Sex and the Sanskrit Classics: Untranslatability, Code-switching, and Sexed-up Translations

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Abstract

By looking at some unconventional and hitherto unstudied episodes in the modern reception history of two erotic stanzas ascribed to Bhartṛhari—translated into French and Latin by Hippolyte Fauche, and into Hindi and English by Purohit Gopinath—this paper aims to complicate the narrative about the (un)translatability of sex as represented in Sanskrit classical poetry, and to move beyond more traditional narratives of obfuscation and censorship of sex in the classics (usually understood as the Graeco-Roman classics) during the long nineteenth century.

Introduction

> THE LOVE GAME
> At first she pleads with me,
> "No, not now, please."
> But soon the petting and fondling
> light the fire of passion in her.
> Almost unnoticed, her limbs relax;
> resolve ebbs away.
> Hot with desire, she brazenly
> throws herself into the love game
> and spreads her legs out
> in an arc of never-ending pleasure.
> Such are the joys
> when a man makes love to his wife.
> (Parthasarathy 45)

> But a certain directness of speech which would be most offensive in England is evidently not regarded in that light in India, and every scholar knows that many of their classical poems, nay, even their Sacred Writings, contain passages which simply do not admit of translation into English.
> (Müller 63)

There is nothing new or sensational about the claim that a 'classic' is, at least in part, untranslatable. In fact, the paradoxical coexistence of an urgency to translate and the professed inability to do so is a theme often rehearsed by translators of 'classic(al)' texts, whether they belong to the much-revered—and endlessly (un)translated—Graeco-Roman canon, or to another 'classical' literary culture, such as that of Sanskritic India. Sex—that is, the representation of (too) graphic sex—has been a prime cause for moral and aesthetic panic on the part of Western translators of Greek and Roman authors up until (generalising wildly) the end of the 1960s.[1] The alleged untranslatability of sex that crops up in works of

[1] See Roberts; Harrison and Stray.

high art and cultural significance is not the result of the target language lacking words or expressions that would allow the translator to capture the exact meaning and, to a greater or lesser extent, the aesthetic potency of the original. Sex that belongs to a foreign literary canon can produce a singular unease in translators, as they carry the burden of preserving (or generating) the text's cross-cultural appeal—the alleged universality and atemporality of a classic's ethical and aesthetic dimensions. Readers can be educated, or at least warned, that 'other' literary cultures view sex differently, in ways that can be uncomfortable to encounter; but translated sex, foreign sex that is made to speak one's own language, can indeed feel too close for comfort.

The modern reception of Sanskrit 'classical' literature—what Indian theorists would simply call *kāvya*—is permeated by these tensions and contradictions. Aesthetically self-conscious creative writings in Sanskrit—as opposed to religious, philosophical, and technical-scientific texts—were produced across the subcontinent between (at least) the first century of the Common Era and the first half of the second millennium, though specimens of *kāvya* have been composed until modern times. Love—in its psychological and physical manifestations—is a theme favoured by 'classical' Sanskrit poets: thus, we find plenty of (highly stylised, yet rather explicit) love scenes in (epic) poems, dramas, and novels dealing with a wide spectrum of subjects. But if love and sex are essentially inescapable when dealing with *kāvya*, there are collections of verses (or entire sections of larger anthologies) that are specifically dedicated to the erotic 'taste' (*śṛṅgāra-rasa*). The *Śṛṅgāraśataka*, an anthology of a hundred (*śataka*) freestanding stanzas on erotic love (*śṛṅgāra*) ascribed to Bhartṛhari (ca. fifth-seventh century) is, at least in modern times, one of the most popular of such collections—and one of the works most resistant to translation.

Confronted with the refined yet unabashed sensuality of one of Bhartṛhari's stanzas (see the beginning of this article), even the contemporary poet Rajagopal Parthasarathy walks a tightrope over the abyss of untranslatability. His register alternates between being mildly sexy ("petting", "spreads her legs out"), playfully allusive ("love game"),

and rhetorically elaborate ("an arc of never-ending pleasure"), though none of these expressions have an exact counterpart in the Sanskrit text. Future translators will have to mould their versions to the (poetic) sex idiom of their times. Yet what I propose to do in this paper is not to look at the present—or venture wild guesses about the future—of the reception of Sanskrit erotic poems in translation. Instead, I shall turn the gaze to some 'vintage' translations of Bhartṛhari's erotic stanzas, in the conviction that it is still profoundly instructive to look at both the striking limits and the utterly original solutions that characterise the first modern responses to representations of sex in Sanskrit *kāvya*. While these one- or two-hundred-year-old translations don't exactly hold a mirror to our twenty-first-century selves, they bring into focus—and with extraordinary clarity—the Sisyphean challenge of translating sex across literary cultures, especially when the status of the source text is that of a 'classic.'

The translations that I shall analyse in this paper belong to the long nineteenth century—a period when the relationship between sex, translation and the 'classic' reached a climax of complexity. It was a time when a prolific curiosity about sex (expressed both in the private sphere and through scientific and legal discourses) was paralleled and counterbalanced by the crystallisation of taboos about where and how sex could be talked about. In his *History of Sexuality* (1978), Michel Foucault famously set out to disentangle the nexus between sexuality, perversion, power, and pleasure under the Victorian bourgeois regime:

> The pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light; and on the other hand, the pleasure that kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, fool it, or travesty it. The power that lets itself be invaded by the pleasure it is pursuing; and opposite it, power asserting itself in the pleasure of showing off, scandalizing, or resisting. (45)

Imparting a slight twist to Foucault's diagnosis, I contend that the translations discussed in this paper are, at the same time, "exercising

a power that questions" the moral and aesthetic purity of the Sanskrit text, and encouraging the reader to partake in the "pleasure of showing off, scandalizing, or resisting" nineteenth-century mores. This period of sexual repression and obsession largely coincided with the golden age of classical philology and what has been dubbed the 'Oriental Renaissance'—which Raymond Schwab conceives as having been primarily triggered by the discovery, translation, and circulation of Sanskrit literature in the West.[2] During this intensely philological era, the 'classics of sex' of the Graeco-Roman canon circulated in variously expurgated form;[3] classical Sanskrit poetry was generally subjected to the same treatment. Scholars and poets could choose to simply not translate words, passages, and even entire sections of Sanskrit poems, usually after claiming—as does the Indologist Max Müller (1823-1900) in the quote that opens this paper—that these passages couldn't possibly be rendered in the target language.

The temptation to file away the history of the modern reception of Sanskrit erotic poetry as a subcategory of 'classical' reception—or a parallel case to that of the reception of the Graeco-Roman erotic classics—may indeed be strong. However, even the seemingly smaller episodes in the reception history of these 'alternative' classics yield unexpected treasures, and challenge received ideas about translators' attitudes towards the erotic, the exotic, and the 'classic.' Thus, this paper discusses two minor and hitherto unstudied chapters of the modern reception of Bhartṛhari's *Śṛṅgāraśataka*. The first analytical section of this paper centres around verse 27 of the *Śṛṅgāraśataka*: it compares French and Latin translations of the same Sanskrit stanza by the French Indologist and philologist Hippolyte Fauche (1797-1869) with a much later 'revised' version of the French translation, which was falsely ascribed to the illustrious, though long-dead, philologist. This was, in fact, a spurious—and intentionally bawdy—retranslation of the Latin version, specially created for a readership of aficionados of the erotic. These French and Latin translations are, in turn, juxtaposed to the

[2] For a (seminal but not flawless) critique of the West's cultural and imperialist engagement with the Orient in this period, see Edward Said.

[3] See Roberts; Harrison and Stray.

Hindi and English renderings of *Śṛṅgāraśataka* 27 that are included in a bilingual volume by the Indian scholar Purohit Gopinath (1863-1935). The identity of this translator appears to be split into, on the one hand, a rather cautious and restrained 'English self,' and, on the other, a 'Hindi self' that is clearly more comfortable with—and closer to—the aesthetic and moral values of the Sanskrit erotic corpus. The same polyphonic alternation between Hindi, English, French and (to a lesser extent) Latin is reproposed in the second analytical section, which is dedicated to Fauche's and Gopinath's translations of *Śṛṅgāraśataka* 25—the verse that, incidentally, opened the introduction of this paper.

The two stanzas, 27 and 25, extracted from Bhartṛhari's erotic anthology, deal with sexual pleasure; particularly, pleasure experienced by women, which was most intractable for nineteenth-century translators. Predictably, the trajectory of the modern reception of these stanzas is married by expurgation—however, that is not the whole story. Ultimately, these intersecting trajectories of reception of the *Śṛṅgāraśataka*, a Sanskrit erotic classic, show that the boundaries between translation and untranslatability, just like those between repression and obsession, are way more porous than we may expect.

Of Pearls and Tears: Sexing-up *Śṛṅgāraśataka* 27

> XXVII
> Ces perles séminales qui coulent à la fin du combat d'amour, alors que les yeux clignotent de douce fatigue, les amants y reconnaissent, et non sans vérité, comme une pluie qui vient terminer et éteindre l'incendie de la lasciveté.[4] (82)

[4] This is the modified version of Fauche's translation of v. 27 that we find in the Bibliothèque des Curieux volume: "These seminal pearls that flow at the end of the love-fight, when the eyes twinkle with sweet fatigue, [these] the lovers recognise, and not untruly, as a rain that comes to conclude and extinguish the fire of lasciviousness" (120). All translations are by the author of this article unless otherwise stated.

Until 1852, when Fauche published his translation of the *Śṛṅgāraśataka* in French prose,[5] European readers who weren't familiar with Sanskrit could only access Bhartṛhari's erotic verses through an 1833 Latin rendering by the German Orientalist Peter von Bohlen (1796-1840).[6] Fauche's translation is generally faithful to the original, although it does contain quite a lot of padding that apparently aims at making the French version either clearer or more rhetorically elaborate. Towards the beginning of the twentieth century, Fauche's translation of Bhartṛhari's verses was reprinted as part of a pocket-sized volume titled *Anthologie érotique d'Amarou suivie des sentences érotiques de Bhartrihari et de contes orientaux* ("Amaru's erotic anthology followed by Bhartṛhari's erotic sayings and Oriental tales"). In this miscellaneous volume, which belongs to the series "Le Coffret du Bibliophile" ("The small coffer of the bibliophile") published by the clandestine publishing house Bibliothèque des Curieux ("Library of the curious"), Fauche's flowery yet erudite translation was re-contextualised as an erotic curiosity; occasionally, it was even retouched to make its erotic suggestiveness more explicit.[7] That is precisely what happened in the translation quoted at the beginning of this section, where the "seminal pearls that flow at the end of the love-fight" appear to be a departure from the 1852 edition—and a rather sultry one.

The stanza is, admittedly, slightly cryptic: whichever textual variant we choose and however we interpret the compound *surata-rasa* (more below), what the poet is ostensibly describing is an experience shared—or rather, simultaneously acknowledged—by sex partners. This experience is, or rather brings about, the extinguishing (if, following Bohlen, we

[5] Fauche's volume included the translation of the three *śatakas* (collections of a hundred verses) ascribed to Bhartṛhari: not only the one dedicated to erotic passion (*śṛṅgāra*), but also those that centre around right conduct (*nīti*) and renunciation (*vairāgya*). The same volume contains also Fauche's French rendering of Bilhaṇa's *Caurapañcāśikā* (eleventh century).

[6] Just like Fauche's later volume, Bohlen's work—an edition of the Sanskrit text, followed by a Latin translation and commentary—included Bhartṛhari's three verse collections and the *Caurapañcāśikā*.

[7] Based in Paris, the Bibliothèque des Curieux was the brainchild of the Briffaut brothers, Georges and Robert, and counted Guillaume Apollinaire among its collaborators. The *Anthologie érotique d'Amarou suivie des sentences érotiques de Bhartrihari et des contes orientaux* (1914) had a print run of seven hundred and fifty copies printed on Arches paper, plus ten copies on Japon Impérial paper; the name(s) of the editor(s) are not indicated in the volume.

read *nivarhaṇaṃ*) or the grand finale (if, like Gopinath, we read instead *nirvahaṇaṃ*, a term used in theatrical theory) of *kāma* (sexual desire—and its consummation). In its original version, Fauche's translation of stanza 27 of the *Śṛṅgāraśataka* reads:

> Ces larmes, que la volupté exprime des yeux clignotants à la fin d'une lutte amoureuse, les amants observent, et non sans vérité, que c'est la pluie, qui éteint le feu du brûlant désir.[8] (83)

However, in a footnote Fauche explained that the compound *surata-rasa* ("love-fluid", "love-delight", "love-taste"), which Bohlen had rendered as *lacrimae* ("tears"), had to be intended otherwise: "There is nothing there, it must be admitted, other than a coarse obscenity" (83). Since "modesty ('la pudeur') does not allow one to put it in good French", Fauche proceeded to offer a Latin rendering of *surata-rasa* as *copulationis liquor* ("fluid of copulation"):

> Qui nictantibus oculis amatoriâ e pugnâ fit copulationis liquor, hoc insimul ut veram lascivi dramatis catastrophen amantium paria sane dignoscunt.[9] (83)

Taking the cue from Fauche's note, the editor(s) of the Bibliothèque des Curieux collated and contaminated Fauche's reticent French translation with the Latin version that he added in a footnote; the outcome is a graphically explicit French version that starkly contrasts not only

[8] "These tears, which sensual pleasure squeezes out of twinkling eyes at the end of a love battle, [these] the lovers regard, and not untruly, as the rain, which extinguishes the fire of burning desire." (Fauche 83)

[9] "The fluid of lovemaking that arises at the end of the amorous battle from twinkling eyes, surely the couples of lovers simultaneously recognise that as the real finale of the wanton drama [of lovemaking]." In his 2005 translation, Greg Bailey renders *surata-rasa* as "the taste lovemaking" (97). Umberto Norsa, who was clearly following Fauche (and who took very seriously his Latin footnote), has in his 1933 Italian translation: *lo sfogo dell'umore erotico*, "the release of the erotic fluid" (72). Another clue that Norsa relied on Fauche's Latin—rather than French—translation is the peculiar expression *la vera catastrofe del drama d'amore* ("the real finale of the love drama"), which is unmistakably modelled after Fauche's *veram lascivi dramatis catastrophen*. Instead of translating this stanza into English, a later British translator, John McFarland Kennedy, inserted Fauche's Latin "literal translation" (145).

with Fauche's translational reticence, but also with the refined ambiguity of the Sanskrit compound *surata-rasa*. From Bohlen's *lacrimae* to the Bibliothèque des Curieux's *perles séminales*, to Fauche's *larmes* and *copulationis liquor*: to which extent is the Sanskrit original responsible for this chain of associations? It is rather suggestive that, in a passage of Donatien Alphonse François de Sade's *Les Infortunes de la vertu* (1787), tears appear to be used as a euphemism for sperm. Having been unsuccessfully assaulted, the protagonist of de Sade's tale, Justine, comments: "je fus abîmée de coups, mais il ne triompha pas; le feu s'éteignit sans succès, et les larmes perdues de l'insensé me vengèrent enfin de ses outrages" (97).[10] In this metaphor, as the critic Michel Delon notes, "physical arousal becomes a fire; semen, tears ('des larmes')" (Sade 97, note 2).[11] How (im)plausible is it that Fauche might have had the Justine passage at the back of his mind as he created the association between Bohlen's *lacrimae*, Bhartṛhari's *surata-rasa*, and his (French) *larmes* and (Latin) *copulationis liquor*? One may even suggest that his turn of phrase "qui éteint le feu du brûlant désir" is redolent of "le feu s'éteignit sans succès"—but that is, after all, a rather common conceit. Even if we discard this wildly speculative hypothesis, there remains a tenuous—yet factually incontrovertible—connection between (Fauche's) Bhartṛhari and de Sade: for the two authors rubbed shoulders within the volumes of the Bibliothèque des Curieux, which published *L'oeuvre du Marquis de Sade* in 1909.

The Bibliothèque des Curieux edition of Fauche's translation constitutes an almost unique case of editorial intervention that did not aim at expurgating a Sanskrit erotic poem, but rather attempted to render such poetry as graphically titillating as possible. It shouldn't go unnoticed that French is the language of both the original translation by Fauche and of its later 'doctored' version. As Deborah Roberts observes, "translators of [Greek and Latin] texts regarded as obscene regularly cite the approach of the French as a kind of antitype to English reticence—for better or for worse" (294). This tallies with the fact that there were no

[10] "I was wrecked by blows, but he did not triumph; the fire was extinguished without success, and the tears shed by the insane man finally avenged me for his assault." (97)

[11] I owe to Will McMorran both the quote from Justine and the reference to Delon's note.

English counterparts to Fauche's translation for more than forty years after its publication. As Müller remarked in 1898, "[i]n the three centuries (*śatakas*) of Bhartṛhari, treating of worldly wisdom, love, and passionlessness, the second, that of love, has generally been left out in English translations" (63). A case in point is Hale Wortham's 1886 translation of the *śatakas* on *nīti* ('right conduct') and *vairāgya* ('renunciation'): in the preface, the English translator justified his choice to omit from his volume the *Śṛṅgāraśataka* on the grounds that it "contain[ed] so many stanzas requiring modification, so many more wholly untranslatable into English" (vii). The same moral panic motivated M.R. Kale's omission of the *Śṛṅgāraśataka* from his 1898 edition of the *Nīti-* and *Vairāgyaśataka*.

But as Müller went on to observe in the passage quoted above, a certain "Purohit Gopi Nath, M.A." published "[a] most useful edition of all the three *Śatakas*… [in] Bombay, 1896" (63). Gopinath, who had earned an M.A. from Calcutta University in 1889 and had worked as a teacher at the Maharaja College in Jaipur, was later appointed state representative of Jaipur State at Abu, where in his spare time he "translated several plays of Shakespeare including *Romeo and Juliet*, *As You Like It* and *The Merchant of Venice* around 1893 in Hindi prose" (Das 529). Gopinath is aware that his decision to translate all the three *śatakas* of Bhartṛhari into English is unprecedented and daring:

> An English translation of the *Śṛṅgāra Śataka* is, I think, here presented for the first time to the public. There being really nothing which can properly be called obscene and immoral, I do not think that any apology is needed for the insertion of the *Śṛṅgāra Śataka*. (52)

This insistently apologetic introduction rehearses two arguments often made by modern translators of Sanskrit erotic poetry: first, that Western literature (in this case, specifically *English* literature) contains passages that are more sexually explicit than those found in Sanskrit literature; second, that Sanskrit erotic poetry mustn't be taken at face value, as its true intent is that of cautioning men against the corrupting effects of female sensuality. Although the latter argument may raise

some eyebrows, this interpretive approach is not altogether unknown to premodern Sanskrit exegetes.[12] What makes Gopinath's volume particularly compelling is the author's choice to approach Bhartṛhari's poetic anthologies while wearing two hats—that of the English and Hindi translator. In fact, there often seems to be a schism between the English and Hindi selves of the author, who often displays conflicting attitudes towards the Sanskrit text in switching from one language to the other. This attitude is particularly evident in Gopinath's treatment of the *Śṛṅgāraśataka*.

Gopinath's translational code-switching is especially interesting because one of the two target languages, Hindi, is closely related to the source language, Sanskrit. The translator could therefore exploit the lexical commonality between Sanskrit and Hindi to reduce the distance between the original text and its translation. However, relying on the relatedness of Sanskrit and Hindi could also function as a smokescreen: I refer to instances where, in the Hindi version, Gopinath left Sanskrit words untranslated which sometimes ossified into empty, almost meaningless icons. At the same time, this (partial) interlingual intelligibility created a safe linguistic space for the translator: rather than bearing the responsibility of speaking the unspeakable, he could afford to merely repeat what had already been spoken by Bhartṛhari, using the same words. This seems to be the case in Gopinath's translation of *Śṛṅgāraśataka* 27—the same stanza that we looked at in the first half of this section, where we examined the Bibliothèque des Curieux 'sexy remix' of Fauche's 1852 French and Latin translations. I first give my English translation of Gopinath's Hindi version, and then Gopinath's own English translation:

> To perceive *surata-rasa* with women with half-closed eyes is the ultimate result of the lovers' longed-for exertion, which both men and women who engage in love play (*krīḍā*) can know completely. (141, my translation from Hindi)

[12] See Bronner; and Lienhard.

> The enjoyment of women whose eyes are partly closed on account of the intensity of their passion is the highest pleasure that can be felt by the loving pair and constitutes the ultimate end of amorous sports. (Gopinath 141)

The English translation is even more literal than the Hindi one, yet it glides over the erotic and ambiguous compound *surata-rasa* by translating it with the euphemism "enjoyment." What is most intriguing in this example is that in the Hindi version, the Sanskrit compound *surata-rasa* is simply 'transplanted' without any note to shed light on its actual meaning. What is more, Gopinath addresses his Anglophone audience in a note which reads: "For etiquette's sake it is most appropriate and proper to leave this stanza without any note whatever" (141). In fact, through the very gesture of denying his readers an explanatory note, Gopinath indirectly alerts them to the problematic content of this stanza.

The Multilingual Feminine: *Śṛṅgāraśataka* 25

If Gopinath, having translated verse 27 of the *Śṛṅgāraśataka* into English and Hindi, draws the line at commenting on it in English, his 'English self' takes an even more reticent attitude towards verse 25—quoted at the beginning of this paper in Rajagopal Parthasarathy's contemporary English version. The stanza describes the stages that a woman goes through when she makes love, possibly for the first time. In only a few strokes, the poet depicts a kaleidoscope of emotions—transitioning from reluctance to desire, from shame to arousal, from restraint to intense pleasure—which is shared by her partner. Gopinath's English translation begins with a long and winding turn of phrase that finds no parallel in the Sanskrit text, where the same concept is concisely expressed at the very end of the stanza (*ramyaṃ kulastrīratam,* "sex with a woman of good family is pleasant"):

> The enjoyment of one's own wife coming of a high and respectable family is indeed the best and highest pleasure on the face of the earth; for…… (Gopinath 139, v. 25)

What is outstanding in this translation is the accumulation of adjectives and qualifying phrases: for instance, *kula-strī*—a woman of good family—is in Gopinath's translation, "one's own wife" (a sort of gloss embedded in the translation, which clarifies what type of *nāyikā*, or literary heroine, is described here), and her family of origin is both "high" and "respectable." These adjectives are mirrored by the superlatives "best" and "highest" qualifying "pleasure": they have no equivalent in the Sanskrit original, where sex with a woman of a good family is simply described as "pleasant", *ramyaṃ*. In a final hyperbolic flourish, the pleasure granted by *rata* ('sex', again translated euphemistically as "enjoyment") is "the best and highest… *on the face of the earth*" (emphasis added)—a rhetorical expansion added by the translator. Expansions and additions are not characteristic of Gopinath's English translation style; in this case they seem to function as a decoy to draw attention away from the emptiness that follows. Gopinath abruptly interrupts his translation with the promise of explaining why sex with such a woman should grant such great pleasure—a promise that remains unfulfilled, as it is only followed by suspension points ("for……"). In his note to the stanza, the translator thus explains his silence:

> I abstain from translating the above stanza from fear of oversensitive critics who are sure to decry it as obscene. To me, however, it presents nothing which can justly be taken as really repugnant to man's feelings in general. (Gopinath 139)

In this brief note Gopinath manages to condense the key tenets of his attitude towards Sanskrit erotic poetry, which—as he claims—deals with themes that pertain to the psychological and physiological phenomenology of sexual love as is universally experienced by human beings. Yet he knows that there are "critics" who deem this poetry "obscene"—interestingly, it is Gopinath's English-writing persona that repeatedly mentions such detractors of Sanskrit poetry, while his Hindi-writing alter ego does not seem to be as concerned with moral(ising) criticism. Gopinath is firm in his condemnation of those who find Sanskrit poetry indecent: they are either "oversensitive," or simply ignorant, as he

argued in his introduction to the volume. Nevertheless, to avoid ruffling any feathers, Gopinath's 'English self' abstains from translating the whole stanza into English.

When Gopinath's 'Hindi self' succinctly expounds the gist of the stanza, none of the above points are raised:

> In this stanza, the poet has accurately represented the love-making (*surata*) of the *nāyikā* '*svīyā*' [i.e. 'belonging to one's self'], from the description of the stage of the still inexperienced young woman (*ajñātayauvanā navoḍhā*) to that of *prauḍhā* [i.e. 'mature married woman']. (Gopinath 139, my translation from Hindi)

Here Gopinath resorts to the *nāyikā-bhed* jargon, i.e. a system of description and classification of the traditional heroines of theatre and poetry, which was familiar to readers steeped in the Braj Bhasha poetic tradition: he thus specifies what kind of heroine is being described (the *nāyikā svīyā*, i.e. 'one's own woman/wife') and what stages of erotic initiation she goes through (from that of inexperienced *navoḍhā*, the 'newly married woman', to that of *prauḍhā*, the 'sexually experienced and confident woman'). As we have seen, the English commentary avoids any direct reference to the original Sanskrit text, only discussing the reasons why Gopinath left the stanza (mostly) untranslated; the Hindi note is instead entirely dedicated to the exposition of technical aspects of the verse within the theoretical framework of Sanskrit/Braj Bhasha poetics. To be fully deciphered, the Hindi commentary presupposes a reader who is conversant with a set of aesthetic and exegetical conventions. Therefore, it is not surprising that the same *rasika*, or 'connoisseur reader,' is provided with a complete Hindi rendering of the verse; this ends with the terse "sexual union (*ramaṇa*) with a woman of good family (*kula-strī*) is indeed extremely pleasant" (Gopinath 139, v. 25, my translation from Hindi), which corresponds to the flamboyant, yet immediately aborted, beginning of the English translation.

This example clearly illustrates that the choice to offer a bilingual translation of the *Śṛṅgāraśataka* should not be read as an attempt to

attain semantic equivalence between the Sanskrit, Hindi, and English texts. On the contrary, each version of Bhartṛhari's verses seems to live a life of its own, with the English and Hindi glosses adding a further layer of complexity (and dissonance) to this multilingual hall of mirrors. The code-switching between different target languages can be seen as a liberating act, whereby Gopinath uses either of the two target languages—and not necessarily always the same—to express the nuances of the original text that he was forced to repress in the parallel translation. Here the schism between the translator's Hindi and English selves is undeniable: while one proceeds to translate the Sanskrit verse, the other doesn't. Gopinath's bilingual translations effectively activate two parallel literary landscapes, an English and a Hindi one, each one defined by different criteria of moral and aesthetic propriety. These criteria are intimately linked to, and derive from, the poetic tradition(s) with which the translator associates each linguistic medium. The Hindi and the English translations are implicitly positioned in two distinct and separate intertexts, and seem to be constructed to speak to two types of connoisseurs, whose horizons of expectations concerning poetry diverge. In the Hindi translations and notes, Gopinath addresses an audience sympathetic to his translation project and most likely familiar with Braj Bhasha courtly poetry, whose themes, conventions, and stylistic features overlap significantly with those of Sanskrit *kāvya*. His tone, compared to the one he adopts in his English prose, is decidedly less apologetic and more matter-of-fact. Moreover, the Hindi translations are not only less reticent, but also more philologically accurate than their English counterparts. The English translations read as retellings or paraphrases, whereas the Hindi versions follow the source text closely, as if presupposing a reader who could move with a certain ease between the Sanskrit verses and their translation.

Both of Gopinath's translations of *Śṛṅgāraśataka* 25—the complete Hindi version and the partial one in English—stand in stark contrast with Fauche's translation of the same stanza. Although the French translator affected philological fastidiousness (for example, by italicising the bits of his translations that had no exact counterpart in Sanskrit), his versions are not primarily aimed at an audience who can read the

Sanskrit text, which was not included in the volume. Fauche's translation of verse 25 goes as follows:

> *D'abord*, elle s'approche de moi avec une vertu un peu aventurée; après, vient le désir; puis elle se hâte vers l'instant de satisfaire cette *envie, mais* avec pudeur; ensuite, elle met bas toute réserve (2);—la volupté humecte ses charmes (3), objet d'un immense désir; enfin, audacieuse dans ses jeux,—elle cause un plaisir infini par les mouvements, qu'elle ne craint pas de communiquer à ses membres: *voilà ce qu'est* une gentille-femme; la jouissance avec elle est une chose délicieuse!
> (2) Littéralement: *fermeté*. (3) RAHAS, *occultum*. (82)[13]

Fauche's reticence to give a literal French translation of *rahas* strikes me as an affectation, as the expression "la volupté humecte ses charmes" ("sensual pleasure moistens her charms") is explicit enough. This reticence is also not supported by the Sanskrit text, where, in fact, *rahas* most likely means 'in secret' (rather than 'the secret place'). In any case, a footnote informs us that the expression *ses charmes* corresponds to Sanskrit *rahas*, which Fauche's 'Latin self' translates as *occultum*, 'that which is hidden'—here, an euphemism for female genitalia. Predictably, the editor(s) of the Bibliothèque des Curieux made sure to remove any ambiguity from Fauche's translation—although this more explicit translation still resorted to the veil of Latin: "la volupté humecte son *cunnus*, objet d'un immense désir", "sensual pleasure moistens her *cunnus* (a vulgar term—'cunt' rather than 'vulva'), the object of immense desire" (Fauche in Bibliothèque des Curieux, 118-9, verse xxv). Remaining true to the overall tone of the book, the editor(s) chose a slang term—*cunnus*—to take Fauche's *occultum* up a notch in the scale of salaciousness. Where Gopinath refuses to translate (in English) and

[13] "*First*, she approaches me with a somewhat daring attitude; after, desire arises; then she hastens towards the moment when she'll satisfy this *desire, but* with modesty; then, she puts aside all restraint (2); —sensual pleasure moistens her charms (3), object of immense desire; finally, bold in her [love-]games,—she causes infinite pleasure through the movements that she is not afraid to communicate to her limbs: *this is* a woman of noble birth; [sexual] enjoyment with her is a delicious thing! (2) Literally: *firmness*. (3) RAHAS, *occultum*." (82)

Fauche resorts to the fig leaf of euphemistic Latin, the editor(s) of the Bibliothèque des Curieux succeed in turning a sexy yet delicate depiction of female eroticism into a bawdy piece vaguely reminiscent of the Latin poet Martial.

Conclusions

This paper aimed at complicating the narrative of the (un)translatability of sex in Sanskrit classical poetry. By looking at two highly unusual and hitherto unstudied episodes in the modern reception history of Bhartṛhari's *Śṛṅgāraśataka*, I have been able to move beyond more traditional narratives of obfuscation and censorship of sex in the classics (usually understood as the Graeco-Roman classics) during the long nineteenth century. What is more, looking at Fauche's and Gopinath's translations of *Śṛṅgāraśataka* 27 (in the first section) and 25 (in the second) has allowed me to neutralise the opposition between silence and expression—and even between repression and obsession.

In the analytical sections, we saw Fauche, a pioneering French Indologist of the first half of the nineteenth century, come up with different translational strategies to deal with some embarrassingly graphic details of the two Sanskrit stanzas. For both *Śṛṅgāraśataka* 27 and 25, the translator provided not only a polite French version, but also a literal rendering of the 'filth' (real or imagined), which he couched in Latin and relegated to a footnote. So far, so predictable—yet what makes this story exceptional is the fact that a filthy Latin footnote to his translation of *Śṛṅgāraśataka* 27 was retranslated into French more than half a century later. Not only that, the graphically sexual details of the Latin footnote, rather than being toned down, were made even more 'unsanskritically' explicit! In the same early-twentieth-century bawdy volume, Fauche's French translation of *Śṛṅgāraśataka* 25 was 'sexed-up' through the inclusion of a Latin slang word—a vulgar paraphrase of the rather chaste Latin term that Fauche had originally used in a footnote to indicate something that he ostensibly perceived as unchaste. In the pirated and doctored translations contained in the Bibliothèque des Curieux volume, the refined and rarefied erotic vignettes of the Sanskrit originals—where

allusion and indirectness played as important a role as the more openly sexual details—metamorphosed into specimens of exotica-erotica apt to titillate the fantasy of the early-twentieth-century Parisian dandy.

Gopinath, an Indian scholar and translator who lived under the British Raj, provided an equally unusual case study: in his English-Hindi bilingual translation of Bhartṛhari's *śatakas*, his attitude towards the more explicit sexual descriptions in the Sanskrit poems changed significantly depending on the language used. Thus, his 'Hindi self' appears to be more attuned to the features of Sanskrit poetry, erotic details included; conversely, the 'English alter ego' practised self-censorship and declared himself reluctant to comment on *Śṛṅgāraśataka* 27—while he aborted the translation of *Śṛṅgāraśataka* 25. The linguistic closeness of Hindi and Sanskrit allowed the translator to effectively transplant intractable Sanskrit terms into his Hindi translation—in this way, the sexually explicit parts of the Sanskrit original were at the same time revealed (because they appeared in their original form) and concealed (because the translation incorporated rather than recoded them). Furthermore, translating into—and commenting in—Hindi meant that the translator could address an audience of cognoscenti who did not need to be persuaded of the aesthetic and moral value of Sanskrit erotic poetry, but who, on the contrary, were already familiar with its tropes and conventions, and with the role that the erotic 'taste', *śṛṅgāra-rasa*, played in the Sanskritic literary tradition.

By shedding light on these (admittedly minor, and otherwise neglected) episodes in the history of the modern reception of Sanskrit classical poetry I have shown, in a Foucauldian vein, that nineteenth-century translators and readers had a multi-faceted and often contradictory relationship with sex—especially sex that cropped up in texts whose 'classical' status was upheld by the cultural intelligentsia. The translators encountered in this paper, Fauche and Gopinath, are both pursuers of a two-sided pleasure. First, the pleasure of exercising an inquisitorial and repressive power over the Sanskrit text, from which they invariably extracted the confession of a sin of perversion. And, second, the pleasure of resisting and evading censorship—whether through multilingual translations, pregnant silences and allusions, or

the reimagining of Sanskritic sexual landscapes to stir the fantasies of modern, and possibly even contemporary, readers.

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Biography

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