

The (Hi)story of *Guru Geethaya*: retranslations and insights into the creation of reading communities

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This paper aims to investigate the relationship between retranslations of popular texts and other forms of creative output that draw from these texts, hypothesizing that this relationship provides insights into the text's reading community. The study draws on the fields of Book History, Sociology of the Text and Translation Studies. William A. Johnson's (2009) formulation of a reading community in Antonine Society is utilized as a point of departure to explore the relationship between the novelette *First Teacher* by Chingz Aitmatov (1962), its early Sinhala translation, D. V. Rodrigo's translation *Guru Geethaya* (1966) and three subsequent retranslations: *Guru Geethaya* (Premachandra, 2015), *Guru Geethaya* (Rathnasekara, 2017) and *Guru Panduru* (Dombagahawaththa, 2019). Their relationship with other digital and non-digital creative regenerations that draw from this story and book such as memes, notices and poems and other mediums through which elements from the text have been extracted and reproduced are also considered in the analysis. The very existence of a reading community such as the one described in this study challenges Johnson's implicit postulation that contemporary reading practice is largely solitary and individualistic. The study goes on to observe that the reading community of *First Teacher* maintains and expands itself through creative regenerations and that the retranslations and creative regenerations come to constitute the 'afterlife' of the translated text, in making it a 'common creation of the public', which the narrator in the text envisions as an ideal fate for the story he narrates. The analysis carried out in this study focuses on the material expressions of the reading community and argues that a reading community is established without members having to read the book/books in the conventional sense.

Keywords: *creative regeneration, reading community, retranslation*