu poetics gives me the turns of intellectual movement through which to see the theory. And theory then also offers playful invitations that I pick up in my readings; theory and poetry are in a *pas de deux*. So the form I seize from Miraji also shapes itself into content.

I have chosen to deploy my own formulation of chronopoetics here, rather than resorting to Mikhail Bakhtin's more familiar chronotope, because Bakhtin

holds the chronotope to the more stringent demands of prose, whereas I bring poetry towards itself through prose. In his descriptions of prose, Bakhtin tends to separate time (the catalogue of the temporality of a series of scenes or events) from space (the parsing of the spatial as contingent upon the form or genre of prose) even though different sorts of time are often elaborated by him as different sorts of space; both time and space are under the command of genre specificities (such as romance or adventure) that also texture the lineaments of particular sorts of protagonists. Poetry for Bakhtin does something else, something other than prose. Lyric is abstracted away from prose and appears to carry a kind of universal generality—a kind of generality that one might imagine Miraji was attempting to provide for the lyrical subject in this essay. But Miraji’s essay, which was written just a few years after Bakhtin’s, brings poetry to prose as a necessity where the general can only texture itself through fleshed, sedimented particulars. The poetic for him makes its case in prose—through the *chronos*, amalgamated into the scene, the *topos*, and towards the subject in a way that does not quite work with the Bakhtinian exegeses. Miraji’s more allegorical readings on a poem such as this, one which images making and takes some of its tropes from quotidian technologies to presage the labor of crafting lyric and one that proposes the incipient politics of temporality in hiatuses of time lingering into the futurity of political possibility through violence embedded colonial pasts, make better sense if they are angled through Heidegger’s discussions of technology as *technae*, Heidegger’s method of getting to the subject and Benjamin’s portrayals of historical materialism.

I stage my openings into chronopoetics through Martin Heidegger and Walter Benjamin, choreographing my analyses through their evocations of technology, labor and temporality. I turn then to Jacques Rancière to trace the gestures that dance chronopoetics into the case of political aesthetic. Rancière’s invocation of political aesthetic notates or enables us to catch Miraji’s attunement to what has been occluded or excluded as gestures through which lyrical and prose must be heard. Keying my exegesis to chronopoetics in this way gives readers another take on Faiz’s luminous political corpus.

The modernist Urdu poet Miraji published only one essay on Faiz Ahmad Faiz’s poems. As I have explored in my earlier book on him, Miraji was known for a particular style and form of reading contemporary poetry. (Patel 2001) He took the style as a form from Roger Fry’s translations of Mallarme’s opaque or *mubham* poetry. These are translations that Fry had annotated; folding them into a clarifying exegesis, a slow nuanced unpacking of the blanked shadows in Mallarme’s opaque/dense poetry. This style as form, unraveling a poem as translated shadow and innuendo, interpreting it as a genre of translation that

attends to shade and hue, this form was one that Miraji carried over into a series of essays on the work of his contemporaries, commentaries he wrote on poems just as they came out, immediately following publication or soon after they had been sent to Miraji for comments often before they were out in print.

Miraji's essays were collected in a volume called "Is nazm men" (in this poem) in 1944. Miraji wanted his particular *adā* to pose a kind of model for how to read contemporary poetry; a model that composed critique to enter the space-time of the poem and inhabit its bones and sinew; what Gayatri Spivak would now perhaps call an ethical habitation (Spivak 2010). As I have indicated in my much longer exposition on him, Miraji used this reading of Mallarmé as the method for grappling with any analysis. In other words, for Miraji, all poetry and prose had to be treated as though it were dense, opaque, full of shadowy space. Translation was the form that a clarification of a writer's work had to take. And in order to get to the meat of a writer's oeuvre, a critic had to enter the words, live in them and open them up slowly, attending to even what seemed to be easily comprehensible as though it were something that demanded a slow unfolding. That unfolding was transmuted into prose by a critic, the prose a translation of the original that transformed what the original was, enabling a reader to see it anew.

Miraji's essays on his contemporaries can only really be understood in the ecology of his prose, which includes long full, dense renditions of history, place, life and poetry that open out into *guldastās* of contemporary European and American lyricists, early Japanese, Chinese, Greek (Sappho among them), Korean women poets, Sanskrit and Bihari love lyric. The other essays, of which the piece on Faiz is one, are deliberately not that. They are not the prolonged assays through which one gets a sense of an entire corpus—a 'shaksiyat aur fann' (personality and style) finessed in Miraji's inimitable style. Baudelaire, for example, gets sent all the way to Calcutta where he stumbles upon precolonial or pre-European poetic lineages that lengthen to the portrayals of the Devi and flesh nature into desire; the poet finds tropes that render his lover Jeanne Duval in the racialized hues of deep skinned Bengali beauty. The poet of the intestines caved into the city returning through colonial travel narrative in a peculiarly French vein to the expanse of the pre-colonial: only through this, suggested Miraji, could the life of the curves of femininity be sought in lyric, in their pointed contrast with the pulsating syncopations of the street, the stark solicitations, the solaces and angles of the madhouse, hospital, prison, whorehouse. Here lay the alchemical incorporation of poetry. (Patel 2001, 161)

The long essays were a kind of destining, an inevitable pulling towards bringing forth as poesis: a path opening up, revealing the lyrical being of the poet in and through their compositions. One might describe their arc, what these essays were intended for, through the German verb *stellen* that Heidegger parsed in the

essay “The Question Concerning Technology.” Stellen with its resonances reaching towards placing or positioning as a kind of rootedness is reminiscent of the Sanskrit root sthā (Heidegger was versed in Sanskrit and Miraji translated kāvya): producing and presenting her-stellen and dar-stellen were akin to utThita or samud, upsthita, emerging, manifesting, arising for action, coming forth, being produced, being ready for, its time having come. (Heidegger 1982, 21) Flowering into being is the method of grounding, a way of habitation for a person, an object, a thing. The essays Miraji wrote brought their object into unconcealment, brought them forth, and flowered them into themselves in the ways that Heidegger suggested through the catalogue of stellen. This bringing forth, this showing the poet Miraji was describing fully as she really was, efflorescing something into being with a nuanced clarity, her time having come—this was about time, was about chronopoetics but as Walter Benjamin may have envisioned as the poesis of historical materialism.

For Benjamin, speaking of historical materialism, in the now well mined montage-like “Theses of History,” it was, in the images from Thesis VI, the matériel thrown up in the now as a moment of danger. (Benjamin 1986, 2003, 391) Danger as Heidegger might have conceived in his essay on technology. And here is where Heidegger and Benjamin come into conversation.

What was danger—intebāh— for Heidegger? In the essay on technology Heidegger speaks about the moment of unconcealment as a moment when one could also quail at that possibility. That was a moment, a chronos, where technology could reveal a thing in itself but also enable it to become a commodity through a process that converted the world into commodity, in the Marxist sense, with everything awaiting its consumption. For Heidegger these ways of being, of living and their counterpoint, these pathways of practice, were deeply imbricated in the idea of history and the aesthetic.<sup>1</sup>

On one hand lay history, as historicism, the world portrayed as world picture, typologies of objectifying representation that foreclosed what had been

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<sup>1</sup> The aesthetic here was not transcendental, not Kantian. Nor is it Kantian when I speak of its other registers further on in this essay, in my discussions of Rancière, or Miraji or Faiz. In each of these instances the aesthetic is corporeal, located practice that cannot be apriori or understood as a science flowering from transcendental principles however much it might be concerned with perceptions by the senses. Even Miraji, who was frequently bundled into a parsimonious categorization of the aesthete, was, as I show in my work on him, very much a political aesthete whose essays and lyric were deliberately and specifically grounded.

chronicled. On the other hand was an aesthetic that provided an opening perhaps as a form of chronicle. History as historicism was what was mined as standing reserve, a kind of instrumentalist practice, a technology that tuned time into a perfectly parceled out set piece that was one way of bringing technology to view where everything even perhaps humans were for use, to be put to use.<sup>2</sup> Historical materialism, as Benjamin described it, was precisely not this kind of history; it was history as another *technae*, as a genre of Heidegger's aesthetic perhaps.

For some of his elaborations on what constituted historical materialism, Benjamin engaged with nature and technology in the ways that Heidegger did years later; "Theses of History" might have been the technology essay's historical materialist past, its moment of danger. Benjamin however brings labor more explicitly into this equation. When workers are enticed by a future that offers to redeem them, liberate their grandchildren, promise them a better life is precisely when they are put to work to convert nature into standing reserve, and that is when they become standing reserve. On the other hand, when workers face backwards and taste the rage that sparks from remembering their enslaved ancestors they enter into a kinship with nature.

Thesis XI telescopes technology and nature to attend to that particular stance which misrecognizes the appropriately ordained properties of labor, and in doing so puts labor in the service of standing reserve. This stand "recognizes only progress in the mastery of nature, not the retrogression of society; it already displays the technocratic features later encountered in Fascism. ... The new conception of labor amounts to the exploitation of nature, which with naïve complacency is contrasted with the exploitation of the proletariat." (Benjamin 2003, 393) Here, in this thesis, Benjamin turns to Fourier's allegorical fantasies [which we would now view as an exploitation of nature] but which Benjamin sketches, as Heidegger did, as illustrations of a kinship with nature that brings nature to its own fruition: "the kind of labor, which, far from exploiting nature, is capable of delivering her of the creations which lie dormant in her womb as potentials." (Benjamin 2003, 394)

This is the point of danger that is necessarily double sided, one face tilted in "naïve complacency" towards fascism the other to the birthing womb, out of which one must face the past. This occasion is an instance when the working class

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<sup>2</sup> Technology in this essay captures the more capacious sense of the word that both Benjamin and Heidegger intend—poetics as *materiel*—while paying heed to its quotidian realist invocations in literal apparatuses such as the camera, or the forge. For both philosophers the mundane use of the word summoned up its evocative, productive aspects: the optical unconscious as technology materialized through the physical apparatuses of viewing for example. (Benjamin 1969, 188)

is likely to forget, and must be asked to remember again what made it what it was, “both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren. (Benjamin 2003, 393) In Thesis XII, as “the redeemer of future generations,” the role assigned to them by Social Democracy, working classes had had the “sinews of their greatest strength” sliced open. Here lie the schisms as the entanglements between historicism and historical materialism—between world picture and aesthetic, between technology as standing reserve and *technae* as a kind of flowering as *ges- and her- stellen*, as *sthā*. Rather than as the oft rematerialized lines about historicism from Thesis XVII---“no theoretical armature. Its method is additive; it musters a mass of data to fill the homogenous empty time” —historical materialism is a “unique experience of the past.” (Benjamin 2002, 396) It is about the abrupt halt into a “constellation saturated with tension,” shocking the configuration, crystallizing it into a monad or William Blake’s infinity in the palm of your hand, Gottfried Leibniz’s everything cupped in a sudden drop; moments making infinity. (Benjamin 2003, 396)

If one sends Benjamin and Heidegger’s invocations of technology and nature, the lineaments of labor facing forward to Fascism or backwards towards enslavement into colonial India, in the form of idioms that must be translated rather than as unembellished parcels of fact that make up a world picture, then something else reveals itself. Miraji translated Baudelaire into the alleys of Calcutta and so turned back Baudelaire’s historical chronology to a moment seen in the angled streets of an Indian colonial present. Labor and technology as allegorical idioms speak about the work of the artist and the mechanisms that compose this work either into the aesthetic or into a world picture. It makes the poet-critic living in the depredations wrought by colonial representational politics, residing in danger either the laborer facing back to confront a legacy of loss or the worker turning to lose himself in promises held out for a better life whose product is the world as commodity.

Labor and technology are what Miraji the critic transmutes into the tools of his trade. “Blasting a specific life out of an era or a specific work out of the work,” Miraji’s essay on Baudelaire, in a fun house mirror image of Benjamin’s, “preserves the life work in this work and at the same time cancels it.” It “grasps the constellation which his own era has entered, along with a very specific earlier one” and in doing so Miraji’s essay “ceases to tell the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary.” (Thesis XVIII A) (Benjamin 2003, 397)

Miraji’s essay on Baudelaire reaches out for historical materialism as aesthetic, eschewing the world picture. And in doing the same thing with the essays on women poets and writers, on languages such as Bihari that had been

absorbed into the ambit of Bengali, Miraji fleshed out a political mandate. His analyses tracked the vicissitudes of what Jacques Rancière would have called the “distribution of the sensible” for each writer—the history of their presence or occlusion in the ways that the senses came to be organized so that writers and languages were or were not seen, heard, felt, spoken, scented, sensed. Miraji’s writings were intended to seed challenges to this distribution for each writer. This is where his politics lay, and in the sense that Rancière meant, was a politics of aesthetics, a politics of the senses. This was not where his contemporaries in the Progressive Writer’s Association would have put politics, nor how they might have understood what the work, the labor of the political, as an idiom, might be. For the Progressives labor in its literal modality, the life of a factory worker, a *mazdūr*, the life of a farmer, a *kisān*, was the proper place where politics could be sought or represented.

The abbreviated pieces, such as those on the poem “*Intebāh*” were not meant to pan through an entire oeuvre sent astray so that each poem rose from the *longue durée* of a life settled into materialist history as political economy, caught at the cusp of Miraji’s particular now; one could almost conceive of them instead as quick takes of just one poem. But even in their differences from the fuller presentations of poetic oeuvre, they still carry with them a bit of the charge of the essays: they reveal a little of Heidegger’s sense of showing something clearly, are historically materialist in a Benjaminian vein where the past is seen through the legacies of seduction, violence and terror that pulls at it and reorients the distribution of the sensible. Aesthetics as Rancière posed it, in relation to time and *technae* as Heidegger and Benjamin imaged, is what I will go on to texture in this essay – as the place of the political.

When I first presented this piece on Faiz at the Faiz Centenary in London at SOAS in the fall of 2011, I began with a lovely sung rendition of “*Bol*” by Tina Sani, a Pakistani singer of classical and semi classical ghazals. As you may have gathered from this and other sung versions with which many audiences are familiar, what I will speak to is the poem many only know by the first word in its opening stanza –*bol*—speak. This is the one poem of Faiz’s that Miraji parsed in his 1944 essay collection. That Miraji wrote only on one poem by Faiz is unusual for Miraji because he usually commented on at least 2-3 poems by each poet of Faiz’s caliber. But for Miraji this essay on Faiz condensed everything that needed to be said. It stood in as a case study of Faiz: only if it were parsed, read, unpacked to render what lay on its surface as mystery. In the ways in which Lauren Berlant has spoken of the revenant of a case as an event: as a moment, as an opening into a sort of incompleteness, one that leads a reader to linger on the mystery of that incompleteness (a mystery without a complete resolution), a case of symptoms that might never be cured, but also paradoxically as a case of

something that stands in for a more general elaboration. While holding onto many of the other tonalities of cases from different epistemic genres that Berlant explores and that are elaborated in the collection that follows her introductory piece on “the case,” the reading of this particular poem composed the case as a statement of the work of the poet Faiz in general. This reading then tunes into discussions of Faiz’s work, its lyricism, politics and subjectivity. Miraji’s colorations of the subject in this poem, both as the figure of politics and the presence whose being stretched into the political, choreographs the case of Faiz as the poet of the political metric. Every poem that Miraji explores endures a process of reading that unravels the poem’s project unwinding the knots on its surfaces for the cues offered in order to tease out meaning; little is left self-evident. And this Faiz essay itself, in the way that Ranci re suggests, is also a political aesthetic symphonic.

The title that Miraji knew this poem under is “inteb h” warning, or alarm, which is also the title that opens his short exegesis on Faiz, a title that has often been lost, as this, one of Faiz’s many popular, populist poems, has traveled over the years. My own style here is an echo of Miraji’s and z e bay n, the fairly spare lyrical essay to which I will now turn to allow me a small opening into Faiz’s aesthetics:

Speak, for your lips are free.  
Speak, it’s your own tongue.  
Speak, it’s your own body muscled with health  
Speak, for your life is still yours.

See how in the blacksmith's shop  
Flames burn wild as iron glows bloody;  
Locks pry open their jaws,  
And every chain spread out like a skirt falling across a slope begins to  
splinter/split open/break/tear/shred.

Speak, this small hour is long enough  
before body and tongue die/fail/fade:  
Speak, because the truth isn’t dead yet,  
Speak, speak, whatever you must.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In this translation I play with Naomi Lazard’s translations in *The True Subject*, which I, as a young graduate student was assigned to be her factotum on, and Azfar Hussain’s translations.

Intebāh, like bol carries a charge with it— it puts something on notice. The alarm has been sounded, you have been warned, a notification has been issued, this alarm voices Benjamin’s moment of danger. Bol, the exhortation to speak, a vocative, in direct address, issues a kind of intimate generality as intebāh does, its abstract distance registers closeness, perhaps in some of the ways that Aamir Mufti in bringing Adorno’s analytic to Faiz’s corpus has pointed to in his work on Faiz. (Mufti 2007, 211)

Miraji stays with intebāh, putting it to task, pulling at it, translating it through a sequence of interrogations. The questions that Miraji asks flesh out the intimacies between what is close and what is far, what is the general and who is the one, the particular. For Miraji this poem opens mysteries, something mysterious, and in doing so makes its case, becomes a case, a kind of case study that a reader could parse for the *nuances* that animate, blow its language into life.

Now, if you are familiar with the poem, or even if you have read it for the first time today, it would not strike you as a poem suffused with nuance. It speaks directly, baldly, without hesitation. It exhorts, it pushes into demands. Its language is commonplace cadenced into a chant that could so easily, as many commentators have suggested, mobilize gatherings fighting for political space.<sup>4</sup> Its language does not seem to call out for a listener who needs to be educated in the silsilā of Urdu poetics.

Intebāh is an ur haqīqat parast’s poem; it carries itself in its urgency to something outside of itself, a command to a “real” world venture. This is perhaps why Miraji chose to bring it to a different kind of life in his analysis. Because in the form of the case it makes, it is a case, an instance of progressive poetry, the poetry for lovers of truth, those who live in the flesh of truth’s present.

So what does Miraji tell us is present and what through that telling do we learn to discern about Faiz? Bol, ki lab āzād hain tere—for Miraji this utterly matter of fact opening line is a fleshy present absence—carried in the repetitive grammatical form of tere. It is a kind of mystery whose solution makes the case for progressive poetry. What is present is ensconced in a series of bodily images: lab, zabān, jism, jān–lips, voice/language, corpe, life/love. Flesh, abstraction,

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<sup>4</sup> The Delhi University students at my talk were familiar with the first and last verse but not really cognizant of the middle. The weekend immediately following my talk there, in February 2012, a political symposium and gathering was organized in Delhi under the nomenclature provided by “Bol.” On March 4, 2012 a program, which revisited the massacres of Muslims in Gujarat 10 years after the events, was organized in New Delhi under the title “Bol is sach zindaa hai ab tak- Ten years of Gujarat 2002. <http://www.anhadin.net/article153.html>

flesh abstraction. But the person who possesses these—the person warranted by the possessives “tere” lab, tere zabān, tere jism, terī jān—the “tere” has no content. So also the one speaking, for whom they speak, the one who must listen; they are all ironically absent. In other words: We know a voice speaks, and we know that a voice is commanding another to speak. We don’t know at this opening enunciation who speaks, who is spoken to and where or when the speaking might sit itself into place or through time. I say place or time --jahān ya kahān, because for Miraji we are led to the what, and then onto a kind of tentative why, through the who into the when and then the where. The where and the what flesh out the mystery, the missing beats, the syncopation between presence and absence.

The poem’s subtlety is in the grammar of its timings: time its Benjaminian nuance. A small portion of its resonances are carried, according to Miraji in its chronopoetics. And those chronopoetics lead you forward inexorably through the first litany of exhortations:

Speak, for your lips are free.  
 Speak, it’s your own tongue.  
 Speak, it’s your own body muscled with health  
 Speak, for your life is still yours.

bol ki lab āzād hain tere  
 bol zabān ab tak terī hai  
 terā sutawāN jism hai terā  
 bol ki jāN ab tak terī hai

What the poem starts with is a command–speak—shaped in a future that is very close by, a proximate futurity. But the temporal grammar of each line closes with hai – is, the present, the now. And this present is sutured to the possessive, tere, each of the first four lines ending with an alternating hai or tere. What’s missing is what’s implied by these lines, till now – ab tak – the past, what happened until the moment of directive, what came before. And carried in the ‘ab tak’ is the question: until when shall one speak, kab tak? The when which is the where: is duration that assembles itself in space. The presence of “As long as” – ‘jab tak ki’ – slinks like a reminder behind the lines and yields a duration of space, the where, where voice, language, body, life live. Its gradations lie in the chronopoetics of the when, the answer given in time lengthening into the lines that begin the final stanza: Thodā vaqt bahot hai, a small time is a lot. Maut se pachele, before death, zindān hai ab tak, before death, you are still, yet alive. The

registers of chronopoetics are those when time transmutes to a where. But not anywhere, the where is precisely where time is pulled open, stretched apart to live at the hiatus of danger between death and life, to live where the smallest thing is more than big enough, where the moment encounters infinity. This is where the jigsaw slips into what has felt so potently and powerfully bereft of the mysterious: the mystery that must be unfurled in order to know the poem as *taraqqī pasand adab*, as progressive versification.

But for Miraji, who will not fold the entire poem, as so many Progressive readers and reciters have, into just the speaking—*intebāh* cannot be tuned into just *bol*. ‘*Bol, ki lab āzād hain tere.*’ These are readers, whatever their political will to transformation, who Benjamin might have imagined as bereft workers. Nourished by the vision of their liberated grandchildren rather than their enslaved past, they have lost their way. These are the readers for whom all the poem contains moves into the inexorability of its chronology as historicism, the future that pushes forward into the past. ‘*Bol, ki lab āzād hain tere.*’ But Miraji wants to stay with alarm, with *intebāh* and its historicism is not a sufficient response to the mystery of its meaning, the absent presence who is to be put on notice. ‘*Bol, ki lab āzād hain tere.*’ For Miraji the poem’s meaning is not merely contained within and by its *chronos* as history but in what’s still left unfinished by the chronology, historical materialism, figured into its poetics—where does this time reside and ‘*kis ke lab,*’ whose lips? The query settled into the ‘*kis,*’ the whose, fleshes temporality in the image of a ‘*might be,*’ possibility living in the open question. In his essay Miraji asks: So, then where is the where? Does this where give us a who (whose lips)—the who of the political subject? One might use this poem, speak it to time when one marches, but what does it mean?

Where might we go? The poem gives us a scene from which to unwind its meaning. The chains being prepared in the smithy suggest the poem’s meaning as content; the corpus of the mystery might lie here. Miraji says that the chains may offer a probable speaker; one who may be a prisoner laden with the past of enslavement, invoking Benjamin’s working class facing backwards, facing down the temporal direction of a truly released future. But if the temporal grammar embedded in the image of *tund shole* and *surkh āhan*, ‘*flames burn wild and iron glows bloody,*’ if their chronopoetics, also suggests that the chains are unfinished, they are still unmolded material, in the process of being forged, *voh tayyār ho rahe hain*, the person speaking is perhaps still free. The work of the forge, materialized through the substance that is the process of being cast, the *āhan*, the piercing flames that melt the iron to be pressed into shape, is in process. If this is the case, then, says Miraji, the speaker couldn’t really be a prisoner yet. But the poem carries a frisson of someone who is in danger -- *shakhs khatare men hai*. The speaking verses suggest, says Miraji, that the peril may lie here - that

someone is close to having their mobility, their movements, their voice bound, closed off. Is this the notification, the warning the poet gives in the title—*intebāh*. Is this, Miraji asks, the futurity that the poem intends?

How does this futurity move from the necessary past of enslavement to a possible politics: the harbinger of danger for Benjamin and in culling that *khatarā* through the opulence of technology also the precise place of danger for Heidegger? Is this futurity, then, not to be pressed into service, bound merely, to a past of enslavement?

“Your lips are free,” says the person writing. But is the object of the poem, the poem’s intent, its intentionality, this person whose lips are free, who the poet notifies, warns? “*Dekh ki*” the poet says. What if we were to look where our gaze might be led as the second verse opens? What if we were to look where the poet turns our eyes? What might we see? What if the object, that is the subject of the poem were the blacksmith’s shop, what if the poem were to lead us here, as it does after its bald calls, to this ordinary place *mā’ mūlī jagah*, a place without much import. What then would be the story, the *qissā* that the poem reveals, the mystery it incants?

Here is the story, the *qissā*, that Miraji goes onto to make for Faiz, the elucidation offered for the case of the mysterious speaker: The poet, says Miraji, looks at the chains being forged there, is *nihāyat mā’ mūlī dukān meN*, its commonplace place brings to mind, suggests the ordinary locations many writers of realism take as their *mauzu’*, their theme. But this poet is a *muhibb-e vatan*, a patriot of a particular genre: a lover whose feelings pull him willy nilly towards his nation. So instead of falling into the seductions promised by the intimacies of the ordinary as such, instead of being drawn into the feeling that through the ordinary we will enter a political life yielded to us through subjects who have hitherto for been accorded no representational space, the poet as lover transforms the image into something else.<sup>5</sup> The ordinary metastasizes into allegory.<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup> Danger, as Heidegger phrases it in the technology essay, lies between this sentence and the next. One is world picture the other is the aesthetic. And it is love that pulls open the place between one technology and another. Miraji also, in many of the essays in *Mashriq o Maghrib* (1958), thinks of this as a moment of danger for progressive writers. For him these images of women and workers are so seductive that in succumbing to them without attending to the violence associated with the long colonial history of their deployment (as tropes) writers often lose their political emphasis. Many of the essays, such as the one on Baudelaire, or those on women writers speak directly to other lineages through which progressives ought to craft their political lyric and prose.

labor of the images in this scenario is allegorical and the poet takes the ordinary into the allegorical work of poesis.<sup>7</sup> The allegorical performs its task in two ways. It is literal, in that technology stands for itself.<sup>8</sup> Making chains is the work of the laborer blacksmith that can also be translated in a fairly quotidian fashion into the forging through which a poet crafts his metaphor: the āhangar ki dukān is the space of the poem. But the chains can also refuse the spare form of commodification. In being turned/tuned/ torqued/ molded/rehoned through the aesthetic, through the allegorical, they cannot just service standing reserve; they are put to other ends, to ‘showing as,’ to unconcealment. What they show is through the other allegorical charge, which is carried in the staging of this scene: the act of ‘being in making’ shuttles this metaphor towards temporality; the scene’s metaphors are time whose imaged labor galvanizes and thus becomes chronopoetics.<sup>9</sup>

A poet sees the chains being made, and imagines that, perhaps even knows that these things are being forged to close off those who fight for freedom. And another person, a mujāhid, someone who strives, labors or struggles and hence is a warrior for the faith, this vatan ke kis mujāhid appears before the poet-lover like

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<sup>6</sup> I am obviously invoking here, through two other thinkers, and through Miraji’s rendering of Faiz, the long history of Marx’s engagement with use value and with the dance between corporeality and abstraction. The commodity here can point to something else precisely because it has not been fully made yet. And this is where, before its making, that it can be put to another use. And alchemy is obviously at stake in the scene’s transmuted mechanisms and dramatis personae. (Taussig 1997, 140) Death is also pulled into the equation but not in the form of dead labor, labor cannot be tallied up, accounted for as abstract labor power. Surplus is something else again because money never enters the picture. Nor does exchange or capital, even as political capital.

<sup>7</sup> That the quotidian is allegorical and not just naturalized into political facticity is the issue that Miraji takes up with the Progressives. For Miraji the mistaken vision meted out in Progressive manifestos about the nature of art, literature, lyric binds images to a fantasy that the only value these images have for political versification lies in the semantics of their realness, not in the lyrically prolific, opulent splay of the allegorical.

<sup>8</sup> I am obviously playing across Rancière’s essays into nineteenth century historical realism in French narrative forms.

<sup>9</sup> I don’t intend transport in the sense of moving over, being carried over. Rather, it provokes the more mystical sense of being carried away that can be seen in elaborations of ghazal: majāzī is haq, and not translated into haq, (Derrida 1974, 26)

a spirit to whom he speaks. And this is the specter who must be warned, to whom the *intebāh* is issued as title and as opening—to whom the poet must say that as long as you are free you are really alive. When you are closed off from moving, speaking, walking, that is true death. So, because of this imminent jeopardy, the *khatarā*, the danger of life and death—speak, ‘bol’.

What Miraji tells us then is that the poem’s import, its meaning does not reside in the frame, the opening and closing calls to arms. Rather it lives in the cusp, in the staging cupped in the differences between the repetition of beginning and end, between *bol* and *bol*--between *bol* of the command to an immediate future and *bol* of the past ‘*ab tak*,’ till this time of the command. *Bol, yeh thodā sā vaqt bahut hai*: speak this small hour is long enough. This is the time of danger for Benjamin, the *chronos* of historical materialism, a small segment that is also a great deal. It is the time in which we enter the scene of the ordinary as metaphor that yields absent subjects to us, the poet/blacksmith, lover/patriot and the laborer/fighter all of whose labor is united around the small absent *lafz* the critic appends, the word “*vatan*” the nation. This is the time that yields the technology of casting the story net which will lead us to the work of political aesthetic—this is the other place of *chronopoetics*, the time of the scene.

The poet, whose imagination ignites this scene of lives turning future into the past, brings this picture to life, a tableau that brings a listener to stand before him. This poet is both Faiz in the particular and any poet fired up by love, by political sentiment. The poet is the protagonist alighting in a smithy, catching sight of chains not yet ready, a metaphor metonymy both for a future, for time and for the person he brings before him to whom he, Faiz, any lover in love with a beloved absolutely must speak. For what is at stake is a death not yet come. For what is at stake is a time of colonialism when the future offers death. What is at stake is a life still lived truly. This is when prison doors will fly open, keys turn in their locks and chains fail their task. And the scene brings a poet to a place, a hiatus, between the chains being forged and springing open. This is a place where a poet can speak to halt time, to pull a fighter back into life and away from the binds of death that await him. Death itself is a metaphor metonymy – for a living death, the death of a political life. This was the possible death that Benjamin portended for the working classes whose sinews would be sliced open if they acceded to a future of capitulation. And in a readerly tour de force that turns politics through the lens of the aesthetic a seemingly simple poem has yielded surprising subtleties.

What other lessons might this sort of reading give us about how to understand what Faiz is doing, tell us about the content of the work that Faiz as a poet does? How is the situation laid out before us that the poem elucidates, the instance of the

absent speaker and listener, the case that stands in for the unfinished business of this sort of progressive, haqīqī-parast lyric? What is the proposition as a kind of opening out?

The first lesson is that the haq the truth of the poem lies in love – lies not merely in a scene, not merely in time but in muhabbat. And it is the truth of this love, its haqīqat that turns time and the scene into majāzī the allegorical metaphor that will release the truth. The poet is a ghazal go, a political romantic, in the unfinished business of feeling his emotional force, the country his beloved. The second lesson speaks to Faiz’s poetry as the poetry of realism, bearing witness to a kind of transportation that occurs with metaphor, with the majāzī, something that Benjamin believed lay in the crevices of historical materialism. That lesson can only be grasped when metaphor can be seen as aesthetic labor whose purpose is the political philosophical.

Realism, then, as Faiz’s particular aesthetic is not to be parsed, as realism sometimes is, merely as a one to one relationship between an outside and an aesthetic object. Nor is it to be handed over to a litany of so called realist subjects treated as though they were the release of fact, such as a mazdūr, whose salvation from depredation would buy political consolation.<sup>10</sup> Nor is it to be found just in a command to history as a way of placing an aesthetic object,

It is to be found instead in the somewhere else of historical materialism, in the small space of time, the spacing between life and death that is big enough for its charge. It is located in the somatics of love and the flesh of a scene. The poet’s labor is in the forge, Heidegger’s proper technology that will bring a thing to itself, to its own being. The poet labors in the time between before the thing is made and after it falls apart. In entering the scene of technology he provokes a story pressed into shape through a chronos that will make over any ordinary scene, ek mā’ mūlī sī jagah, the quotidian aesthetics that animate realist narrations, turn the flesh of that scene through the delicacy of its careful music to the unfinished business of the political. This is chronopoetics—the third lesson. And the unfinished business of the political, as Benjamin so poignantly put it, must not face the lambent seductions of the seemingly unfinished dangerous promise: the certainty of a better life. Instead time must face death. Because the political is precisely about an uncertain future, a life released to uncertainty.

The lyric tale’s protagonist is always the poet. Not the poet as Faiz the historical personage, but the poet as Faiz the general lover, the political romantic, enlivening a triangle. The third person in the triangle is a presence who lives only in absence, the political subject whose being resides only in the form of the possessive – possessed of life to come and possessed by death.

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<sup>10</sup> Rancière’s work offers apposite lessons here.

The mujāhid, the third being, is conjoined to the speaker through the love object they both share, the nation to be. This poem could stand for any poem, which is composed painstakingly and spoken on behalf of this person. The person is someone whose generality is brought close in by the intimacy of the poet's love, so close that anyone of us here can become that person. But this love is not just *ishq*, love, *ārzū*, longing, *taras*; thirst seized from the corpus of ghazal and turned to political realist ends, a well-worn metaphor transmuted into a new philosophical topos. (Derrida 1974) In the essay, Miraji brings love in through a metaphoric scene seemingly denuded of it; the critic storyteller's political aesthetic turns a poem that drums/galvanizes political gatherings into a poem about the socius of the lover. The curious case of a critic vilified for his stance on *jadīdīyāt*, for his *jāmūliyat*, parsing the *ur-taraqqī pasand* poet, resolves into political resonances that gather us all through the fleshed abstractions of the lyrical.

So that, it is to each one of us that Faiz always speaks, igniting us to live. And this is the final lesson. We compose the profound sociality that Mufti says mediates the political for Faiz. We are the mujāhid, the political subjects that Faiz commands to life in the years before independence. Our sweat the labor we put towards the aesthetic, which in turn orchestrates us as and in the syncopations of the political. But *this* is still our immediate future as the chronopoetics of its constant continual truth. *This* is still the unfinished business of a life, *thodā vaqt bahut hai*, which we have precisely because we push out against the pressure, the *khatarā*, of our death, an opening. This is political aesthetic poised in the question of effacement: that we make a space against brutal endangerment of our death as a speaking, to mobilize, always as a dangerous political subject. With an uncertain future our only salvation is in the violence that lies behind us.

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*Intebāh*

bol ki lab āzād haiṅ tere  
bol zabāṅ ab tak terī hai  
terā sutawāṅ jism hai terā  
bol ki jāṅ ab tak terī hai  
dekh ke āhaṅgar kī dukāṅ me ṅ  
tuṅd haiṅ shole surKh hai āhan  
khulane lage quffaloṅ ke dahāne  
phailā har ek zanjīr kā dāman  
bol ye tho.Dā waqt bahot hai  
jism-o-zabāṅ kī maut se pahale  
bol ki sach ziṅdā hai ab tak  
bol jo kuchh kahane hai kah le