

# Yamī's Friendship(s): How it Started and How it Ended Up. Linguistic and Text-critical Notes on the Dialogue Hymn Ṛgveda 10.10<sup>1</sup>

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Between men and women there is no friendship possible.  
There is passion, enmity, worship, love, but no friendship.

Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*

## 1. Yamī and Yama's story: preliminary remarks

One of the most fascinating specimens of the earliest Vedic literature, the famous dialogue hymn RV 10.10, focuses on the relationships between Yamī and Yama.<sup>2</sup> Yamī (who opens this dialogue) attempts to beguile her twin brother into incestual relation. Yama, who replies in even stanzas (second, fourth etc.), constantly refuses this invitation. Yamī insists, providing further arguments, such as the necessity of producing offspring; their prenatal physical union in the womb; etc. Yet, Yama consistently argues that the incestual relation is inappropriate, which makes their sexual relations impossible.

The characteristics of Yamī as a mythological personage can only be gleaned from the text of this dialogue on the basis of its thorough linguistic and philological analysis. In what follows I will offer a linguistic and text-critical

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1 I am grateful to Alexandra Aikhenvald, Siglinde Dietz and Konrad Klaus for their comments and critical remarks on earlier drafts of this paper. I also would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to the audience of the talks at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle (Paris, 17 April 2019), Universität Wien, Institut für Südasiens-, Tibet- und Buddhismuskunde (29 November 2019) and l'Institut des Hautes Études de Belgique, Bruxelles (Journées Belges d'Études Celtologiques et Comparatives "Grâce à elles ou à cause d'elles: déesses et héroïnes dans le mythe et l'épopée", 4 December 2021), where some parts of this paper were presented. This research was generously supported by FWO research grant G004121N.

2 For an overview of this issue, see, for instance, Oberlies 1998: 388, with bibliography.

study of a few relevant stanzas, paying special attention to the evolution of Yamī's attitude towards her twin brother from passionate love towards anger and hatred.

## 2. Ṛgveda 10.10.1: Yamī seducing Yama to sex: a sweet start of relationship?

tantum ne nostros avidi liceantur amores ...  
[... only let them in their greed not put our loves for sale!]  
Ovid, *Amores* 3.8.59

The first half of the opening stanza of the dialogue runs as follows:  
(RV 10.10.1ab)

ó [= á=u] cit *sákhāyaṃ **sakh,yá*** vavṛtyāṃ ' tiráḥ **purú** cid arṇavám jaganván

There are two problematic words in this passage (shown in boldface). The most difficult form of this stanza and one of the most debated forms of the entire hymn is *sakhyá* in pāda a. This is the abstract noun derived from *sákhī*- ‘friend, partner, companion’ (the accusative singular form of which, *sákhāyaṃ*, appears in the same pāda), meaning ‘friendship, partnership’. Its grammatical characteristics remain unclear, however. Another difficult word that may require special comments is *purú* in pāda b.

Geldner's (1951: III,412) translation runs as follows:

“Ich möchte doch den Freund **zu einem Freundschaftsdienst** bewegen. Auch wenn er noch so viele (Meilen), über das Meer gegangen ist, (sollte er kommen).” [here and elsewhere boldface is mine. – LK]

Geldner explains his interpretation as based on a conjecture (“*sakhyá* Dat. für *sakhyáya*”), thus ultimately following Sāyaṇa's indigenous commentary and ascribing to the analysis substantiated by Pischel (1889: 64–65). This analysis, adopted by many Vedicists (Renou 1956: 55;<sup>3</sup> Schneider 1967: 3 [= Schneider

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3 “Que ne puis-je vers l'amitié attirer mon ami, fût-il allé au loin, par delà les mers !” Later Renou (1967: 122) abandoned his earlier analysis, ascribing to Oldenberg (1912); see below.

2002: 153];<sup>4</sup> Doniger 1981: 247;<sup>5</sup> Jamison & Brereton 2014: 1382<sup>6</sup>) appears dubious, first of all, because of heavy emendation (<sup>†</sup>*sakhyā*[*ya*]), which, as Oldenberg (1909: 287 [= 1967: 303]) convincingly argues, is unnecessary.

Instead, *sakhyā* can be satisfactorily analysed as a grammatically correct form of the abstract substantive *sakhyā*- ‘friendship, partnership’ without any emendation. One such formal option is to take *sakhyā* as the instrumental singular form (Lanman 1872–1880: 336; Ludwig 1883: vol. 5, 511), adopted, for instance, by Whitney in his translation of the parallel verse of the Atharvaveda<sup>7</sup> and Schnaus (2008: 163–164), who sees here an “Instrumental des Grundes” and translates this passage as follows:

“Herbei möchte ich den Freund aufgrund der Freundschaft wenden.  
Er ist über wirklich vieles hinweg zum wallenden Meer gegangen.”

Albeit formally possible, this analysis does not make much sense, however: the instrumental of cause (“I would like to invite a friend because of friendship”?) appears redundant in this context.

Alternatively, *sakhyā* can be taken as an accusative plural form (thus Oldenberg 1909: 287 [= 1967: 303]; Oldenberg 1912: 204), which leads us to the following translation of pāda a: “I would like to turn my friend towards friendships...” or the like. As Oldenberg (1909: 287 [= 1967: 303]) rightly noticed, the accusative of goal is quite common with the verb *ā-vṛt*. This analysis was adopted, in particular, by Renou (in his posthumously published comments on RV 10.10; see Renou 1967: 122), Elizarenkova (1999: 419)<sup>8</sup> and, most recently, by Bodewitz (2009: 256–257) and Pinault (2012: 144–145). The last two authors disagree in the exact rendering of the verbal form: Bodewitz (ibid., 257) believes that it can be interpreted as “(make) return to” (“[a]pparently Yamī wants to get back the situations of friendship (therefore the plural

4 “Herbei, unter allen Umständen, (*ó cit*) möchte ich den Genossen zur gemeinsamen Sache bewegen. Auch wenn er noch so weit über das Meer (*arṇavá*) gegangen ist...”

5 “Would that I might draw my friend into intimate friendship, now that he has gone far across the ocean.”

6 “I would turn my partner right here to partnership – even though he has gone across many (realms), across the flood.”

7 AVŚ 18.1.1 (see Whitney & Lanman 1905: II,816): “Unto a friend would I turn with friendship.”

8 In fact, Elizarenkova’s translation “Как бы я хотела повернуть друга к дружбе...” [I would very much like to turn the friend to the friendship] (ibid., 124) rather suggests the dative analysis of the form.

is used), but now with a special form of sexual partnership”), while Pinault doubts his interpretation.<sup>9</sup> Pinault’s objection against Bodewitz’s translation of the verb *á-vṛt* appears fully justified, but his explanation of the meaning of the plural form does not appear convincing: the exact meaning of *sakhyá* remains unclear. Let us take a closer look at the semantics of this plural noun, paying special attention to possible semantic nuances induced by the pragmatic context of Yamī’s replica addressed to Yama.

The key to the solution of this controversy is the fact that Yamī encourages her brother to become her sexual partner. Accordingly, a more precise rendering of the accusative *sákhāyam* in our context should be ‘sexual partner’, rather than just ‘friend’ or ‘partner’, which thus anticipates the future relationship between the twins as imagined by Yamī, rather than refers to the actual state of affairs. This implies that the abstract noun *sakhyá-* should be understood as ‘sexual partnership, sexual relation’ (which, in fact, is very close to Bodewitz’s proposal quoted above).

How can a plural form of this noun be interpreted? Abstract nouns are typically uncountable, thus very often lacking plural forms (*singularia tantum*). In the case an abstract noun can nevertheless form a plural, this necessarily implies a semantic shift.<sup>10</sup> The plural form of a noun denoting an abstract notion Q may either refer to (i) several varieties or types of Q (e.g. hatreds = various types of hatred: Anti-Semitism, Hinduphobia, Islamophobia, etc.; pleasures = types of pleasure: sensual, aesthetic, etc.), or to (ii) multiple realizations of Q (e.g. hospitalities = many realizations or occurrences of hospitality; kindnesses = many realizations or occurrences of kindness; etc.). The former type of semantic shift makes little sense in our context: ‘I would like to turn my partner to [various sorts of] friendship / partnership’? By contrast, the latter is perfectly appropriate for *sakhyá-* ‘friendship’, which commonly occurs in the plural in the Ṛgveda (33x), as, for instance, in the following stanza:

(RV 1.108.5)

*yānīndrāgnī cakráthur vī<sub>i</sub>yāni* ' *yāni rūpān<sub>i</sub>y utá vṛṣṇ<sub>i</sub>yāni*  
*yá vām pratnāni sakh<sub>i</sub>yā śivāni* ' *tébhiḥ sómasya pibatam sutásya*

9 “Pace Bodewitz (2009, p. 257), Yamī ne propose pas à Yama de « revenir » à une « amitié » antérieure : aucun terme n’implique l’idée de retour. Le pluriel de l’abstrait *sakh(i)yá-* ajoute à la tonalité officielle et délibérément euphémistique de l’intervention de Yamī.”

10 For a discussion of this linguistic phenomenon in a general semantic perspective, see already Jespersen 1949: 114–131; and, more recently, Burge 1972; Chierchia 1998; Rothstein 2010; Zamparelli 2020 – to quote just a few.

Most translators merely disregard the plural number of *sakhyá-*, either rendering it as a plural without any comment (Jamison & Brereton 2014: 255: “O Indra and Agni, which manly deeds you two have done; which forms and bullish powers you have made your own; which age-old propitious **partnerships** are yours—with these, drink of the pressed soma”; likewise Gotō in Witzel & Gotō (2007: 190): “...welche alten **Genossenschaften** euch freundlich (waren)...”), or even translating it as a singular form (Geldner 1951: I,140: “...was eure alte liebe **Freundschaft** ist...”). Renou (1965: 50) pays more attention to this plural form, translating *pāda c* as “les **amitiés** antiques, propices, qui (se sont manifestées de) votre (part)...”. In my view, Renou’s translation could be made still more precise by the transformation of the bracketed part into a substantive: “les (manifestations) antiques, propices (de) votre amitié / vos amitiés ...”. This is exactly how the stanza in question is rendered by Elizarenkova (1989: 130), who offers, thus, in my opinion, the most accurate translation of the plural form in question (shown in boldface):

“(Те) героические подвиги, о Индра и Агни, что вы совершили,  
Облики, что (вы принимали), а также силы мужества,  
Те прежние ваши милые **проявления дружбы** [= manifestations of friendship. – LK] –  
С ними пейте выжатого сому!”

The same analysis of the plural forms of *sakhyá-* appears most appropriate, for instance, for RV 1.178.2d *gáman na índraḥ sakhyā́*... “may Indra come to the manifestations of our friendship...”<sup>11</sup>; RV 4.3.4d *kadā bhavanti sakhyā́ grhē te* “When will (the realizations of) your friendship be in [our] house?”; RV 6.19.13ab *vayám ta ebhiḥ puruhūta sakhyaíḥ ' śátroḥ-śatror úttara ít syāma*, cf. Geldner 1951: II,117: “Wir wollen durch diese deine **Freundschaftsdienste**, Vielgerufener, über jeden Feind die Oberhand haben”; similarly Elizarenkova (1995: 114): “С помощью этих твоих **проявлений дружбы**, о многопризываемый, / Мы хотим быть выше любого врага”; and some other occurrences.

The plural number of *sakhyā́* in RV 10.10.1a should, in my view, be explained in a similar way: “I would like to turn (= invite) my sexual partner to [many realizations of] sexual partnership”. In other words, Yamī encourages

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Elizarenkova’s (1989: 657) comments ad loc.: “Пусть Индра придет к нашим проявлениям дружбы...”.

Yama to perform many acts of love with her.<sup>12</sup> This interpretation is indirectly supported by the syntactically problematic form *purú* “many” in the next pāda b, which is usually taken as lacking an overtly expressed syntactic head (cf. Oldenberg (1912: 204): “viele (Räume)” (hesitantly); Jamison & Brereton: “many (realms)”; Geldner: “so viele (Meilen)”) and thus syntactically hanging. Although, as Oldenberg (1912: 204) notices, the collocation *tiráḥ purú cit* “over many...” is not uncommon in the Ṛgveda, one might tentatively connect it with *sakhyá* as well. Even in spite of the fact that *sakhyá* and *purú* are separated by as many as two words,<sup>13</sup> *purú* might be regarded as a delayed (and thus somewhat camouflaged) hint of Yamī at her sexual offer: “I would like to turn my sexual partner to make love with me, many [times]” (lit.: “I would like to turn ... to loves, ... many [loves]!”).

### 3. Ṛgveda 10.10.12–13: the bitter end of Yamī’s friendship

We know that Yamī’s attempts to seduce Yama failed, at least within the temporal frame set up by the hymn. Yet, even though the general matrix set up by the text of RV 10.10 is essentially clear, several details of the final part of this passionate dialogue remain obscure. Of particular interest are some metrical features of the two last but one stanzas, 12 and 13. Below I quote them together with Jamison & Brereton’s (2014: 1383) translation:

(RV 10.10.12)

*ná vá u te tan<sub>u</sub>vā tan<sub>u</sub>vām sám paṛcyām ' pāpām āhur yāḥ svásāraṃ nigáchāt  
anyéna māt pramúdaḥ kalpayasva ' ná te bhrātā subhage vaṣṭy etāt*

“[Yama:] Verily, I must not mingle my body with your body. They call him evil who will go down on his sister.

With another than me arrange your pleasures. Your brother does not want this, well-portioned one.”

(RV 10.10.13)

*bató batāsi yama ' náivá te máno hṛdayaṃ cāvidāma  
anyá kila tvām kakṣyēva yuktām ' pári ṣvajāte libujeva vṛkṣám*

12 Cf. also Bodewitz’s (2009: 257) rendering “situations of friendship”, which appears to be fairly close to this idea.

13 For a discussion of ‘discontinuous’ noun phrases in Vedic, see Reinöhl 2020.

“[Yamī:] You jerk, you really are a jerk, Yama! Truly we have not found mind and heart in you.

Another (woman) will surely embrace you, like a girthband a yoked (horse), like a vine a tree.”

These two stanzas clearly show how drastically Yamī's attitude towards her brother changes by the end of their highly emotional conversation, after all her attempts to seduce him and to make him her sexual partner have failed, the last refutation being stanza 12. Having exhausted all arguments, Yamī, quite predictably, flies into a rage. Yet the exact meaning of the initial part of her last cue (rendered by Jamison & Brereton as “You jerk, you really are a jerk, Yama!”) in the dialogue is far from clear. The semantics of pāda a is obscure, foremost, because of the twice occurring hapax legomenon *batá-* (or, to be more precise, *dis legomenon*), tentatively rendered by Jamison & Brereton as “jerk”. This difficult semantics goes parallel with the metrical deficiency of this pāda noticed by many scholars: pāda a has as few as seven syllables, instead of eleven, as expected for a regular triṣṭubh. In order to ‘lengthen’ this pāda as much as possible, several Vedicists (Arnold (1905: 73, 202–203), Schneider (1967: 10 [= 2002: 157]), Schnaus (2008: 188)) suggest to read it without vocalic sandhi, i.e. *bató bat<sub>a</sub>si yama*. This yields, however, an even worse metrical structure, with a sequence of six short syllables, which can hardly be an acceptable solution (see e.g. Knobl 2007: 113–114).

Already Oldenberg (1912: 207) suggested that the truncated pāda may point to Yamī's passion. Schneider (1967: 10 [= 2002: 157]) saw here “das hilflose Gestammel der abgewiesenen Yamī”. Jamison & Brereton in their comments ad loc. explain the irregular metre of pāda 13a as due to “a pure eruption of frustration, exasperation, and anger.”

It seems, however, that the situation is rather opposite to what Schneider suggested: we can easily figure out how Yamī, enraged and furious because of Yama's rejection of her love, is shouting at him, probably with all her lungs, losing the last remnants of her sympathy for her twin brother. What is most important in this situation, this mental state may imply using the strongest insults. Presumably, Yamī does not mince her words, using perhaps the dirtiest tabooed expressions. This is in fact admitted by many translators rendering the obscure *batá-* (quasi-hapax) as an insult, such as, for instance, “shit” (Bodewitz 2009: 279) or “jerk” (Jamison & Brereton); cf. also Schnaus (2008: 188–189): “Ekel”; Pinault (2012: 162–162): “misérable” etc.

Knobl (2007: 111–112) advocates the analysis suggested already by Wackernagel (1905: 5) and adopted by Oldenberg, to take the (quasi-hapax) noun *batá-* as a “substantivization of (the exclamation or interjection)”, even suggesting the allegedly similar word play in English translation: “*A LAS, alas, you are, Yama!*” This ingenious proposal was criticized by Jamison & Brereton as barely corresponding to the emotional state of Yamī. I agree with Jamison & Brereton (comments ad loc.) that *batá-* must be “a pejorative slangy designation”, which could easily “get turned into a swear word or an emphatic particle” (unaccented *bata*, which appears in the later language as the only trace of the obscure noun *batá-*), thus similar to such cases as Eng. *damn!*<sup>14</sup>

Whatever the exact meaning of the hapax *batá-*,<sup>15</sup> the most important message of this pāda is the anger of an enraged woman pronouncing these words. This brings us to a somewhat risky, yet quite attractive explanation of the metrical deficiency of the pāda a. One might assume that some part of Yamī’s words addressed to Yama and pronounced in fury were eventually considered (too) dirty and thus even less appropriate than the later tabooed *batá-* for a divine (sacral) text by the redactors of the version of the Ṛgveda which is considered standard nowadays (Śākala recension). We know that some hymns were not admitted to the canonical text, but preserved, for instance, in the text of the Ṛgveda-Khilāni (in European scholarship often referred to as the “Apocrypha

14 Cf. Russ. swear word *бля!* ‘shit! fuck!’ originating from the vocative use of *блядь* [bl’ad’] ‘slut, whore’ (e.g. Levin 1986; Konstantinovskaia 2020: 165–166).

15 The etymology of this word deserves a special study. Given the common variation *b/v* (and the interjection *bata/vata* attested in later texts), it would be tempting to try to explain this form as a verbal adjective with the suffix *-tá-* (which, incidentally, accounts for its final accent) derived from the aniṭ-root *van*. The basic meaning of this root is now determined as ‘gain, acquire; conquer, win’, while the seṭ-root *van* ‘love, desire’ is treated as a different root (see e.g. LIV 680–683). Yet, the clear-cut border is not always easy to draw, and some usages of *van* are considered ambiguous or at least problematic; see, in particular, Renou 1964: 77–78 ad RV 1.31.13–14 *vanóṣi*: “G[e]ld[ner]. [13d] « den begehrst du », mais 14b « du ... gewinnst ». On ne peut en effet écartier tout à fait *van-* « aimer »”. Furthermore, the semantic shift ‘acquire; conquer’ → ‘copulate (with violence, forcefully?)’ is considered possible; see e.g. Gotō (1987: 285), who compares Ved. *van* ‘gewinnen, überwältigen’ with Hitt. *uen-* ‘future, copulate’: “Bedeutung wie ‘future’ kann ohne weiteres auch aus ‘gewinnen, überwältigen’ hergeleitet werden” (ibid., fn. 664). Thus, it seems not unlikely to consider *batá-* (← \**vatá-*) as originally meaning ‘subdued (one), overpowered (one)’ or, perhaps, given its possible partial confusion with *van* ‘love’, ‘fucked (one)’; cf. also Lat. *fututus*, of an anally (and forcibly) penetrated male (Kamen & Levin-Richardson 2018: 451). The rude stylistic register of this substantivized verbal adjective might also account for the hapax status of this word, only preserved as an interjection (based on the vocative form?) in later texts. I hope to discuss this issue at length elsewhere.

of the R̥gveda”), as was the case with the notoriously obscene Kuntāpa hymn AVŚ 20.136. In the case of the Yama-Yamī dialogue, the situation apparently was different: the text was (presumably) approved positively by the redactors. Some minor parts of the text could be considered problematic due to the inappropriate lexicon, however. This immediately raises a somewhat speculative (yet fundamental) question: how could the Vedic ṛṣis deal with such potentially inappropriate text fragments? Even being fully conscious of entering this fairly shaky ground, one might, at least tentatively, figure out the logical possibilities available in such cases. Assuming that the redactors did not consider the possibility of entirely deleting such inappropriate parts of the sacral texts, allegedly transmitted directly from the gods, one might consider the following two opportunities, at least in theory: (i) the original text could be slightly modified, or (ii) it could be moved to another fragment (an adjacent stanza perhaps?) of the hymn. In both cases we might expect some signals in form of (minor?) irregularities caused by such modifications or transpositions.

One such irregularity was already mentioned at the beginning of this section: the metrical deficiency of the pāda a: seven syllables, i.e. four syllables less than required by the metre. Most amazingly, this is not the only metrical irregularity in the Yama-Yamī hymn: the lack of four syllables in 13a is paralleled (and balanced?) by the surplus of three syllables in the first pāda of the preceding stanza (12a). There is no need to argue that this repeated deficiency cannot be explained by the lack of skills of the Vedic ṛṣis: such an assumption is absolutely untenable. Instead, one might assume, at least as a working hypothesis, that some part of the text (constituting three or four syllables) was moved, perhaps with minor modifications, from pāda 13a to pāda 12a.

Let us now take a closer look at the deficient pāda 13a. Apart from the (quasi-)hapax *batá-*, occurring in two forms, nominative and vocative, there is yet another vocative form here, *yama* “o Yama!” At first glance, there seems to be nothing irregular in this vocative in a dialogue utterance addressed to Yama. Yet, there is one peculiar feature in this construction, which is at least worth mentioning. Throughout the dialogue, starting from the very first stanza of 10.10, Yamī more often addresses her interlocutor in the third person: 10.10.1a *ó cit sákhāyañ sakhjá vavṛtyām*; 10.10.7a *yamáśya mā yamyām káma ágan* ‘Desire for Yama has come to me, Yamī’ (Jamison & Brereton). Even though the verbal forms in the second person as well as the second person pronoun (*te*) do occur in Yamī’s replicas, the name *yamá-* is not attested in the vocative form elsewhere in the dialogue. Although it does not imply that

such form would be impossible in the dialogue, its quasi-anomalous character at least deserves our attention.

Could this form be due to a minor modification of the original text of the type (i) mentioned above? Changing one single consonant, *m*, to another consonant of the same varṇa, *bh*, one arrives at another unaccented form, the 2nd person imperative *yabha* ‘copulate, fuck!’ (incidentally, attested in the RV-Khilāni and, several times, in the parallel Kuntāpa hymn AVŚ 20.136 mentioned above).

Let us figure out how this conjecture can help us to get closer to the original text. Can we find in another metrically deficient pāda (12a: *ná vā u te tan<sub>i</sub>vā tan<sub>i</sub>vām sám paṛcyām*) something which fits into a construction with *yabha*? The answer is, I think, yes. We find here two forms of *tanū́-* ‘body’. Even though a construction with both the instrumental (*tan<sub>i</sub>vā*) and accusative (*tan<sub>i</sub>vām*) is not *per se* impossible, one of these two forms can readily be omitted. In particular, this utterance of Yama will still be perfectly grammatical and syntactically correct without the accusative form, as pointed out already by Arnold (1905: 102) and Geldner (1919: 102ff.). As noticed by Knobl (2007: 132), omitting this form would be the best solution (better than omitting *vā u*) to make the pāda a perfectly regular triṣṭubh: [\*]*ná vā u te tan<sub>i</sub>vā sám paṛcyām*.

Adding this ‘redundant’ form to pāda 13,<sup>16</sup> we arrive at the reconstruction \**tan<sub>i</sub>vām yabha*. Let me remind that, alongside the lexical meaning ‘body’, *tanū́-* is well-attested in the function of the reflexive pronoun (“self”) in the Ṛgveda (see, for instance, Kulikov 2007). Next to simple reflexive constructions of the type RV 3.1.1 ... *agne tan<sub>i</sub>vām juṣasva* “...O Agni, enjoy yourself!” (cf. German reflexive with *sich*, Russian with *себя* [sebja]), we also find heavy reflexive constructions (cf. German reflexive with *sich selbst*, Russian with *себя самого / саму* [sebja samogo/samu] etc.) with the adjective *svá-* ‘own’.

As I argued in Kulikov (2007: 1421–1422), simple reflexives are common with natural reflexive situations, such as ‘to wash (oneself)’ or ‘to dress (oneself)’, whilst heavy reflexive constructions are appropriate in the cases where the reflexive situation is rare or abnormal, as, for instance, with the verbs of speech (talking to oneself), cf.

16 Adding some words to pāda 13a in order to restore metrical regularity was mentioned, at least as a theoretical possibility, by Oldenberg in his early work (1888: 86): “...im ersten [Pāda] scheint gesagt zu sein: du bist ein Wicht, und nicht bist du das und das. Welches Wort dastand, ist natürlich nicht auszumachen”.

(RV 7.86.2a)

*utā sváyā tan<sub>v</sub>vā sám vade tát*

“And I discuss it with myself.”

Obviously, the verb of copulation *yabh* must instantiate this latter type, which makes a hypothetical heavy reflexive construction with *yabh* more than appropriate. Adding the accusative singular feminine form *svām* at the end of the pāda 13a, we obtain a good triṣṭubh:

*bató batāsi \*[tan<sub>v</sub>vam yabha svām]*

U – U – U , U U – U – –

Notice that the verb *yabh* does not occur in the text of the Ṛgveda, but is attested in the closely related Ṛgveda-Khilāni, exactly in this imperative form *yabha* (see, for instance, Hoffmann 1976: 570; Vigasin 2016: 114):

(RVKh. 5.22.9cd = AVŚ 20.136.11cd)

*imās tát asya gā rakṣa ' yábha mām addh<sub>i</sub>y +odanám*

“Protect these cows of his! Fuck me! Eat up the rice pap!”

Such attestations may at least indirectly corroborate reconstructing *yabha* with an accusative as a syntactic pattern that was well known to the speakers of this variety of Vedic. Given quite a scarce evidence available for Vedic sexual slang (but see Kulikov 2023), we can only speculate if this hypothetical Vedic construction (for understandable reasons, never attested in the Vedic corpus) could be used in the same situation as, for instance, Eng. (*go*) *fuck yourself*. Yet, parallels in other languages (e.g. French *va te faire enculé* and *va te faire foutre*, Portuguese *vá se foder*<sup>17</sup> or Moroccan Arabic *roḥ intāk*, cf. also Hindi *jā apnī marā!* (lit.) ‘go hit your [ass]’),<sup>18</sup> obviously independently arising due to similar lexicalizing processes,<sup>19</sup> seem to plead for this assumption.

17 See e.g. Dos Santos 2011: 10; Bannerjee 2022: 79–80.

18 I am thankful to Ashutosh Anand, Viktor Pallades, Yakov Testelests and Vera Tsukanova for their valuable clarifications and comments on the use of the relevant constructions in Arabic and Hindi.

19 See Ljung 2011: 72, 138–142 for a cross-linguistic perspective; see also Di Sabato & Cordisco 2010 and Heine 2023: 14, fn. 17.

The last issue to clarify about this difficult pāda is the syntactic status of the obscure word *bata*. The use of the vocative next to the nominative (*bató*) appears somewhat unusual. Here it will be in place to remind that the vocative can replace the nominative in some, relatively rare, cases, in particular, in the predicative function. Cf. the textbook example of a predicative vocative (see e.g. Delbrück 1888: 106):

(RV 6.31.1a)

*ábhūr éko rayipate rayīṅám*

“You alone have become the Lord of wealth.”

(lit. “you ... have become – o Lord of wealth!”)

A very similar construction, with the more usual nominative *rayipátī*, is attested at RV 2.9.4:

(RV 2.9.4c)

*tvám h<sub>i</sub>y ási rayipátī rayīṅám*

“because you are the Lord of wealth”

The obvious parallelism of these two constructions shows that the vocative in RV 6.31.1a must be of secondary character, functionally nearly identical with the nominative, with only minor added semantics. Specifically, in such uses the vocative noun, instead of the canonical vocative function (i.e. call, appeal), seems to emphasize the features or aspects of the referent (usually a deity): “you ... have become – o [what a magnificent!] Lord of wealth! ... ” (or the like).

Given the peculiar character of our text, it seems very likely that the vocative plays a similar role in our dialogue, adding still more emphasis to this highly emotional text. This opens the way to a new syntactic analysis of pāda a: both case forms of the substantive *batá-*, the nominative and the vocative, express the nominal part of the predicate, syntactically connected with the copula verb *as*. A tentative rendering of the passage might be then: “you are a jerk, oh what a jerk [you are]!”

To summarize, the invective pāda 13a, undoubtedly the climax of Yamī’s anger against Yama, can be tentatively restored and translated as follows:

*bató batāsi \*[tan<sub>i</sub>vām yabha svām]*

“You are a jerk, oh what a jerk [you are]! \*[(Go) fuck yourself!]”

#### 4. Concluding remarks

The dialogue hymn RV 10.10 furnishes extremely rich evidence for a study of several aspects of the cultural and social life of Vedic Indo-Aryans. Apart from being of key importance for reconstructing Vedic and, more generally, Indo-Iranian mythology, this text can be considered one of the main sources of information about the obscene vocabulary and sexual slang. Even though some fragments of the original text could undergo changes and censoring, I believe (perhaps, a bit too optimistically) that we are able to find traces of such editorial work and, subsequently, to uncover some elements of sexual slang, obscene words and insults, such as *vīcyā* (Kulikov 2023) or *batá-/\*vatá-*. The lack of attestations of such words in later texts may be due to their specific (sexual) register, causing their tabooing. An adequate understanding of this part of Vedic vocabulary can only be based on a systematic study of this lexical domain in Vedic and other ancient and archaic Indo-European languages, which still remains a desideratum.

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