

Translation Immoral? Contamination, Hybridity, and Vociferous Silences in Early Twentieth-Century Translations of Sanskrit Erotic Poetry

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Introduction

*Gegen die Kontamination ist kein Kraut gewachsen.*¹

*I dotti leggano l'originale.*²

For the philologist, contamination – the confluence, in the same version of a text, of variant readings transmitted by different manuscripts that the scribe could compare and collate – is an obstacle to the establishment of a family tree of manuscripts, and ultimately to the reconstruction of a text as close as possible to the original. What is more, there is no systematic method to counteract the muddling effects of contamination: hence the above quoted claim, famously made by the classical scholar Paul Maas in his seminal *Textkritik* (1957).

A similar confluence of different readings, re-readings, and misreadings characterises virtually every step of the translation chain of the seventh century³ Sanskrit anthology titled *Amaruśataka* (“The hundred verses of Amaru”) throughout the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century. The practice of comparing, collating, and ‘contaminating’ variants from earlier modern versions is the defining feature of most of the literary translations that are the object of this essay, for most of their translators-cum-poets lacked the linguistic skills to access the original text in Sanskrit. Another typical ‘contaminating’ intervention in the text was the addition of forged passages – whether entire stanzas or, as I will show, descriptive or rhetorical details that were silently inserted into otherwise faithful translations.

Finally, omissions of morally or (most often) aesthetically problematic passages – the ‘vociferous silences’ that I mention in the title of this paper – are yet another form of contamination between classical and modern, Sanskrit and European sensitivities and literary conventions. In fact, modern translators would not simply and straightforwardly expurgate their sources by editing out graphically explicit details; on the contrary, a certain amount of titillation and ‘exotic’ sensuality was a *desideratum*. Yet such ethical-aesthetic pitfalls as ‘salaciousness’ and ‘vulgarity’ had to be avoided at all costs;⁴ after all, these translations were aimed at an elite of connoisseurs: not necessarily erudite, but definitely well-read, refined, and – by self-designation – way above the *hoi polloi* from both an aesthetic and moral standpoint. Ironically, a similar self-perception and self-portrayal characterised the discerning readers and listeners for whom Sanskrit classical poetry was originally composed.

Unlike the author of a critical edition, I do not aim here at reconstructing a text that approximates the archetype, for I only focus on translations; furthermore, I do not attempt to offer ‘better’ translations than those that are the object of my study. Instead, I aim to follow and unpack the selective, comparative, and combinatory process that produced each modern translation; I am interested in the multiple, prolific contaminations that shaped the various translation processes, not in the construction or re-construction of a ‘better’ translation.

Seen from this perspective, ‘translation contamination’ reveals its creative rather than polluting force: for it was often the hybrid, if not outright spurious, details of these modern versions that – acting as a litmus test of the aesthetic and moral preoccupations of their authors and projected readers – turned such texts into new and newly translatable originals.

Sanskrit Erotic Poetry For The Discerning (And Subscribing) Few

“This extraordinary collection of Oriental Folk Lore, ancient, medieval and modern, is offered to booksellers and subscribers with the advice of the publishers that they maintain an attitude of circumspection regarding the sale and possession of this work.”

In today's literary scene, it would be hard to imagine a less controversial book than a collection of mildly erotic poems translated from the Sanskrit. This was not the case in 1930, when the "Notice To Booksellers And Individual Subscribers" partially quoted above was inserted into the first volume of the American limited edition of Edward Powys Mathers' *Eastern Love*. The collection includes second- and third-hand translations (mainly from the French) not only of Sanskrit, but also of Arabic, Chinese, Bengali, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Japanese, and Turkish prose and poetry of erotic subject. It is in this anthology – which caters to well-off, intellectually curious, but not necessarily academic readers – that we encounter the *Amores of Amaru*,⁵ the first rendering of the *Amaruśataka* that appeared in English.

The author of the *Eastern Love* collection, Edward Powys Mathers (1892–1939), was a prolific translator as well as an English poet in his own right, who often smuggled original poems into his second- and third-hand translations of Oriental literary texts. Powys Mathers' anthologies of Eastern poetry in translation⁶ provide the ideal literary space for his fictional authorial personae – linguistically hybrid, half-Eastern and half-Western poets about whom Powys Mathers even provided detailed biographies (as in the case of John Duncan, the 'Arab-Scot', and J. Wing, an 'American-born Chinese'). Even those translations for which an Oriental original can be invoked tend to be marked by linguistic and cultural hybridity, as the distinctive poetic voice of the English translator – not only his syntax, diction, and rhythm, but also his own repertoire of imagery – is all the more perceptible where he claims to have simply translated pre-existing translations. As Powys Mathers explained in one of the "Terminal Essays" that close the anthology, "[f]irstly and emphatically, [*Eastern Love*] is not a work of scholarship"; consequently, the English translator could openly embrace his superficial or non-existent acquaintance with the languages of the originals ("I can lay claim to a very small smattering of Sanskrit and Arabic"), and reassure his readers that "everything in the [*Eastern Love*] series is translated at second-hand" (Powys Mathers, *Eastern Love: English Versions & Terminal Essays* 92-3).

'Second-handed-ness' and an un-scholarly approach to translation characterise the *Amores of Amaru*, which Powys Mathers claimed to have translated "from the French versions of A.L. Apudy and Franz Toussaint, and from the Italian of Umberto Norsa" (Powys Mathers, *Eastern Love: The Loves of Rādhā And Krishna And Amores* 140). Like Powys Mathers' English renderings, these translations are all in prose (although Norsa's Italian versions are divided into lines, in an attempt to follow the arrangement of the text in the original Sanskrit stanzas). Powys Mathers gave no indication as to how he used the three sources, nor did he specify whether his version was more indebted to one translation in particular, or whether his rendering was the product of unsystematic consultation, collation and contamination of any and all of the three earlier translations.

The first name in Powys Mathers' list, A.L. Apudy, is the pseudonym used by the French Orientalist Antoine-Léonard de Chézy (1773–1832)⁷ to publish his pioneering *Anthologie érotique d'Amarou* – the first attempt to acquaint a Western audience with a selection of verses (fifty-one in total) from the *Amaruśataka*. The *nom de plume* Apudy prompted the birth of a quasi-Mathersian, linguistically foreign alter-ego: the 'young English writer' whom the scholar Julius Klaproth (1783–1835) extolled in a long and extremely positive review published on May 25th 1831 in a Parisian newspaper, where Klaproth described Apudy's French diction as "remarkably correct for a foreigner," although marked by a few Anglicisms.⁸

The mysterious and paradoxical identity of the translator – at once, mature Francophone scholar and rapturous Anglophone youth – is paralleled by a series of other paradoxes that surround the *Anthologie érotique d'Amarou*. On the one hand, Chézy-Apudy's volume is a work of high scholarship: entire sections of the book – such as the critically edited text of the fifty-one stanzas, and the commentary in the form of endnotes – could be fully understood and appreciated only by an elite of erudite who commanded Sanskrit, Latin, Greek (in an endnote, Chézy went so far as to attempt a metrical translation of Greek poetry into Sanskrit!), and ideally even Persian. On the other hand, the anthology did not fail to catch the attention of readers who – although not necessarily interested in Chézy's erudition and linguistic acrobatics – were intrigued by the erotic themes and graphic frankness of the Sanskrit poems. It is thus not surprising to find Chézy's book listed and highly praised in the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* ("Catalogue of prohibited books") privately printed in London in 1877 by Henry Spencer

Ashbee (1834–1900), a collector of books “contrary to the law, whether political, religious, or moral” (Ashbee xv), “unknown and outcast volumes, [...] pariahs of literature” (Ashbee xxvi).

Chézy’s translation proved protean and long-lived: in 1914, the *Anthologie érotique d’Amarou* was included in the series “Le coffret du bibliophile” (“The small coffer of the bibliophile”), which, together with the series “Les maîtres de l’amour” (“The masters of love”), was the brainchild of the brothers Robert and Georges Briffaut, founders of the clandestine publishing house Bibliothèque des curieux (“Library of the curious”) in Paris. Like Powys Mathers’ *Eastern Love* books, the volume that contained Chézy’s translation came out as a luxury limited edition “strictly reserved to subscribers”. In this volume, the *Anthologie érotique d’Amarou* was followed by the translations of two other masterpieces of Sanskrit erotic poetry, Bhartrhari’s *Śṛṅgārasataka* (“A hundred verses on erotic love”) and Bilhaṇa’s *Caurapañcāśikā* (“The fifty stanzas of the thief”); the author of these translations, originally published in 1852, is the Sanskritist Hippolyte Fauche (1797-1869). The learned character of these translations contrasts with the openly titillating tones of the “contes orientaux” (“Oriental tales”) that close the volume: this editorial patchwork attests not only to the extreme portability of the two French Indologists’ respective translations, but also to the morally and aesthetically ambiguous locus that ‘exotic’ erotic poetry still inhabited at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the Bibliothèque des curieux volume, not only were Chézy’s and Fauche’s flowery yet erudite translations re-contextualised and re-presented as erotic curios: occasionally, they were even retouched to make their erotic suggestiveness more explicit.

The 1914 reprint of Chézy’s *Anthologie* is almost contemporaneous with the first edition of Franz Toussaint’s *L’amour fardé* (“Rouged love”), a collection of second-hand and faux translations from the *Amaruśataka*. *L’amour fardé* saw at least two editions from the publisher Ernest Flammarion; Toussaint’s prose-poems appear to have been often re-touched before being re-printed, though the changes are minor and mostly affect punctuation. The earlier edition, undated (but almost certainly published in 1913),⁹ had a preface on the poet Amaru by Gabriel Boissy, which was not included in the 1927 edition. In Boissy’s preface, Toussaint’s prose-poems were presented as the translation of “the complete oeuvre of Amaru” “[r]ecently [discovered] near Hyderabad”; this purely fictional textual tradition allegedly included “a series of commentaries of the initial text – real lyric counterpoints [“véritables contrepoints lyriques”] – which were the result of the work of the poet himself, of his disciples or of his copyists” (Boissy xiv, my translation). Note also that the 1913 edition includes erudite endnotes that, in fact, had been tacitly lifted – and ‘repurposed’ – from Chézy’s 1830 commentary on his edition and translation of Kālidāsa’s *Śakuntalā*.

Yet, the most striking detail that sets apart the two editions of *L’amour fardé* is the authorial ascription of the collection. The frontispiece of the 1913 edition bears the names of both Franz Toussaint and “Amarou”; in contrast, the 1927 edition mentions Toussaint as the sole author of the book: only the subtitle (present in the 1913 edition, too), informs the reader that Toussaint’s prose-poems are translations from the Sanskrit. This edition of *L’amour fardé* stood as an instantiation of the distance that separated the modern translator from the Sanskrit author, whose name was obliterated, as if forgotten. The indeterminacy of the authorial figure would cast an aura of a-temporality on the stanzas of the collection, which were not presented as ‘composed’ by a poet, but simply as “traduit du sanscrit” (“translated from the Sanskrit”). Moreover, the namelessness of the author had the effect of attenuating the translator’s responsibility towards an ‘original text’, thus allowing him greater creative freedom.

There is no Sanskrit in *L’amour fardé*; the sole remarkable exception is the first stanza, where Toussaint’s French version is preceded by the corresponding Sanskrit verse from the *Amaruśataka*. This stanza does not simply embody and enshrine the seductive indecipherability of the Sanskrit original: being printed in the same elegant Devanāgarī script that was used in the first edition of Chézy’s *Anthologie érotique d’Amarou*, the Sanskrit quotation also gestured towards a then-century-old French translation, one of the sources – or perhaps the only source – of Toussaint’s anthology.

Franz Toussaint’s (1879-1955) career as a translator is reminiscent of that of Powys Mathers: Toussaint was in fact the author of dozens of French second-hand translations and pseudo-translations from the Arabic, Chinese, Sanskrit, Japanese, and Persian.¹⁰ It was mostly – or perhaps uniquely – on *L’amour fardé* that Powys Mathers based his *Amores of Amaru*. In his introductory remarks to the

collection, Powys Mathers paraphrased Boissy's preface, yet without acknowledging it: appropriating Boissy's hoax, he claimed that "Amaru's... supplementary fragments and the 'lyric counterpoints' to his work by pupils [were discovered] only after 1900"; thus, Powys Mathers' "poems... are not the original Century of Amaru, but a hundred selected from the complete available examples of his work and school" (Powys Mathers *The Loves of Rādhā And Krishna And Amores* 140).

The modern versions of the *Amaruśataka* that I have introduced so far are tied one to another by intersecting links: Chézy's French translation was the unacknowledged source of Toussaint's French prose-poems, which were in turn the (only partially acknowledged) source of Powys Mathers' English renderings. What is more, Chézy's *Anthologie érotique* is arguably the source of most of the Italian free-verse poems included in the collection *Canti d'amore indiani* ("Indian love songs") by the poet-translator Ugo Ghiron (1876-1952). Like Powys Mathers and Toussaint, Ghiron did not specify what the original of each individual translation was. In the introduction, the Indologist Angelo Maria Pizzagalli contented himself with claiming that Ghiron had translated selected stanzas from the works of the three most remarkable love poets of ancient India – namely, Amaru, Bhartṛhari, and Kālidāsa.

Canti d'amore indiani was published in 1930 and is thus almost contemporaneous with Powys Mathers' *Amores of Amaru* and with the more recent edition of *L'amour fardé*. Neither Powys Mathers, nor Toussaint or Ghiron could read Sanskrit. The three anthologies – similarly to the reprint of Chézy's translation – had a limited run and were designed for a small elite of non-specialists. Of the 1914 edition of the *Anthologie érotique d'Amarou*, seven hundred and fifty copies were printed on Arches paper, while only ten copies were lavishly printed on 'Japon Impérial' paper. Twenty copies of the 1913 edition of *L'amour fardé* – each numbered and signed by the publisher – were expensively printed on *washi* paper ('papier du Japon'). Ghiron's 1930 edition of *Canti d'amore indiani* consisted of five hundred and thirty copies, each numbered and signed by the translator. Powys Mathers' *Eastern Love* books were printed in slightly bigger numbers: the copies of the John Rodker twelve-volume set (1927-1930, printed on rag paper and numbered) were one thousand, whereas the Horace Liveright three-volume edition (1930) went up to one thousand and five hundred numbered copies for sale.

The last intermediary translation that was mentioned by Powys Mathers as one of his sources – though he probably never consulted it – appears to be rather independent of all the versions of the *Amaruśataka* that I have mentioned so far. This is a fairly faithful and accurate translation by Umberto Norsa (1866-1943),¹¹ who could access the original Sanskrit text and translated it directly, rather than translating pre-existent versions in modern languages.¹² Norsa's *La centuria* ("The hundred verses") appeared in 1923; in the introduction, the translator proudly claimed that his was the "first complete and literal Italian translation, without any Greek or Latin veil, which other translators resorted to out of modesty" (Norsa 5). As we shall see, although Norsa's renderings are remarkable for their philological accuracy, at least in one instance the Italian translator tacitly censored a graphically explicit detail of the Sanskrit original. Whether the omission was motivated by the same modesty that informed his predecessors' resort to Latin and Greek, or whether he opted for censorship as the only possible response to a (perceived) vulgarity – that remains a matter of speculation. Norsa's silence is significant in as much as it shows that even a philologist would occasionally restrain his pen when confronted with the 'erotic untranslatable.'

In the two analytical sections that follow, I compare selected verses from the English, French, and Italian versions of the *Amaruśataka* that I have introduced above. My primary aim is not, or not only, to underscore the similarities and differences between these multi-lingual '*avatāras*' of Amaru's Sanskrit verses – a comparative exercise that is as necessary as it is ultimately sterile in itself. What interests me is the 'radical' core of each translation: the features that, while marking a translation's departure from its original (whether in Sanskrit or in another European language), at the same time turned the translation into a new original, pliable to further 'radical translations', appropriations and sometimes intentional misinterpretations.

'Dead Or Asleep?': Post-Coital And Translational Silences

Although stanzas dedicated to the description of love-making are not prominent in the *Amaruśataka*, the few vignettes that capture the most intimate moments of *sambhogaśṛṅgāra*, love-in-union, did not

fail to capture the attention of modern readers and translators. The following verse appears in Powys Mathers', Toussaint's, Chézy's, and Norsa's collections.

PRAGALBHĀYĀḤ SURATAM

gāḍhāliṅganavāmanīkṛtakucaprodbhinnaromodgamā
sāndrasneharasātirekavigalacchrīmannitambābarā |
mā mā mānada māti mām alam iti kṣāmākṣarollāpinī
suptā kiṃ nu mṛtā nu kiṃ manasi me līnā vilīnā nu kim ||¹³

LOVE-MAKING OF THE BOLD AND CONFIDENT WOMAN¹⁴

With her breasts pressed tightly in the embrace, the hair of her body bristling, her garment slipping off her charming buttocks in the excess of delight of her intense passion; 'Don't, don't, destroyer of my pride, don't – it's really enough for me!', she pleads with a feeble voice. Has she fallen asleep? Is she dead? Has she melted, dissolved in my heart?¹⁵

Powys Mathers' version – included in the section of the *Amores* titled "Man" – stands out for its ambiguous blending of eroticism and violence:

'Pity!', she says, with bruised breasts and disordered hair. With eyes closed and legs still trembling, 'Finish!' she says. She says in a choked voice: 'It is enough!' And now her silence grows eternal. Is she dead or sleeping, is she meditating in delight on what has happened, or thinking of another?¹⁶

The details of the 'bruised breasts', 'legs... still trembling' and 'choked voice' are not unexpected in the context of Sanskrit erotic poetry, where the wounds – bites or scratches – left on the lovers' bodies are always signifiers of intense passion (and as such are treated, and prescribed, in *Kāmasūtra* 2.4). Here, however, the love scene seems to take a slightly darker tone; if it were not for the questions that the unnamed "Man" asks himself toward the end of the stanza – "is she meditating *in delight* on what has happened, or thinking of another?", emphasis added – that the scene loses its equivocally violent undertones. This contrasts with the Sanskrit stanza, where the "excess of delight of [the woman's] intense passion ('sāndrasneharasātireka-') is foregrounded already in the second hemistich.

Toussaint's translation, which is Powys Mathers' source, is somehow less ambiguous.

LE TRIOMPHE

Les seins meurtris, la chevelure en désordre, les yeux clos, les jambes et les bras frémissant encore de volupté, elle me dit, d'une voix étouffé : « De grâce ! Finis... C'est assez ! » Et elle se tait.

Est-elle morte, ou simplement endormie ? S'absorbe-t-elle dans une méditation délicieuse, ou pense-t-elle à un autre ?¹⁷

First, the woman's legs and arms are "frémissant encore de volupté" ("still trembling with pleasure"); in the French translation, the woman's pleasure is objectively stated, rather than only posited as a possibility in an interrogative fashion. Moreover, in the 1927 re-writing, the woman "se tait" ("becomes silent"), but her silence is not described as "eternal" – an adjective that, in Powys Mathers' rendering, makes the woman's death seem more likely. I believe that Powys Mathers' sentence "And now her silence grows eternal" is modelled directly on Toussaint's "Et son silence s'éternise" ("And her silence drags on"), which is found in the 1913 version of *L'amour fardé*. Note that Powys Mathers opted for the adjective 'eternal' as a 'lexical bridge' between the English rendering and the French original; in fact, the expression "son silence s'éternise" would be more naturally rendered in English as "her silence drags on", rather than with the un-idiomatic "her silence grows eternal". However, Powys Mathers'

slightly dissonant rendering works particularly well in this context: for not only does it hint at its French source, it also contributes to tinge the whole stanza with an original, subtly sinister nuance. In the Sanskrit verse the woman is not described as falling silent: her silence can only be inferred from the fact that the man asks himself whether she is dead or asleep. Thus, Powys Mathers' "silence grow[ing] eternal" projects the love-making scene onto a metaphysical plane, where death and love are inextricably linked.

In contrast with Powys Mathers' rendering, which opens with a disturbing plea ("Pity!"), Toussaint's stanza is introduced by a title, "Le triomphe" ("The triumph"), that hints at a victory: that of the man victorious in love-fight, while the dead-looking woman is assimilated to a dead combatant; or, rather, to the victory of love over man and woman – both won, overcome by the intensity of pleasure. It is remarkable that the interpretational spin imparted by the French title goes in the opposite direction from the heading added by the Sanskrit commentator. In the Sanskrit heading, the focus is on the type of woman who, according to the conventions of Sanskrit drama and poetry, would engage in such a passionate love scene as the one described in this verse: it is the 'bold and confident woman' – not defeated by the intensity of love-making, but able to relish the pleasure of love until reaching an ecstatic state.

Even more than Toussaint's, Chézy's rendering (which Toussaint was in effect translating) accentuates the tender, sweet and rarefied atmosphere of the love-scene, thus toning down the more physical and violent aspects of love-making.

LE TRIOMPHE

Le sein affaissé à la suite de mes caresses réitérées, tous ses membres dans un doux abandon, frémissant de volupté, son dernier voile tout en désordre, tombé dans nos transports amoureux : "Ah ! ah ! ah ! trop charmant ami, finis, de grâce, c'est assez !" me dit-elle d'une voix étouffée ; et ces mots sont suivis du plus profond silence Eh quoi ! pensai-je alors, serait-elle donc morte, ou simplement endormie ? Serait-elle absorbée dans la méditation, ou pâmée de plaisir ?¹⁸

Thus, the woman's breasts are not "meurtris" ("bruised"), but "affaissé à la suite de mes caresses réitérées" ("sunken as a result of my repeated caresses"); her limbs are not only "frémissant de volupté" ("trembling with pleasure"), but are also in a state of "doux abandon" ("sweet surrender", emphasis added); she affectionately addresses her lover as "trop charmant ami" ("too charming friend"), while the jealous suspicion that she may be thinking of another man is substituted by a final interrogative, infused with passion: "serait-elle donc... pâmée de plaisir?" ("could it be that she has passed out with pleasure?"). Chézy's translation contains a detail that Toussaint chose to leave out: the woman's "dernier voile" ("last veil") is "tout en désordre, tombé dans nos transports amoureux" ("all in disorder, fallen in our amorous raptures") – a detail that, on the one hand, calls the reader's attention to the woman's nudity (which, however, is not directly mentioned, but only subtly, elegantly alluded to), and, on the other, reinforces the notion of the mutual exchange of pleasure between the two lovers. The 'slipped off garment' is indeed mentioned in the original Sanskrit text, where, however, it is specified that the dress (or the veil) has slipped off the woman's "charming buttocks" ('śrīmannitamba-') – clearly too explicit a detail for Chézy to render it in French.

What is even more interesting, if perplexing, is the fact that Toussaint – and Powys Mathers after him – mention "la chevelure en désordre" ("the dishevelled hair") of the woman, which is in fact absent in Chézy's translation. One may be tempted to take this reference to the woman's dishevelled hair as a misinterpretation of 'prodbhinnaromodgama' ("bursting forth of bristling body hair"): for the mistranslation of 'roman' ('body hair'), as simply 'hair' (i.e. 'head-hair'), is commonly encountered in nineteenth and early twentieth century translations of Sanskrit poetry.¹⁹ Nevertheless, this is unlikely to be the case, because Toussaint could not read Sanskrit; what seems more probable is that Toussaint was freely 'contaminating' this verse with other verses of the anthology. In connection with this point, we may observe that, in the Sanskrit text, no reference is made to the woman's breasts being bruised, as both Toussaint and Powys Mathers have them; that specific, exquisitely 'Sanskritic' detail – absent in Chézy's translation, which instead attempts to render the idea expressed in the original – must have

been taken from some other Sanskrit erotic stanza. These examples compel us to look at the verses of *L'amour fardé* as truly hybrid creations; for they cannot simply be divided into the two categories of second-hand translations (based on Chézy's stanzas) and pseudo-translations: in fact, each of Toussaint's stanzas tends to be the product of contamination between different sources.

Finally, I shall point out that – in contrast with Toussaint's and Powys Mathers' renderings – the Sanskrit stanza does not contain any allusion to a potential unfaithfulness, or temporary distraction, on the part of the woman, which must then be interpreted as the result of yet another 'contamination' between different sources. In the original verse, the woman seems to dissolve at the end of intercourse, having reached a state of ecstasy and abstraction from reality that approximates annihilation – an annihilation within the soul of her lover. The only translator who attempted to convey this potent image was Norsa, who depicted the woman as having "perhaps entered [her lover's] heart, mingled with it":

Nella forte stretta il seno s'è inturgidito, eretto s'è il pelo,
di abbondante erotico umore son bagnati i panni dei fianchi;
'No, no, tesoro, non mi (stringer) troppo, basta!' grida con voce
affievolita:
è forse addormentata, forse morta, forse entrata nel mio cuore,
confusa con esso?²⁰

Norsa's avowedly 'faithful' translations are among the sources that Powys Mathers declared to have relied on to compose his *Eastern Love* versions: in fact, these literal Italian renderings did not seem to appeal much to the English poet, who instead tended to opt for Toussaint's literary and translational patchworks. In Powys Mathers' *Amores* – as well as in Toussaint's *L'amour fardé* – the erotic texture of the original, rather than revealing its untranslatable nature, remains 'strategically' untranslated: in these versions, what is offered to modern readers is not the original, but a richer, more complex concoction that constantly 'travels' back and forth between past and present, West and East, genuine and fake.

Erotic *Ma Non Troppo*: The Taboo Of 'Upside-Down Intercourse'

The following stanza – probably one of the most openly erotic of the entire *Amaruśataka* – is conspicuous for its absence from Powys Mathers' *Amores*.

VIPARĪTARATAVARṆANAM
ālōlām alakāvalīm vilulitām bibhrac calatkuṇḍalaṃ
kiñcinmṛṣṭaviśeṣakam tanutaraiḥ svedāmbhasaḥ śīkaraiḥ |
tanvyā yat suratāntatāntanayanam vaktram rativyatyaye
tat tvām pātu cirāya kiṃ hariharabrahmādibhir devataiḥ ||²¹

DESCRIPTION OF UPSIDE-DOWN INTERCOURSE

The dishevelled mass of her locks swinging, shaking ear-rings, the mark on her forehead slightly smudged by tiny drops of sweat, languid eyes at the end of love-making: may the face of the slender one *as she lies on top* (literally: *in upside-down intercourse*) protect you for a long time. What is the use of gods – Viṣṇu, Śiva, Brahmā, and the others?

Scenes of *viparītarata*, or 'upside-down intercourse' (when the woman lies on top of the man) are not infrequently depicted in Sanskrit poetry; for nineteenth and early twentieth-century translators, the most problematic aspect of these erotic vignettes was the fact that the position taken by the woman was explicitly mentioned in the stanza – a detail that they generally omitted to translate. Paradoxically, the tell-tale description of the woman – exhausted by the effort, with dishevelled hair, sweat-drops dripping off her face – was generally *not* rendered in an excised or euphemistic fashion: the 'untranslatable' element of the original stanza was only the direct mention of the type of sexual act. This is what happens

in Chézy's *Anthologie érotique*: the verse (the fifth of the selection) is titled, in its Sanskrit version, 'viparītaratavarṇanam', namely 'description of upside-down intercourse'; as expected, the French scholar did not translate the expression, but substituted it with a no less explicit – though less *specific* – heading: "Le comble de la volupté", "the height of pleasure". What is more, the original verse contains a reference to the sexual practice described in the Sanskrit title: 'rativyatyaye', "in inverted order of intercourse", which can be better paraphrased as "during upside-down intercourse" – a compound that Chézy chose not to render in French. In his note to this stanza, the French scholar openly commented on the 'untranslatability' of the term 'viparītarata' (and of the equivalent expression 'rativyatyaya'), although – at the same time – he claimed that "from this point alone depends all the charm attached to the composition of this little scene" (Chézy-Apudy 61, my translation).²²

LE COMBLE DE LA VOLUPTÉ

Qu'au sein des plus vives voluptés, les boucles de ses cheveux flottant dans le plus aimable désordre, ses pendans d'oreille retentissant dans leur choc rapide, le front légèrement humecté de petites gouttelettes brillant de tout l'éclat des perles les plus pures, ta maîtresse tourne languissamment vers toi ses beaux yeux fatigués de volupté..... Dis-moi, que pourraient de plus pour toi les Dieux?²³

Although any reference to the specific position assumed by the woman is carefully avoided, Chézy's translation is nonetheless graphically erotic; the word 'volupté', 'pleasure', recurs twice – and in both occurrences the term can hardly be said to be used euphemistically. Although the French translator avoids mentioning intercourse directly, the phrase "plus vives voluptés" – strategically placed at the beginning of the stanza – sets the tone and the atmosphere of the erotic scene even before the appearance of the female protagonist. The intense pleasure experienced by the woman is further underscored through the description of her eyes as being "fatigués de volupté", "worn out by pleasure" – an expression that plausibly translates the compound 'suratāntatāntanayanam', "with eyes *languid* (or: *worn out*) at the end of love-making". Note that Chézy reduplicates his translation of 'tānta-' ('languid' or 'worn out'), as he emphatically employs the adverb 'languissamment' ('languidly') to describe the turning of the woman's eyes. Finally, the detail of the forehead being "légèrement humecté de petites gouttelettes brillant de tout l'éclat des perles les plus pures" ("slightly wet with small droplets shining with all the brightness of the purest pearls") appears to be an amplification of the more concise expression in the original stanza, to which is added the metaphor of the 'sweat-droplets that are pearls'. The comparison between drops of sweat on a woman's body and pearls is not unheard of in Sanskrit erotic poetry: Chézy was probably 'contaminating' the image of this stanza with descriptions that he had encountered in the vaster corpus he was familiar with.

Chézy's translation becomes, in effect, a new original; this is attested by the fact that the poet Ugo Ghiron re-translated it into Italian and included his almost literal versified rendering in the collection *Canti d'amore indiani*. The Italian (second-hand) translation goes as follows:

VOLUTTÀ

Come – in seno alle più ardenti voluttà –
come, ondeggiando
i suoi riccioli nel più vago disordine,
mentre i suoi lunghi orecchini
battono nel rapido agitarsi,
e la fronte – bagnata
di piccole gocce di sudore –
brilla dell'abbagliante luce
delle perle più pure,
oh come l'amante tua volge languidi

verso di te
i suoi begli occhi sfiniti di voluttà!
Ma che cosa,
ma che cosa di più
per te potrebbero gli Dei?...²⁴

Ghiron's translation – which is as faithful to Chézy's version as it is unfaithful to Amaru's original – starkly contrasts with an earlier Italian rendering by Umberto Norsa. As I mentioned earlier, the latter set himself the task of providing his contemporaneous Italian readers with a faithful translation of the *Amaruśataka*, which he aimed at presenting “without any... veil” (Norsa 5, my translation). What is more, like Chézy before him,²⁵ Norsa founded his translation project on the assumption that Amaru's erotic verses were not only translatable, but also entirely familiar to a modern audience, as they represented, “perhaps with an Oriental character and colour, the eternal scenes of the eternal love-drama, and the poet who wrote them reveals himself to be one of the deepest connoisseurs of mankind's heart and of women's soul” (Norsa 4). Nevertheless, Norsa did not translate the expression ‘rativyatyaye’ (“in upside-down intercourse”) – thus proving that, although the “eternal scenes of the eternal love-drama” were the same in pre-modern India as in early twentieth century Italy, modern Italian translators could not always describe such “eternal scenes” with the same frankness and precision as Sanskrit poets.

Il volto della gentile nell'abbandono del piacere, il volto portante una
irrequieta striscia di tremuli ricci e oscillanti anelli,
col neo un po' dilavato dalle minutissime goccioline di sudore,
con l'occhio languido sulla fine dell'amoroso piacere,
un tal volto ti protegga a lungo! Che giovano Viṣṇu, Śiva, Brahman e
gli altri dei?²⁶

At the other end of the spectrum of ‘faithfulness to the original’ stands Toussaint's version, which – although based on Chézy's translation – attempts a radical re-writing of its source. This is evident from the very title of the stanza, “L'échange du plaisir” (“The exchange of pleasure”): even though he does not substantially depart from Chézy's choice of title (“Le comble de la volupté”), nonetheless Toussaint seems to consciously and purposely opt for a different turn of phrase to describe (the orgasm at the end of) intercourse; he goes so far as to even substitute the noun ‘volupté’ with the near-synonym ‘plaisir’.

L'ÉCHANGE DU PLAISIR

Extenuée, mais encore ardente, ton amie tourne vers toi ses beaux yeux
cernés du fard bleu de la volupté. Sa chevelure est éparse, dans un
aimable désordre. Une rosée de sueur parfumée emperle ses tempes.
Ses bras te retiennent.

Dis-moi, que demandes-tu de plus aux dieux ?²⁷

This is one of the instances where Toussaint's self-rewriting was so subtle as to only affect punctuation; nevertheless, his gentle touch-ups to the 1913 rendering change considerably the rhythm of the sequence of ‘snapshots’ that capture the woman's experience of pleasure. In fact, the 1913 version had a single sentence describing the hair, the drops of sweat and the still clinging arms of the woman, with suspension marks at the end of the *tricolon*: “Sa chevelure est éparse, dans un aimable désordre, une rosée de sueur parfumée emperle ses tempes, et ses bras te retiennent...” (“Her hair is dishevelled, in a lovely disorder, a dew of perfumed sweat impearls her temples, and her arms hold you back...”; Toussaint 10). This rhythmic and syntactical choice is reminiscent of Chézy's verse, which consists of a long sentence – with the main clause coming last – followed by a brief direct question.

In contrast, in his 1927 re-writing Toussaint broke the initial long sentence into four, increasingly shorter independent sentences, and retained (with some very minor changes) the direct question at the end. This stylistic choice infuses Toussaint's rendering with a decidedly poetic scent – whereas Chézy's version, less incisive and concise, reads more like an attempt to reproduce the use of nominal compounds in the Sanskrit original as literally as possible. Here, too, the direct reference to the position taken by the woman is excised; nonetheless, her experience of sexual pleasure is the theme that opens the stanza: she is “[e]xtenuée, mais encore ardente” (“exhausted, yet still ardent with passion”); what is more, Toussaint introduces an entirely original depiction of the woman's eyes, which are “cernés du fard bleu de la volupté” (“encircled by the blue shadow of pleasure”) – a terse and suggestive image that is probably intended as a further allusion to the woman's exhaustion after intense love-making. Chézy's (over)elaborate description of the pearl-like, glittering sweat-droplets on the woman's forehead is substituted by a condensed expression: “Une rosée de sueur parfumée emperle ses tempes” (“A dew of perfumed sweat adorns her temples as if with pearls”), where the ‘sweat-droplets that are pearls’ metaphor is elegantly conveyed through the use of the verb ‘emperler’ (‘impearl’); moreover, the woman's perspiration is qualified as ‘parfumée’ (‘perfumed’), thus adding a (sensually pleasing) sensorial dimension – the perfume of the woman's body – that is absent in the original.

Finally, before introducing the direct question that closes the stanza, Toussaint imagines the female protagonist as holding with her arms the generic ‘you’ that, in the original Sanskrit version, is addressed by the narrator only in the fourth hemistich: “tat tvāṃ pātu cirāya”, “may that [face] protect you for a long time” – an expression that Toussaint, following Chézy, left untranslated, thus obliterating the implicit, playfully blasphemous comparison between the woman's auspicious seeing-and-being-seen (*darśana*) and the more orthodox *darśana* of the deities mentioned at the end of the verse.²⁸ In Toussaint's rendering, the woman's *darśana* is substituted by a tight embrace: an image that would have appeared more contextually relevant and poetically effective both to the author and his readers.

Conclusions

The poet thinks, and rightly so, that even love poetry, the most universal and human [literary genre], changes according to times and places, and therefore even Indian love poetry, to become Italian, should adapt to our tastes.

These are the words chosen by Angelo Maria Pizzagalli – a now lesser-known Italian Sanskritist and Classicist – to explain and defend the translation strategies adopted by the poet Ghiron (Ghiron 17). The lack of chronological and even authorial coordinates throughout the anthology *Canti d'amore indiani* did not seem to concern Pizzagalli, who curtly stated: “Let the learned read the original” (Ghiron 17). Pizzagalli's attitude was one of openness and appreciation for what we could describe as ‘radical’ translation: a translation mode that attempted to reach and extract the emotional, sensual, and aesthetic ‘roots’ of a pre-modern, Indian erotic text. For Ghiron – like the other modern translators that I mentioned in this paper – successfully rendered “the eternal scenes of the eternal love-drama” (to borrow Norsa's words) so that they could retain their “Oriental character and colour” (Norsa 4), but without infringing modern – and ‘Western’ – norms of good taste.

There is yet another ‘radical’ element to Pizzagalli's views on translation, namely his conspicuous silence about the intermediary translations consulted by Ghiron to produce his new, versified Italian renderings. This state of affairs is reminiscent of Toussaint's kaleidoscopic (and often ‘faux Oriental’) stanzas included in *L'amour fardé*; to an extent, it also reminds of Powys Mathers' *Amores*: although he declared which intermediary translations were at the roots of his own versions, he did not specify where or to what extent he followed each of his various sources.

The aim of translators such as Toussaint, Powys Mathers, and Ghiron was not that of offering a quasi-scientific, philologically accurate genealogy – or anatomy – of their own renderings; as Pizzagalli put it, the objective of this breed of translators was “to communicate whatever of lovely, beautiful, and moving [they] found in India's love poets. Noble goal and noble toil!” (Ghiron 17). Still, Pizzagalli did not discuss a crucial aspect of this radical process of discovery and distillation ‘via translation’: Toussaint's, Powys Mathers', and Ghiron's intellectual journeys to the ‘roots’ of Sanskrit erotic poetry

were mediated through other modern translators' aesthetic selections and distillations. Ultimately, the state of 'contamination' of these (re-)translations only enhanced their 'radical' quality and turned them into new, hybrid texts – which gestured, at the same time, towards the sensual and aesthetic roots of the Sanskrit original, and towards modern innovations and departures from it.

Notes

- ¹ “No herb has grown against contamination”, i.e., “against contamination no remedy has been found” (Maas 31).
- ² “Let the learned read the original” (Ghiron 17).
- ³ See Lienhard 92.
- ⁴ “With skill he [i.e. the translator] avoids the pitfalls of salaciousness and vulgarity, leaving his text to remain, nevertheless, frank, charming and complete.” Thus ends the “Notice to Booksellers and Individual Subscribers” inserted in the first volume of the 1930 edition of Powys Mathers' *Eastern Love*.
- ⁵ Probably after Ovid's collection of erotic elegiac couplets titled *Amores*, ‘The Loves’.
- ⁶ Before the publication of the *Eastern Love* series – whose first edition appeared in London between 1927 and 1930, printed by John Rodker ‘for subscribers only’ – Powys Mathers had already published two anthologies of ‘Asiatic love poems’ translated into English (*Coloured Stars, Versions of Fifty Asiatic Love Poems*, published in 1918, followed in 1920 by *The Garden of Bright Waters: One Hundred And Twenty Asiatic Love Poems*), as well as a free rendering of the Sanskrit erotic poem titled *Caurapañcāsikā* (published in 1919 under the title *Black Marigolds*).
- ⁷ Antoine-Léonard de Chézy translated numerous Sanskrit works into French for the first time, most notably Kālidāsa's drama *Śakuntalā* (*La Reconnaissance de Sacountala*, published in Paris in 1830). He was the first European to be appointed to a chair of Sanskrit language and literature, which he held since 1814 at the Collège de France in Paris. The pseudonym ‘Apudy’ is a semi-Latin rendering of ‘Chézy’, with the Latin preposition ‘apud’ (‘among’, ‘at’) being a translation of the French ‘chez’.
- ⁸ I have not been able to ascertain the title of the newspaper; Klaproth was almost certainly aware of the real identity of the translator, but he playfully feigned ignorance. Another clue to the tongue-in-cheek quality of the review can be probably seen in the fact that Klaproth insisted that the translator must be an impassioned young man; on the contrary, and more realistically, the philologist Silvestre de Sacy (1758–1838) explained Chézy's decision to publish the *Anthologie érotique d'Amarou* under a pseudonym as “appropriate for his age [in 1831 Chézy was 58] and for the rank that he had so legitimately acquired through serious studies” (Sacy 26, my translation).
- ⁹ I could not ascertain the exact date of publication of this volume; however, on p. 5 of the issue of the paper *Le Figaro* published on 14th November 1913, in the section titled “Études et pages littéraires, livres divers”, one can read a brief review of Toussaint's *L'amour fardé*, which was presented as having been only recently published (Glaser 5).
- ¹⁰ Including the famous *Robaiyat de Omar Khayyam*, published in 1924 in Paris by Henri Piazza, and later re-translated into other languages.
- ¹¹ Umberto Norsa was a polyglot *littérateur* who – after achieving a degree in Law – pursued a career as a translator from the Hungarian (for which he is chiefly remembered), English, Polish, Russian, Classical Greek, and Hebrew; he was also a prolific translator of Sanskrit erotic verses.
- ¹² Norsa claimed to have consulted “the classical work by Böhlingk” (1863); “the text [of the *Amaruśataka*] with the Sanskrit commentary by Arjunavarmadeva published in Bombay (1900)” (*Amaruśataka of Amaruka*, first published in 1889; it contains the so-called ‘Western recension’); and the text of the *Amaruśataka* “edited by Simon [and published in] Kiel

(1893)” (the volume contains four recensions: the so-called ‘Southern’ accompanied by Vemabhūpāla’s commentary, the ‘Western’ with Arjunavarmadeva’s commentary, the ‘Eastern’ with Ravicandra’s commentary, and the recension with Rudramadeva’s commentary) (Norsa 6). In contrast, Chézy’s edition of fifty-one stanzas from the *Amaruśataka* is primarily based on the text published in 1808 in Calcutta: this is the so-called ‘Eastern recension’ with Ravicandra’s commentary, which Chézy quoted extensively in his endnotes. In a few instances, Chézy amended the Calcutta edition by comparing it with a manuscript of the then Bibliothèque du Roi (see Chézy-Apudy).

¹³ See Chézy २० [20], verse ३९ [39]. All my Sanskrit quotes from the *Amaruśataka* follow Chézy’s 1831 edition. Only in a few instances did I intervene on his reading of the Sanskrit text: here, for example, the ‘**ā**’ (third hemistich, in bold) is my own correction, and corresponds to a short ‘a’ in Chézy’s text, which is probably a typo. Toussaint, Powys Mathers, and Ghiron did not base their translation on any particular edition of the *Amaruśataka*, as they were ultimately translating Chézy’s translations (in Powys Mathers’ case, mostly ‘via Toussaint’). Chézy and Norsa were the only translators who were reading Amaru’s stanzas in Sanskrit; however, although Norsa did mention the various editions of the *Amaruśataka* that he consulted (see above), he did not include in his volume the actual version of the Sanskrit text that he followed. With respect to the two stanzas that I quote in this paper, Simon’s 1893 critical edition (which Norsa consulted) slightly differs from Chézy’s in a couple of instances: thus, I will indicate in my footnotes the places where the two editions diverge. In this verse, instead of “vigalacchrīmannitambāmarā”, Simon has “vigalatkāñcīpradeśāmarā” (“with the garment slipping off the place of the girdle”) (Simon 79).

¹⁴ Note that, as Chézy specifies in his introduction, all the Sanskrit titles prepended to Amaru’s stanzas are, in fact, later additions by an Indian commentator. In turn, Chézy chose to rewrite such titles following his own inspiration, “still filled with the impression that these delightful scenes had made on [his] soul” (Chézy-Apudy xii, my translation).

¹⁵ My translation. The compound ‘vigalacchrīmannitambāmarā-’ can also be interpreted thus: “the lucky [‘śrīmat-’] buttocks-covering garment slipping off” (implying that the garment is lucky to be constantly in contact with the woman’s buttocks).

¹⁶ Powys Mathers, *Eastern Love: The Loves of Rādhā and Krishna and Amores* 146.

¹⁷ “THE TRIUMPH / The breasts bruised, the hair dishevelled, the eyes closed, the legs and the arms still shivering with pleasure, she says to me, with a muffled voice: ‘Please! Finish... It’s enough!’ And she becomes silent. / Is she dead, or simply asleep? Is she absorbed into a delightful meditation, or is she thinking of another man?” (Toussaint 35th page unnumbered, my translation).

¹⁸ “THE TRIUMPH / The breast sunken as a result of my repeated caresses, all her limbs in a sweet surrender, her last veil all in disorder, fallen in our amorous raptures: ‘Ah! Ah! Ah! Too charming friend, finish, please, it’s enough!’, she says to me with a muffled voice, and these words are followed by the most profound silence... What!, I thought then, Will she now be dead, or simply asleep? Will she be absorbed into meditation, or passed out with pleasure?” (Chézy-Apudy 50; my translation).

¹⁹ In the first stanza of the *Caurapañcāsikā*, where the poet describes his mistress as being ‘tanuromarājīm’ (“having a thin line of hair”, above or below the navel), the compound was rendered by Bohlen (1833) as “tenerrimis capillis ornatam” (“[that young woman] adorned with very soft head-hair”, emphasis added); Fauche (1852) translated the compound as “aux touffes soyeuses de cheveux” (“[that king’s daughter] with silky tufts of head-hair”, emphasis added); Arnold’s *An Indian Love-Lament* (1896) has “those lustrous tresses / dark-winding down” (emphasis added), while Powys Mathers’s *Black Marigolds* (1919) reads “[s]moke tangles of her hair” (emphasis added).

- ²⁰ “In the tight embrace, her breasts have swollen up, her body hair has become erect, / the garment around her hips is wet with copious erotic fluid; / ‘No, no, darling, do not (hold) me too (tight), it’s enough!’, she cries with a faint voice: / is she perhaps asleep, perhaps dead, has she perhaps entered my heart, mingled with it?” (Norsa 26, my translation). This is the fortieth stanza in Norsa’s complete Italian version of the *Amaruśataka*. Norsa’s translation significantly diverges from mine in the rendering of the compound ‘sāndrasneharasātirekavigalacchrīmannitambābarā’, which he translates: “the garment around her hips is wet with copious erotic fluid” (where I had: “her garment slipping off her charming buttocks in the excess of delight of her intense passion”). Norsa interprets *rasa* (in ‘sāndrasneharasātireka-’) as ‘fluid’ (‘umore’) rather than as ‘delight.’
- ²¹ Chézy ३ [3], verse ५ [5]. Instead of “svedāmbhasaḥ śīkaraiḥ” (“by droplets of sweat-water”), Simon has “svedāmbhasām jālakaiḥ” (“by nets of sweat-water”) (Simon 52).
- ²² In the 1914 Bibliothèque des Curieux edition, this stanza was presented under the title “À Rebours” (“Backwards”), with a footnote explaining that the sexual practice that the text hinted at was “the *coitus aversus* (‘coition from behind’) of Ovide”, the “intercourse *more ferarum* (‘in the manner of beasts’), the one of quadrupeds, the one that Lucretius claimed to be the most favourable to fecundation” (*Anthologie érotique d'Amarou suivie des sentences érotiques* 16, my translation). Inadvertently – that is, probably through a misinterpretation of Chézy’s use of the phrase “à rebours” in his note to the stanza (Chézy-Apudy 62) – the editor of the 1914 reprint ended up re-writing Chézy’s (and Amaru’s) stanza. If, as Chézy remarked, visualising the position taken by the woman is key to understanding and enjoying the stanza, the 1914 re-writing of the sex position “à rebours” effectively changed the emotional and aesthetic impact of the text.
- ²³ “THE HEIGHT OF PLEASURE / That in the midst of the most intense sensual pleasures, the curls of her hair fluttering in the loveliest disorder, her pendant earrings resounding in their fast beating, the forehead slightly moistened with small droplets shining with all the brilliance of the purest pearls, your mistress turns languidly towards you her beautiful eyes worn out by pleasure... Tell me, what more could the Gods [do] for you?” (Chézy-Apudy 33; my translation).
- ²⁴ “How – in the midst of the most ardent sensual pleasures –, how, her curls swaying in the loveliest disorder, while her long earrings click in the fast agitation, and her forehead – wet with small drops of sweat – shines with the dazzling light of the purest pearls, oh how your beloved turns towards you, languid, her beautiful eyes worn out by pleasure! But what, but what more might the Gods [do] for you? ...” (Ghiron 21; my translation).
- ²⁵ Chézy claimed that, in his erotic anthology, Amaru had managed to express “all the nuances of a passion that, as it seems, is as intensely felt on the banks of the Ganges as on those of the Sein” – for “it is Love himself who has mixed the colours of [the] paintings [of Amaru]” (Chézy-Apudy vi).
- ²⁶ “The gentle one’s face in the abandon of pleasure, [her] face bearing a restless streak of quivering curls and swinging rings, with [her] beauty mark somewhat washed out by the tiny drops of sweat, with [her] eye languid at the end of the amorous pleasure, may such a face protect you for a long time! What is the use of Viṣṇu, Çiva, Brahman and the other gods?” (Norsa 10, my translation). The expression “beauty mark” is thus glossed in a footnote: “Artificial beauty mark (viṣesaka) made with colored ointments” (Norsa 10, my translation).
- ²⁷ “THE EXCHANGE OF PLEASURE / Exhausted, yet still ardent with passion, your girl-friend turns towards you her beautiful eyes encircled by the blue shadow of pleasure. Her hair is dishevelled, in a lovely disorder. A dew of perfumed sweat adorns her temples as if with pearls. Her arms hold you back. / Tell me, what more do you ask of the gods?” (Toussaint 18th page unnumbered; my translation).

²⁸ It is also not coincidental that Chézy condensed the expression “Viṣṇu, Śiva, Brahmā, and the other gods” (“hariharabrahmādhīr devataih”) into a more neutral, culturally un-specific “les Dieux”. Indeed, the mockingly sacral – or rather, the light-heartedly blasphemous – undertones of the stanza are entirely lost in Chézy’s rendering, as well as in all the translations that derive from his.

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