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**Raghavanka. *The Life of Harishchandra*. Translated by Vanamala Viswanatha. Cambridge, Mass., and London, England, Murty Classical Library of India, Harvard University Press, 2017, 640 p.**

**Paul St-Pierre. *Translating Odisha*. Bhubaneshwar, Dhauri Books, 2019, 436 p.**

Sherry Simon

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[See table of contents](#)

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est effectivement hétérogène. En outre, il appert que l'erreur culturelle est souvent nécessaire en traduction et en interprétation. Je laisse le mot de la fin à nul autre que Jean-René Ladmiral, qui résume succinctement ce recueil : «[s]i l'on contrevient à la vérité consciemment, on n'est pas dans l'erreur, mais plutôt du côté de mensonge, voire de la manipulation et de l'idéologie. Alors, quelle est l'instance de la vérité en traduction » (p. 231)?

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**Raghavanka. *The Life of Harishchandra*. Translated by Vanamala Viswanatha. Cambridge, Mass., and London, England, Murty Classical Library of India, Harvard University Press, 2017, 640 p.**

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I was lucky enough to spend extended periods of time in India during the late 1990s and early 2000s. This was an exciting time for translation studies in India and I learned much from remarkable scholars. India is often called a “natural” translation zone because of its multiple languages and cultures, but equally important is the strong intellectual tradition that drives and gives meaning to translation practices. Tejaswini Niranjana’s *Siting Translation* (1992) and Harish Trivedi’s *Colonial Transactions* (1993) are well-known landmark studies. They joined an already rich body of writing about translation in India, enhanced by subsequent writers, including Sujit Mukherjee, P. Lal, A.K. Ramanujan, Vinay Dharwadkar, Ayyappa Paniker, Shivaram Paddikal, G.N. Devy and Rita Kothari.

What made those years particularly stimulating was that questions of translation were prominent in public debate—in newspapers as well as academic and literary journals. Closely linked to post-colonialism, translation was key to understanding the relationship between colonized cultures and the metropolis, and more broadly to the controversial status of English. Was English the language of the colonizer or rather a new means of expression for Indian culture itself? Was Indian literature in English gaining stature at the expense of Indian languages, which remained largely untranslated?

Why did books in Indian languages (each the bearer of a huge and venerable tradition) remain untranslated into English, but also into other Indian languages? To these questions were added discussions of politically progressive translation strategies with particular attention to caste and gender.

Both Vanamala Viswanatha and Paul St-Pierre participated actively in these conversations, as translators and as theorists, each from their respective geo-linguistic location: Bangalore and the Kannada world for Viswanatha, Bubhaneshwar and the Odia world for St-Pierre. The books under review offer different facets of this engagement. Viswanatha adds an entirely new dimension to her work by turning a 13<sup>th</sup> century epic poem from medieval Kannada into English, while St-Pierre brings together a collection of his articles and talks on translation in the Odia world.

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Since its publication, Vanamala Viswanatha's translation of Raghavanka's medieval epic has received considerable media attention. One may well wonder why this version of an ancient poetic drama, written in a form of the Kannada language similar to what Chaucer is for us, and published in the Murty series of Indian classics at Harvard University Press (2017), would have such resonance. The answer has as much to do with Viswanatha's combined abilities as a scholar, translator and performer as with the political and cultural importance of the work for the Kannada language tradition. A former Kannada newsreader, Vanamala Viswanatha is a prominent personality in the Kannada world, deeply engaged with this strong regional culture.

'Regional culture' might convey in English an impression of marginality and small numbers. In fact, Kannada is spoken by some 40 million people, has a strong literary and cinematic tradition, and a huge diaspora across the globe.

Viswanatha was for many years a professor of English and Translation Studies at Bangalore University, and there is a strong pedagogical bent in all her work. Her academic articles aim at increasing awareness of the political dimensions of translation, particularly in relation to gender and caste. Her translations include the work of both mainstream and marginalized writers such as U.R. Ananthamurthy, P. Lankesh, Tejaswi, Vaidehi, Sara Aboobakkar, and Gulvadi Venkata Rao (this last with Shivarama Padikkal).

The story of the honest King Harischandra has been told since ancient times as part of the Sanskrit epic tradition. It enjoys a particularly large place in the Kannada tradition, both as a written text set down by the author Raghavanka in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century and through popular cultural traditions such as folk theatre, sung versions known as Gamaka, retellings and abridgements, and two films: the first in the 1930s, the second, a very popular 1965 version featuring the iconic actor of Kannada cinema, Dr. Raj Kumar. While these folk traditions also exist in other Indian languages, it is only in Kannada that Harischandra's story was given a full-length poetic treatment, in an innovative six-line form. Viswanatha's *The Life of Harischandra* is the first complete translation of this work into any language. Previous versions, even into modern Kannada, have been abridgements.

In the now well-established tradition of writers reanimating ancient texts with distinctive contemporary language, Viswanatha's spirited version of the medieval Kannada text offers its own ample rewards. Like Seamus Heaney's *Beowulf*, Anne Carson's *Antigone* or A.K. Ramanujan's translations of medieval Bhakti poetry, it summons a voice both respectful and personal. A scholarly work such as this one, published in a series overseen by Sheldon Pollock and David Schulman, must conform to the guidelines of the series, avoiding for instance any quirky, arcane or slang expressions. The substantial introduction by Viswanatha details the extensive research required into long-forgotten Kannada terms, the vocabulary of flora and fauna, and practices such as boar-hunting. But still there was room for the writerly hand. Wordplay, onomatopoeia and rhythm provide opportunities for creative interventions. Viswanatha offers a lively text, answering the challenges of a densely poetic text with vivid language. Sometimes this means integrating words from the original in such a way as to highlight the poet's affection for the resonance of repeated words.

What is most striking are recurring passages of litany-like enumerations, demanding a profusion of near-synonyms. These demand virtuoso incursions into English, whether having to do with kingly virtues as in this passage:

Undimmed radiance, untarnished fame, undiminished courage,  
unmatched reputation, unassailable confidence, unwavering attention,  
unalloyed discernment, and wisdom free from illusion blended naturally  
in King Harischandra. His life was marked by speech without falsehood,

devotion without indolence, wealth without avarice, and advancement without regress. (p. 41)

or in dramatic action scenes:

The king gaped at the scene open-mouthed:  
If you escape the elephant, the tiger is lying in wait;  
Dodge the tiger, the bear grunts in your ear;  
Back off, the serpent comes at you;  
Turn around, the lion roars next to you;  
Move a step, the wild boar comes charging;  
Slink away, the deer comes butting;  
Then, the gaur is all set to pounce on you;  
Next, the buck is ready for you with its sharp horns;  
And, if you are alive still, the wild bull is out to crush you! (p. 445)

The full effect of the stirring rhythms, the incantatory drive, the interpolations of Sanskrit and Kannada words can be heard in the oral performance by Viswanatha, which the editors of the collection have had the good idea to include on their website (Viswanatha, 2018). There are of course historical and cultural terms that are unfamiliar (there are explanatory endnotes) and an entire frame of reference that will be foreign to the Western reader. But to listen to this oral version, to savour its energetic language, to know that the story of Harischandra deeply affected a nine-year-old Gandhi and inspired his life-long devotion to truth, to hear echoes of the Biblical story of Job—these are welcoming pathways into a major work of world literature. The fact that original and translation are both included in the volume means that the text can be used today for Kannada speakers as a reverse-dictionary, contributing to a renewed interest in the history of the Kannada language.

Any translation of a classic will face the challenge of reconciling readability with “the rich tonality, compression, physicality and poetic energy of the original verse”—as Viswanatha (2017) herself has observed. *The Life of Harischandra* is to be saluted as a work carried by the conviction that this challenge can be successfully met.

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*Translating Odisha* is a title packed with meaning. For some three decades, Paul St-Pierre has taken this phrase as a program—a multi-pronged engagement with the world of Odisha (formerly known in English as Orissa). The two words offer palindromic reversibility: how

can translation illuminate the territory and how can this particular part of the world shed light on how we think of translation?

The collection of articles, prefaces and conference presentations make for inspiring reading. They trace a career dedicated to collaborating with the scholars of a culture little-known in the West, to making available the writings of its authors in English and to showing how translations alter relationships across cultures. Not included in the present volume and still to be published is a bibliography of printed translations into Odia, from all languages, which St-Pierre has been working on for many years. The bibliography already contains more than 5400 works published between 1807 and 2004. The research tool will be an invaluable contribution to the cultural history of Odisha, and no doubt a model to be emulated in other Indian languages.

There was nothing inevitable about St-Pierre's encounter with Odisha, as he himself explains. It came about through meeting a mentor, Ganeswar Mishra. But it was prepared by his activities as a Canadian translation studies scholar who had been trained in French theory and semiotics. In the very first essay in the collection, St-Pierre traces the development of his understanding of translation as an autonomous field of study. This essay is not only revealing of a personal trajectory; it is an important contribution to intellectual history—and would have been much appreciated by our regretted colleague Daniel Simeoni, whose work was dedicated to untangling the strands of histories of knowledge. The article concludes with examples from Odia literature adduced to confirm St-Pierre's central thesis: that a translation can at the same time be faithful and unfaithful, that a translation is always incomplete and replaceable. This because translations respond to different demands over time. St-Pierre first articulated the idea of "translation as a discourse of history," embedded in the cultural and ideological possibilities of an era, in the pages of this journal, *TTR*, in 1993. The necessary articulation of translation with other writing practices was an insight he gained from his doctoral work on Samuel Beckett, and this perception is also clearly at work in his study of Odia translation.

The conference papers, introductions to translated volumes, and scholarly articles on translation testify to decades of attention to a wide variety of literary voices. The most prominent among the authors are Phakirmohan Senapati, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century writer

who is the founder of the Odia novel, and J.P. Das, one of Odisha's most prominent contemporary poets. Senapati is the author of two landmark works—the novel *Six Acres and a Third*, and *Atmacharita*, the first autobiography published in Odia. St-Pierre has been deeply engaged with this author, having done a collaborative translation of the novel for University of California Press and Penguin in 2005 and now a new translation with K.K. and Leelawati Mohapatra called *Six and Third Acres* (Aleph, 2021). St-Pierre identifies some culture-specific terms in Senapati, which have been given diverse translations, showing that each is grounded in its specific 'take' on the text. To reduce these discussions to a standoff between two opposites (foreignization vs domestication) is reductive: all translations involve a mix of the two. These comments provide some insight into St-Pierre's own strategies of translation, but what is missing is an account of the process of collaboration itself. St-Pierre has contributed to the translation of some 44 Odia titles—all of which are listed at the end of the volume.

Both of the books under review are landmarks. They grow out of rich years of experience, and will no doubt stimulate the imaginations of younger scholars. Deepening and enriching the paradoxes of distance and connection, they deserve to be widely circulated, in India and beyond.

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