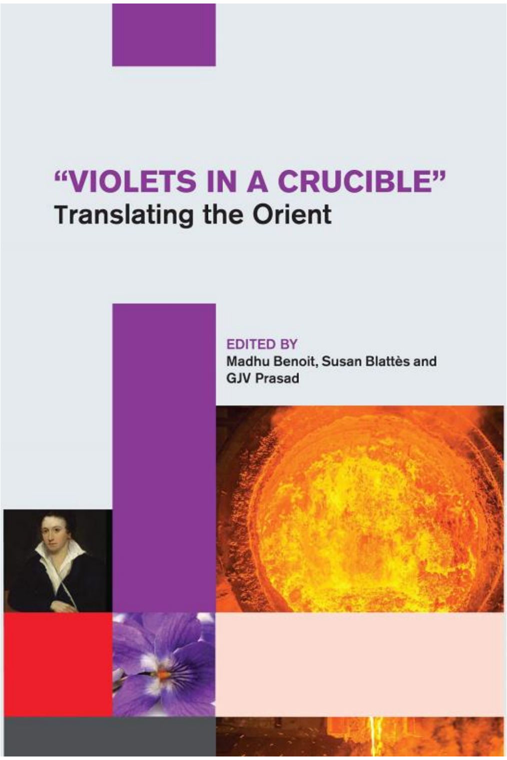
Madhu Benoit, Susan Blattès and GJV Prasad, eds. *"Violets in a Crucible": Translating the Orient*. Delhi: Pencraft International, 2019. 215 pp. ISBN 978-93-82178-28-6.



Books on translation and Translation Studies are aplenty. From a trickle two decades ago, it is a veritable avalanche now. Most of them seem to be repetitive and lacking in insight and wisdom that come from practice and an informed historical view. The volume under review is an honourable exception. Focussing mainly on the representation of the Orient through translation, the essays in the volume cover a vast ground, from India to Egypt, Sri Lanka to Persia and France, they engage with the translation traditions of a vast swath of literary geography and show how translation remained at the forefront of representation of the Orient in the early stages of literary development in many countries. I was reading the volume alongside Raymond Schwab's *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of the East*, which made me value the essays all the more. However, this is just one facet of the volume. The other facet consists of translation of European texts into the languages of the Orient. Thus, the volume truly addresses the phenomenon of East-West encounter through translation.

The opening essay by Madhu Benoit, one of the editors, "The Raj and Translating the *Manavadharma Shastra*" gives a comprehensive, almost exhaustive, account of how one of the foundational texts of Hinduism, i.e., *Manavadharma Shastra*, popularly known as *Manusmriti* was translated into English and canonised because of the exigencies of the British East India Company administration. When East India Company assumed direct responsibility for the administration of civil justice in Bengal, Europeans were frequently called upon to act as judges in cases to be decided according to Hindu law. Warren Hastings found it necessary to provide a corpus of law which would replace conflicting sources and rival interpretations by pundits and maulvis. To this effect, William Jones undertook the massive project of translating ancient legal texts from Sanskrit to English. What the essay eloquently points out is that Jones' project was deeply flawed because, *Manavdharma Shastra*, a Brahminical text, could not be said to represent all castes of Hindus and those outside the pale. The other flaw was – as Said pointed out in *Orientalism* – how could an ancient text contain all the laws to govern a modern society? Thus, the writer makes the valid argument that "The East India Company's interest in locating and codifying Hindu law gave legal form to what was essentially social observances and customary law" (13).

The next essay, "Chares Wilkin's *Bhagvat-Geeta* and the Problems and Politics of Translating the Language(s) of Oriental Gods and Men" by Dhananjay Singh, engages mainly with Wilkin's translation of Bhagwat Geeta which made this work available to the Western world and helped it gain immense popularity. What Singh explores is the deeper impulse behind translating this and other similar Oriental texts, which was the colonial enterprise of accessing native texts in order to entrench native subjection and enhance governability. Singh explores the translation strategy undertaken by Wilkins to make a broader comment on colonial translation:

> In colonial translation of this sort, the relation between the Sanskrit original and the English translation is not merely about a linguistic or cultural equivalence. The target text appropriates the Sanskrit text into the image of the culture and religion of the mother country. What gets reproduced as translation is an ambivalent relation between the colonized Sanskrit and the colonialist English. (35)

One of the highlights of this volume is that in as many as four essays the writers discuss multiple translations of the same text, and all of them are fine examples of translation criticism. In a delightful essay, "Kamasutra in English: Four Versions," Harish Trivedi discusses how the Sanskrit work was amplified with graphic illustrations in the English versions, so much so that its considerable reputation in the West and in India is due to its fame as a how-to-do manual of sex and the illustrations of coital postures rather than the cryptic text that accompanies them. This is a case where the translation takes a life (or, "afterlife" as Trivedi characterises it, taking off from Walter Benjamin) of its own and almost supplants the original. Trivedi traces the history of its collaborative and clandestine translation for private circulation by Richard Burton et al. to its most current and public translation by the translator duo, Wendy Doniger and Sudhir Kakar. I find Trivedi's following reflections insightful for students of Translation Studies:

> Thus, due to all kinds of extrinsic and even accidental circumstances, the *Kama Sutra* has succeeded in English translation far better than it ever did either in the original Sanskrit or in translation in any of the modern Indian languages. Such alternative canon formation is often an unpredictable and random part of the process of translation, through which a translated text assumes dimensions it never possessed in its first and original life, and which may not be found elsewhere even within the target language. (53)

Another fascinating essay about multiple translation of the same text is Sonia Farid's "Translating Literature, Allegory, or Taboo?: The Case of Naguib Mahfouz's *Awlad Hartima*." This novel nearly cost Mahfouz his life. He was permanently maimed by the assassin who wanted to kill him because of the novel's alleged blasphemous intent. The essay highlights how challenging it can be to translate a deeply allegorical text where several possible layers of meaning cohere, and which shares the borderline between the sacred and the profane and could be interpreted as blasphemous. Arabic language, Sonia Farid argues, steeped in Islamic culture, has developed nuances and connotations accessible to the native speakers of the language, that cannot be conveyed adequately in English. So, any English translation of a piece of Arabic literature, particularly of writers like Mahfouz who was a skilled master of the language, looks like a partial translation, being unable to capture the full import of the original. In this context, one remembers Edward Said's comment about Mahfouz's translators that in English Mahfouz sounds like each of his translators, and not as the undisputed master of the language in which he wrote. The inadequacy and opacity of the English versions of *Awlad Hartima* offer Sonia Farid the occasion to engage with the concept of "transparency" in translation which, again, is a very limited concept. The third essay on multiple translation is by Nadia Fayidh Mohammed who discusses two Arabic translations of Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," one by an Iraqi translator and the other by a Syrian. The writer points out how the translation of Whitman's poem was inflected by his reception in the Arab world in two different historical epochs. She shows how a poet-translator and a scholar translator bring their own individual poetics to bear on their strategy of translation of this classic American poem. In the fourth essay on multiple translation, "Poetry, Phoenix of Translation: Perspectives and Views on the

Translation of *Tirukkural*," Kumarasamy Pugazhendhi makes a detailed comparison of three translations of this ancient Tamil epic written in the third century BC. Besides this study, there are two more essays that explore Tamil-French connection. "Translating Sangam Tamil Poems into French: Motives and Manners of Connection" by Geetha Ganapathy-Doré, explores the circumstances that led to the translation of ancient Tamil poems into French, while Shoba Sivasankaran's essay, "Cultural Exchange between Tamil and French: What Facets of the Two Worlds Are We Translating?," focuses mainly on the translation of fictional literature between Tamil and French.

Another interesting essay in the collection is "In Search of the Translator: *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*" by James Morier, which explores the curious case of this text written originally in English and considered very derogatory to the Persian and was banned there. The essay traces its many translations/transformations through French into Persian when it finally became acceptable to the people of Iran. The essay "*Quand refleuriront les lilacs blancs vs.* When the Violets Bloom: An Intercultural Discourse of Translating French Chanson into Japanese," analyses the way French chansons were "adjusted both to the Japanese language and culture through subtle shifts in lyrics, tempo, rhythm and melody."

All in all, *Violets in a Crucible* is an excellent collection of essays dealing with different aspects of translation. It would have been without blemish but for some printer's bloomers. There are quite a few unnecessary definite articles that have escaped the proof reader's attention. William Jones has been turned to William James more than once (28, 34). On page 132, in the third line, there is a gaping hole, and then one finds several lines below, the Greek term written as a superscript dangling like a *trishanku* in a blank space without any word before or after. Words have got jumbled up at places ("aReadereds," 26). Lastly, I wonder why the editors forgot to mention that the essays originated from an international colloquium held at Grenoble in 2016, France, although the Introduction to the volume quotes from the original CFP almost verbatim.

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