TRANSLATING, TRANSLATIONS, TRANSLATORS FROM INDIA TO THE WEST

Edited by

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outside of India cannot be contested. Varāhamihira's errors and deficiencies in describing this material is most easily explained on the hypothesis that it was foreign to him also.

In my last example, in chapter XVII, which like the previous one is taken from Varāhamihira's summary of the *Vasiṣṭhasiddhānta*, the first two verses are based on the Babylonian period relation for Jupiter and the rest on a breakdown of that synodic period in a manner found in both Babylonian and Greek sources.

vicatustriṃśad dyuganaṃ (vivatustriṃśa dviguṇaṃ)
nāḍībhis tāvatībhir api ca guroḥ ||
hṛtvā navanavadahanair
udayā labdhāḥ sthi<tā> divasāḥ ||6||
udayanavāṃśān (udayaravāṃśa) dattvā
dineṣu ṣaḍvargasaṅguṇe hy udaye (°saṃguṇair udayaḥ) ||
ekanavāgnicchinne
padam (vadam) iti sāṣṭādaśaṃ śeṣam ||7||
dinaṣaṣṭy<ā>ṃśā dvādaśa
khakṛtair vedāḥ kṛtāśvibhir dvau ca ||
saptāṣṭakena vakrī
ṣaḍ bhāgāḥ (vargāḥ) ṣaṣṭitaḥ ṣaṭ ca ||12||
anuvakro 'śītyārkā<n>(anuvakrī śītyarkā)
dinārdhaśatena (dīnārdhamatena) nava<ca> tato 'stamitaḥ ||
sthitvāśvam ekamāsaṃ(sthitvā saikaṃ māsaṃ)
spuṭodayo dyvantye māsasya (sphuṭodayāṣṭātaraṃ māsamī [māsaṃ α]) ||13||

6. "For Jupiter subtract from the *ahargaṇa* 34 (days) and as many *nāḍī*-s and divide (the remainder by 399; the quotient is (the number of) its risings. The (remaining) days are put down."
7. "Add to (these) days $^1/_9$th (of a day for every) rising. Multiply the (number of) risings by 36 and divide (the product) by 391; (the remainder) is called the *pada*. Add 18 to the remainder.
12. "In 60 days (Jupiter) traverses 12°, in 40 (days) 4 (degrees), and in 24 (days) 2 (degrees); (it moves) retrograde 6° in 56 (days) and 6 (degrees) in 60 (days);"
13. "In direct motion (it goes) 12 (degrees) in 80 (days); 9 (degrees) in 50 days; then it sets; staying (set it travels) 7 (degrees) in one month; its accurate rising is on the last day of the month (i.e., the 29th)."

Philology, Literature, Translation

by
Sheldon Pollock

1. Like a number of the people in this room, I suspect, I have spent much of my life translating.[1] Of course I'm thinking about the common-sense notion of translating, what Jakobson calls "translation as such", and not Steiner's notion that would equate all forms of linguistic interpretation with "translation". I translated from Latin to English in school, from Dutch and French and German to English (and Latin to Dutch) as a student in a Belgian *athenäum*, from Greek and Latin and Sanskrit to English in college; and as a scholar, in the study and in the classroom, from Sanskrit (occasionally from Hindi, and more recently, in a very tentative way, from Old Kannada) to English, but most of all, from Sanskrit to English, day after day. The Sanskrit at issue has been above all *śāstra* -- *alaṃkāraśāstra* and the classical *darśanas*, especially *pūrvamīmāṃsā* -- and *kāvya*, both later courtly materials and that "first" of Sanskrit poems, the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*; on the last of these I worked for four or five years and translated material that amounts to something like an *Odyssey*. All that said, this is one of the very few times I've spoken in a public gathering about the activity that fills the space of my days, and I've written about it only once.[2]

In fact, though translation was an activity that evidently filled the lives of my teachers as well -- many of them at this institution, Daniel Ingalls, Zeph Stewart, Cedric Whitman, John Finley, Glen Bowersock, G. P. Gould, and others; some of them in India, M. V. Patwardhan, Pattabhirama Shastri, Balasubrahmanya Shastri, who translated into Marathi, Hindi, and Tamil respectively) -- they never talked much about it either, or, so far as I know, wrote much about it. And why this should be so it is worth pausing to consider.

Translation as a discrete problem has typically been addressed by philosophers concerned with the higher-order, theoretical issues translation raises; linguists (and increasingly scholars of cognitive science and artifical intelligence) concerned with the psychological or mechanical or technological possibilities of translation; and, finally, poets and would-be poets, whose active conceptualization of translation and its challenges is entirely different from the first two, being concerned as they are with solving precisely the problem, that of the aesthetic

[1] What follows is the text of a talk given at the symposium "Translating, Translations, Translators. From India to the West" (Harvard University, May 1994). Although adding footnotes and amplifications, I have tried to preserve something of the character of the original oral presentation.

[2] *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki, Vol. II: Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, Princeton, Princeton U. Press, 1986, pp. 74ff.

dimension, which the other two communities ignore, and thus with struggling to keep what is said to get lost in translation from getting lost. Although it underpins all their work, for historians and interpreters of political, social, cultural or literary formations linguistically different from their own, the problem of translation has long had the status of the proverbial family idiot in the attic: everyone knows he's there and impossible to deal with, but no one wants to acknowledge him or they won't be able to carry on with their daily business. And for this reason, too, translation is a problem that many of these scholars -- and here I include myself -- have come to view as intellectually barren: No one addressing translation ever has anything new to say that will improve translation as a practical activity, so unless we are interested in its philosophical, cognitive, or poetic dimensions, we might as well just forget it.

The worst case, of course, is when the philosophical pretends to impinge on practice. Years ago I had the privilege to attend a conference with George Steiner, whose landmark book, *After Babel*, had just been published. The entire panel of philosophers and theoreticians agreed that, yes, translation was really quite impossible. The fine translator from the Dutch, the late James Holmes, was there, and he looked at me, and I at him, in the secure knowledge that we were both going to go home and somehow do the impossible. Certainly for people who actually translate, translation as a metaphysical or even abstract aesthetic problem is banal, and I think that is why all my teachers -- who by in large were not philosophers, scientists, or poets -- ignored it to a man. For they knew then what I since learned: translation is as philosophically problematic, stylistically individual, and practically hard as life, and as we keep on living we keep on translating, with the inevitable singular imperfections that define being human.

2. What is not either theoretically or historically barren or banal is the history of translation regimes, both those in which we have come to operate in the modern academy, where a standard of linguistic truth in translation reigns, and earlier and possibly other regimes, especially those in which the texts were produced that scholars at this symposium are concerned with translating. The principal institutional location of most translation of premodern texts today is the university, and the forms of knowledge and protocols of discourse defined by the university have come to characterize academic translation. To some degree this is responsible for the non-experimental nature of such translation -- one cannot easily both be scholarly as well as aim to transform the English language through translation -- and the narrow reduction of possible translation regimes. Nothing like Pound's Propertius (probably happily) nor even Logue's more recent Homer (unfortunately) seems on the agenda of contemporary translators of Indian literary texts.

Both for the history of earlier translation regimes -- what it has variously meant in premodernity to transport a text from one language

into another -- and for another, non-banal question that relates to the history of translation viewed within the general history of the economies of cultural exchange, South Asia offers precious materials. Here we confront what is without question the most complex and historically densest network of multilingual literary cultures anywhere in the world -- and yet, it seems to me, virtually all of the crucial questions about the translational aspects of this network have never been unasked. Let me briefly catelog some of these questions and materials, however provisionally my ongoing work on historical cultural studies of premodern India allows me to do this.

One dimension of South Asian translation regimes I am tracking situates this activity within the general trade in cultural capital, where Sanskrit texts take their place along with other preciosities that India exported to the world. An instructive example here is offered by the legends concerning the translation of Sanskrit texts on statecraft into Persian. The following is recounted from *Kalila and Dimnah* (I summarize Keith Falconer's summary):

> Nūshīrvān, king of Persian, having heard that there exists in India a book containing every kind of instruction, directs his vizier to find a man acquainted with "Indian" and Persian. The vizier selects Barzōye, who had earlier traveled to India to extend his knowledge of medicine and chemistry. The latter receives the order to procure the book, which is supposed to be in the library of the king of India. Arriving in India, he meets with great difficulties, but at last obtains not only the book he is seeking but also other works of great value. Barzōye labors day and night translating the book into Persian, fearing lest the king of India may ask for it back. This done, he returns home. A large assembly is convened, and the book is read aloud. It is universally acclaimed.[3]

The romance of the tale shouldn't obscure its factuality: the *Pañcatantra,* which is the text at issue, was translated into Persian around the end of the Sassanian period. Comparable if more intense is the translation of mostly Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Chinese, certainly the most massive translation program in all antiquity. Filliozat calculated that nearly 1700 texts were translated over a period of nine centuries, amounting to something like 40 million Chinese characters. But the market in the West is strong, too, from the time of the Sassanian king if not earlier, where among other things we find translations of scientific and spiritual texts into Arabic and Persian (the *Yogasūtra* itself, for example, or the numerous versions of a mystical text called the

[3] Ion G. N. Keith-Falconer, *Kalīlah and Dimnah or the Fables of Bidpai*, reprint Amsterdam, Philo Press, 1970), pp. XXI-XXII.

Amṛtakuṇḍa).[4]

A second regime relates translation to strategies of (usually surreptitious) incorporation. It is striking that, with the exception of astronomical literature translated from the Greek, those Sanskrit texts that are translations from another language never seem to acknowledge themselves to be so; the translation itself is an appropriation whose name cannot be spoken. A celebrated instance here is the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, which as Friedhelm Hardy has shown, is partially translated from the verses of the Tamil devotional poets.[5] It is thus unsurprising that, unlike the world of Latin, for example, where a *translatio studii* took place not unlike what we find in the regional traditions of the subcontinent, there exists no Sanskrit or other Indian discourse on translation; in fact, there exist no common word for translation in any premodern Indic language. The IA term *anuvādayati* in this sense is modern; *parivatteti* appears occasionally in Pali texts (*Mahāvaṃsa* 37.175; 244),[6] and (so far as I have discovered) once in a Sanskrit text, Rājaśekhara's account of the type of plagiarizer (one among the *śabdārthaharaṇeṣu kaviprabhedāḥ*) by whom "a poem is converted from one language into another", *anyatamabhāṣānibaddhaṃ bhāṣāntareṇa parivartyate*. The example Rājaśekhara gives is a very close, if slightly expanded, Sanskrit version of a *gāthā* from the *Sattasaï*:

necchaï pāsāsaṃkī kāo diṇṇaṃ pi . . .
. . .-oggaliyavalayamajjhaṭṭhiaṃ piṇḍam||
dattam piṇḍaṃ . . .
pāśāśaṅkī galitavalayaṃ nainam āśnāti kākaḥ||

[Her fallen bracelet encircles the riceball, and the crow hesitates to eat, thinking there's a trap.][7]

But this phonological transformation hardly constitutes "translation"; somewhat further along the continuum, now in the case of scientific literature, is a work like the *Kavirājamārga*. This rhetorical treatise was produced at the court of Nṛpatuṅga Amoghavarṣa, king of the

[4] See Helmut Ritter (ed.), "Al-Bīrūni's Übersetzung des Yoga-sūtra des Patañjali", *Oriens* 9 (1956), pp. 165-200; Bruce B. Lawrence, "The Use of Hindu Religious Texts in al-Bīrūni's India with Special Reference to Patanjali's Yoga-Sutra", in *The Scholar and the Saint: Studies in Commemoration of Abu'l Rayhan al-Bīrūni and Jalal al-Din al-Rūmī*, ed. Peter J. Chelkowski, New York, New York University Press, 1975, pp. 29-48. The *Amṛtakuṇḍa* is currently being translated by Carl Ernst, to whom I owe these references.

[5] Friedhelm Hardy, *Viraha-bhakti*, Delhi, Oxford U. Press, 1983.

[6] References courtesy my colleague Steven Collins.

[7] *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*, ed. Dalal, Baroda 1934, pp. 66-67.

Rāṣṭrakūṭas at the end of the ninth century, by his court poet, Śrīvijaya. Its conceptual foundations, overall structure, rhetorical categories, definitions, and sometimes even exemplifications, are derived from the *Kāvyādarśa/Kāvyalakṣaṇa* of Daṇḍin (late seventh century; the work played a similar role in the later Sinhala, Tamil and Tibetan poetic traditions). Here is one example out of many, the illustrative verse for the figure *tattvāpahnavarūpaka* or *rūpakāpahnuti*:

naitan mukham idaṃ padmaṃ na netre bhramarāv imau |
etāni kesarāṇy eva naitā dantārciṣas tava || (Kāvyalakṣaṇa 2.94)
[This is not a face, it is a lotus, these are bees, not eyes,
these are filaments, not the gleaming of your teeth]

vadanam idaltaṃburuhaṃ madalōlavilōcanaṃgaḷ allam ivaḷigaḷ |
mudam allidu vikasanam eṃbidaniṃbene bagege
rūpakāpahnutiyaṃ || (Kavirājamārgam 3.24).[8]
["This is not a face, it is a lotus, these are bees, not eyes wild with lust,
and this not pleasure but a blossoming" -- an utterance of this sort is called "metaphorical denial"]

It is of course especially interesting and important to determine those areas where the vernacularizing cultural politics of a court like that of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas found it important to deviate from, while incorporating, the cosmopolitan discourse of Sanskrit. But that is another story.

Another regime, closely related to the former, understands translation as ennoblement or communicative enhancement (it's not always clear which obtains). Important examples here would be Sanskrit versions of Prakrit texts where the antecedent is fully acknowledged. In some instances, of course, these are just full-scale applications of the translational impulse found in the *chāyā*, the Sanskrit "shadow" that came to be attached to many Prakrit verses in medieval India. I am currently studying the history of this latter practice, and its communicative context is complex. In the early eleventh century, for example, Bhoja never provides *chāyā*-s for any of the numerous Prakrit quotations in the *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa*, whereas Kṣemendra, his Kashmiri contemporary, seems always to do so, as in *Aucityavicāracarcā*. And certainly it is "communicative enhancement" that governs the production of something like the Sanskrit version of Pravarasena's *Rāvaṇavaha* that was prepared by one Śivanārāyaṇadāsa "at the command of Rāmasiṃha, during the time of Jahangir." But something different seems to be going on in the case of Jaina texts: the *Harivaṃśapurāṇa*, exists both in a Sanskrit version of one Jinasena (A.D. 783) and in Apabhraṃśa versions by Svayaṃbhu and Puṣpadanta (tenth

[8] *Kāvyalakṣaṇa*, ed. Thakur, Darbhanga 1957; *Kavirājamārgam*, ed. Krishnamoorthy, Bangalore 1983.

century), though their relationships need to be established. But, to take another genre of text, the Jaina cosmographical work, the *Lokavibhāga*, exists now in a Sanskrit translation of a Prakrit original, dated to A.D. 458, that has long been lost (no doubt as a result of the existence of a Sanskrit version). One set of texts I am currently examining is the splendid eighth-century tale, the *Kuvalayamālā* of Uddyotanasūri, along with its (probably thirteenth century) Sanskrit version, the *Kuvalayamālākathā* of Ratnaprabhasūri, who says in his introduction,

> *dākṣiṇyacihnamunipena vinirmitā yā prāk prākṛtā*
> *vibudhamānasarājahaṃsī |*
> *tāṃ saṃskṛtena vacasā racayāmi caṃpūṃ sadyaḥ prasadya*
> *sudhiyaḥ pravilokayantu ||* (1.10)
>
> [The Prakrit *campū* -- a royal goose upon the Mānasa lake that is wise readers --
> made long ago by the great sage renowned for goodliness, I have rewritten in Sanskrit: may the learned but deign to glance at it.]

Ratnaprabha abbreviates, adapts, epitomizes, reworks, reproduces -- in fact, employs a wide variety of strategies for turning Uddyotana into Sanskrit, and thereby offers a whole trove of material for cultural theorization on the basis of the actual modalities of literary translation into South Asian languages.[9]

This fourth regime, that of modalities, in fact requires new and sensitive historical and cultural-theoretical reconstruction. What seems to be the dominant form of post-Enlightenment translation in the West, mimetic or word-for-word translation, is often said not to appear in India. We've already seen that, to some degree, this is not so; Sanskrit *alaṃkāra* works are translated into regional languages often with great exactitude, as are Prakrit texts into Sanskrit (or, earlier, and far rarer, Greek scientific works). Yet the distance between source and target language in these instances was often short, and the mode of translation -- as in the case of the Kannada rhetorical treatise -- often meant not the invention of a new *deśi* idiom but a new dialect, one of the many kinds of '*maṇipravāla*' that used *deśi* morphology and Sanskrit lexemes. New self-aware forms of translation scholarship do seem, however, to develop under new cultural conditions. During the time of the Sultanate, the court of Zain ul Ābidīn and his immediate successors in Kashmir witnessed a striking two-way cultural flow and new translational practices. I am trying now to piece together the cultural project of this court, one of whose driving forces on the Sanskrit side was the historiographer, anthologist, and savant, Śrīvara, who styled himself *yavanabhāṣāpāraṅgama* (expert in Persian). Sometime at the end of the

[9] *Kuvalayamālākathā*, ed. Upadhye, Bombay 1970. See also the editor's introduction, pp. 92ff.

fifteenth century -- indeed, it must have been very soon after the original was composed (A.D. 1484) -- he partially translated, sometimes word-for-word, and partially adapted Jami's *Yusuf va Zulaikha* (or *Yosobhajolekhā*, as Śrīvara calls it) under the title *Kathākautukam*.[10] In the Mughal period the norms that were meant to prevail are most vividly captured in Badāonī's account of the Persian translations of Sanskrit texts he helped to prepare at the court of Akbar: "A hundred *juz*" of the Persian translation of the *Mahābhārata*, for example, were "closely written, so exactly rendered, that even the accidental dirt of flies on the original was not left out."[11] The resulting text, called *Razm nāma*, represents, as Badāonī himself reports, the conversion of a "rough translation into elegant prose and verse," which was then compared "word for word with the original." How precisely the Persian stands in relation to the Sanskrit remains to be examined.

As for **exact** translation of Sanskrit **poetry** into South Asian **regional languages**, this does not appear to be a practice that captures wide cultural interest perhaps until British colonialism arrives. Providing texts for classroom use in modernizing educational institutions was one stimulus (and the texts were the predictable primers, *Hitopadeśa*, etc.). But also, and unparadoxically, with the rise of modernizing literary movements under the sign of colonialism and English education, poets sought to make their intellectual revolution -- to enhance the prestige of their languages, to reconfigure their literary history as part of their new national history -- by conjuring up the spirits of the poets of the past by means of *bhāṣā* translations of Sanskrit literature. The mid-nineteenth century saw the first Bengali translations of key Sanskrit dramas such as *Ratnāvalī* (1849) and *Śakuntalā* (1854), while later in the century, the same Hindi translator who first translated Shakespeare was the first to translate *Mṛcchakaṭika* and *Uttararāmacarita*.[12] Again, the procedures, standards, and purposes of these translations await detailed study.

A very different regime of literary "translation" was in place prior to these developments. All regional language "epic" poems, for example -- starting with Pampa's *Bhārata* (*Vikramārjunavijaya*) in the tenth century

[10] See Richard Schmidt, *Das Kathākautukam des Çrīvara, verglichen mit Dschāmī's Jusuf und Zuleikha*, Kiel, C. F. Haeseler, 1893; *Śrīvara's Kathākautukam*, Kiel, C. G. Haeseler, 1898.

[11] *Ain i Akbari*, trans. H. Blochmann, Calcutta, Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1927, pp. 110ff, p. 111. fn. 2; *Muntakhab-Ut-Tawarikh*, trans. W. H. Lowe, Calcutta, Baptist Mission Press, 1884, Vol. 2, pp. 330; 366, and cf. 278, 302.

[12] Sisir Kumar Das, *A History of Indian Literature, Volume VIII: 1800-1910, Western Impact, Indian Response*, Delhi, Sahitya Akademi, 1991, p. 108; Harish Trivedi, "Reading English, Writing Hindi: English Literature and Indian Creative Writing", in Svati Joshi, ed., *Rethinking English: Essays in Literature, Language, History*, New Delhi, Trianka, 1991, pp. 191-92 (discussing the Hindi translator Lala Sitaram).

-- are of course far more justly to be styled retellings than translations in any sense (though a writer like Pampa knew his Vyāsa intimately). Indeed, one even might think there was some stricture on strictly "translating" such texts, if one is to believe such verses as the following:

> *aṣṭādaśa purāṇāni rāmasya caritāni ca |*
> *bhāṣāyāṃ mānavaḥ śrutvā rauravaṃ narakaṃ vrajet ||*
>
> (Whoever listens to the eighteen *purāṇas* or the *Rāmāyaṇa* in vernacular language will go to hell).[13]

At all events, exact translation of literary texts does seem to be either unknown or irrelevant to the cultural history of much of South Asia before colonialism. This applies to *laukika* texts, too. Here Sanskrit poetry provided important models and paradigms, no doubt, as is witnessed by such works as the *Andhrakumārasaṃbhava* or the *Karnāṭakakādambarī*, but these were typically not imitative translations. Counterexamples can be found, however; Janna's Jaina romance in Kannada, the *Yaśodharacarita*, adopted in 1209 from the tenth-century Sanskrit text of Vādirāja, uses as wide a variety of appropriation stategies as Ratnaprabha, including translation "as such."[14]

A final regime of translation would situate the practice squarely in the domain of power. This is perhaps more evident under western colonialism than for earlier periods. Vincente Rafael's recent study of Bible translation and conversion in Tagalog society under Spanish rule, shows well how this regime operates.[15] Rather more tentative have been studies of literary translation and imperialism in terms of Orientalist and neocolonial constructions of India.[16] And we have just begun to explore translation and contemporary politics movements in India. A striking case here is the recent Sanskrit translation of Tulsi *Rāmāyaṇa*, a text that sought originally to open up a vernacular space for the Rāma tale and

[13] The verse is cited by Bhabatosh Datta in V. Raghavan, ed., *The Rāmāyaṇa Tradition in Asia*, New Delhi, Sahitya Akademi, 1980, p. 548.

[14] T. R. S. Sarma, trans. *Janna, Tale of the Glory-Bearer*, New Delhi, Penguin Books, 1994, p. XII.

[15] Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism*, Durham and London, Duke U. Press, 1993. This also provides a useful historical and real-world context for one of the more important theorizations -- if socially disembodied theorization -- of translation, that offered by Eugene Nida (developed under the auspicies of the Bible Translation Society). Cf., for example, *Toward a Science of Translating*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1964.

[16] Dorothy Figueira, *Translating the Orient*, Albany, SUNY, 1991; see my comments in *Journal of Asian Studies* 1992, pp. 419ff; Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation*, Berkeley, U. of California Press, 1992.

explicitly rejected Sanskrit. Outside these instances of modernity we need to know what translation and power meant in the cultural politics of premodernity, and how translation mediated the great contests between cosmopolitan and regional cultural-political formations. We need to consider as well what does **not** get translated. It is a fact worth pondering that in the three-hundred year presence of the Greeks in Bactria and India, we can point to virtually no **literary** communication via translation. As Peter Green put the case more generally, "Of genuine literary interpenetration between Greek and other cultures there is virtually no trace. For one thing, literary translations -- as opposed to those of medical, mathematical, astronomical, or similar practical treatises -- seem to have been nonexistent, a sure sign of esthetic indifference."[17] This may be, I suspect is, overstated for India,[18] but there are important cultural-political limits to translatability. We don't quite understand these limits yet, nor what it is precisely that such incommunication was communicating.

3. It is probably fatuous to think that earlier or alternative forms of translation especially as these were developed in India can or should affect contemporary practices of translating Indian texts. What we were called here to addressed -- which, I take it, is translation as practical activity, as craft or skill -- seems in the contemporary academy, as I said, to be largely impervious to theoretical or historical intervention. This is not to say that craft or skill is not theory-drenched (and historically constituted), too; but much of the theory embedded in the skill of translation -- the ideology of canon, for instance, that makes the translator choose a given work for translation (or, as others would have it, whose very choice creates canonicity), or notions of linguistic meaning -- is not specific to or helpful for translation. When, for example, in his discussion of translation Derrida wants to explode the notion of a "transportable univocality" in the source text or target language and thereby the possibility of any transparent representation, the practical translator hears the useless chattering of one who never translates.

But if theoretical abstraction is irrelevant to translation, reflection on the practice is not empty, for translation can be done better or worse. I don't mean by this to imply that translation has a very interesting **independent** history **as a skill** -- at least it doesn't when two closely related cultural conditions are satisfied: first, when the source language is equal in cultural prestige to the target language, and second, when it is not normally accessible to speakers of the target language. When

[17] Peter Green, *Alexander to Actium*, Berkeley, U. of California Press, 1990, p. 316.

[18] At least I try to argue this in "Literary History, Indian History, World History," forthcoming in *Social Scientist*.

differential prestige between languages is present translation has additional tasks to perform that makes its history very interesting indeed (as in the "vertical translation" environment that marks the early history of Latin literary culture, or Kannada);[19] as it does when the source language is fully accessible to speakers of the target language, for bilingual intellectuals translate not so much in order to communicate through translation as to make metadiscursive statements, for example, that the target language possesses the expressivity of the source language, or indeed, that the language exists as such as an independent communicative instrument.

That translation over the past four or five centuries does not have a very interesting independent history as a skill makes it quite unlike, say, the history of European (or middle-period Indian) painting, which could be described as a history of progress: a history of the conquest of visual appearances, something at which artists got better and better. As Arthur Danto puts it, "Painterly success up to Rousseau's time consisted in presenting the eye with an array of stimuli as identical as possible to those with which the real world would present it. The strategies for achieving this took a very long time to discover, as Ernst Gombrich has tirelessly demonstrated. . .".[20] (Of course, one could write a history of painting not as a history of development toward adequacy, but of changes in sensibilities of what "adequacy" is, as post-realist art shows, though this was possible, perhaps, only after the conquest of appearances had been achieved.)

In its history as a skill translation is more like the history of literature, which is not a history of "the systematic conquest of the appearance of things" and therefore not describable as a history of progress. Quite the contrary, in literary history, traditions typically celebrate the perfection of origins -- Homer and Vālmīki, Dante and Pampa -- whereas all later poetry in the tradition is thought to mark something of a decline. These may, of course, in some cases only be putative origins, but there is an undeniable if undefinable cultural power in such "first" works. So in the history of translation: readers typically find Golding's Elizabethan version of Ovid, like the King James Bible, far more powerful than any more recent version.

Where the history of translation (as product) differs from that of literature and indeed does describe a history of "conquest" is in its aspect as 'philology', which I would define as the disciplined historicization of textual knowledge. This is something that can improve, and so, in its philological aspect, can translation.

What this all means, I think (and here may be the reason my teachers

[19] The distinction between vertical and horizontal that captures two different relations of cultural power is made by Gianfranco Folena, "'Volgarizzare' e 'tradurre'", in *La traduzione: saggi e studi*, Trieste, Lint, 1973.

[20] Arthur Danto, *State of the Art*, New York, Prentice Hall, 1987, p. 70.

and I rarely talk about translation as such) is that in those aspects that permit us to do anything historically important about it -- to do a more knowledgeable piece of work than our predecessors, so that we might come to describe translation as a history of progress -- translation is only a subset of philology, whereas it is more properly a subset of literature in those aspects that, for the most part, do not so permit us. If we want to think of it as a teachable skill and provide rules of action, as I proceed now to do, we have to keep in mind that there is little specific to translation as such in all this, distinct from, on the one hand, doing philology or, on the other, making literature.

4. In a narrower sense, there are features specific to Sanskrit poetry -- the topic I was asked to address in this talk -- that make understanding and translating it an activity subject to specific constraints, where conscious reflection and modest conceptualization do have some role to play. These constraints inform the principles -- very humble and often self-evident principles -- that I want to enunciate in the time remaining to me.

One of the most important of these constraints is philological respect for the long history of reading in South Asia itself, and the tradition of exegesis and appreciation it comprises. Respect for this history generates my first set of principles, primary among which is the following: **Medieval Indian readers (as concretized in their commentaries) can know more about their culture than we**, and must therefore be listened to. (This is not always-and-everywhere the case; few classicists would, I think, make similar claims for the Hellenistic commentaries on Homer.) These readers can be very far removed in time from the *mūla* text, and still have important contributions to make to our understanding. One small example: in the second book of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Kausalyā says to her son,

> *daśa sapta ca varṣāṇi tava jātasya rāghava |*
> *atītāni prakāṅkṣantyā mayā duḥkhaparikṣayam* || (2.17.26)
>
> The ten years and seven since you were born, Rāghava, I have passed yearning to put an end to my sorrow.[21]

I have no doubt that the late medieval south Indian commentators on this passage are correct -- however *recherché* their view may strike us -- and that "born" here is used in the pregnant sense of "reborn, i.e., at the *upanayana* ceremony", which for *kṣatriya* boys takes place in their eight year. Rāma is thus twenty-five years old, and this is corroborated in other passages, which considered together make us realize that a certain argument in the narrative of the poem depends upon our appreciating a

[21] All translations from the *Rāmāyaṇa* are from my volumes (Princeton U. Press, 1986, 1991).

signfication recovered for us by the southern commentators.

It is worth noting that the NE tradition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Nepal and Bengal) somehow lost this interpretation, and sought ineptly to revise the text in other passages that correctly identify the hero's age (see my notes on 2.17.26 and 3.45.4). And this suggests to me a second principle of translation: **Medieval Indian readers can know less about their culture than we**, and therefore must be critically interrogated. (I am not unaware that such a principle, thus formulated, raises important issues in philosophical hermeneutics pertaining to the meaning of 'meaning', but these I ignore for now.) In the third book of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāvaṇa abducts Sītā and flies up with her into the clouds:

sā hemavarṇā nīlāṅgaṃ maithilī rākṣasādhipam |
śuśubhe kāñcanī kāñcī nīlaṃ maṇim ivāśritā || (3.50.21)

"Maithilī was golden skinned, the *rākṣasa* deep blue-black,
and folded within his arms she looked like the star that glitters
from within a sapphire."

The entire *Rāmāyaṇa* exegetical tradition has lost the meaning of the word *kāñcī* -- all extant commentaries and Sanskrit lexica take the word in its usual sense of "jeweled belt", which makes no sense whatever in the context. We can only recover the real meaning from the *Dhātupāṭha* on *kaci/kāci*, "*dīptibandhayoḥ*" (faintly remembered in the D1 variant *lekhā*).

Who "we" are ("Medieval Indian readers can know less . . . than **we**") brings me to another principle that lies somewhere between respect for past reading and trust in contemporary reading. It was the editor of classical texts, M. L. West -- breathing the spirit of Housman -- who remarked that editors cannot be trusted, and critical apparatuses are provided so that readers will not have to trust them. Here is an example of a passage that both the tradition and "we," meaning the editor of the critical edition, both failed to understand (I have discussed this elsewhere): the text is 2.63.4, as it is printed in the critical edition:

vādayanti tathā śāntiṃ lāsayanty api cāpare |
nāṭakāny apare prāhur hāsyāni vividhāni ca ||

crit. app. ad loc.: [a]) . . . D4.5.7 *gāṃti* (sic) . . . For 4^{ab}, Śl, Ñ2 Vl B D1-2.6 M4 subst.:
1594* *avādayañ jaguś cānye nanṛtur jahasus tadā*

My note ad loc.: "The reading of the crit. ed. *śāntim*, has no syntactical relationship here. The commentators are forced to understand with it *uddiśya* ('in order to pacify him')... The correct reading, *gānti*, is preserved in D4,5,7. This was apparently misunderstood by the editor to be a corruption [expect *gāyanti*], but we now know that the form is part of the epic dialect: in *MBh*. 5.107.9c *gānti* is correctly restored by the crit. ed." (and elsewhere in *MBh*). "It is, moreover, confirmed by the gloss in the NR, *jagus* (1594*). Note also the common collocation of singing, dancing, and playing music . . . as for example in 1.31.11, 2.85.33." Without knowing, and critically weighing, India's knowledges as well as modern scholarship, and striving for that right mix of humility and independence toward both, translation of Sanskrit poetry must fail.

My second set of principles moves beyond the philological and concerns the literary, and more generally cultural, aspects of literary translation. Here I feel far less secure in formulating even my banal imperatives, for there is a highly pragmatic dimension to the literary. As Richard Rorty might put it, literary translation can effectively be done in as many ways as there are purposes to be served, and be "evaluated according to their efficacy as instruments for purposes".[22] Also determinative to some extent are audience and venue -- Princeton University Press as opposed, say, to Bantam books -- and expected longevity -- there is a new version of the *Gītā* every couple years (though still no one has gotten it quite right), whereas the critical edition of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, if for no other reason than its mass, will not be translated again into English in our lifetime. Thus readership and intended shelf-life have got to effect our aesthetic choices, and I therefore hear the qualifications of my principles even before I articulate them, but let me proceed nonetheless.

One of my literary-cultural principles is that, in Sanskrit poetry, **form is a value in itself**, and translation that fails to communicate this value fails as translation. Form bears, in fact, a certain content, a kind of meaning. The syntactically self-sufficient verse in which all of Sanskrit poetry is composed (retaining independence even in larger structures like *yamakas* and *kulakas*) is the rhythm of thought and narration, and cannot be collapsed without an almost semantic loss. Furthermore, the strictures especially on Sanskrit "lyric" verse, which is among the most highly conditioned verse forms in the world in view of the double constraint of syllabic count and quantitative weight, generate a substantial portion of the aesthetic impact of the poetry. What is important here is not only the patterns of expectation produced by the seriality and syntactic isolation of the verses, but by the achievement of expression within a self-imposed set of limitations. To open up or relax this form in the target language is to diminish the Sanskrit poet's victory.

Of course, here endless debate arises, for me best encapsulated in Robert Grave's (I think) remark that he always would prefer a live sparrow to a dead eagle. The force of this came home to me very perceptibly several years ago when I was editing the early and middle-period South Asian materials for the *Harper Collins World Reader*. The

22 Richard Rorty, "The Pragmatist's Progress," in Stefan Collini, ed., *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, Cambridge, Eng., Cambridge U. Press, 1992, p. 92.

English translations of Sanskrit poetry I find formally most faithless -- W. S. Merwin's -- were the biggest hit with the "focus-group" readers, whereas Daniel Ingalls's Victorian formalism, far closer to the Sanskrit though it was, fell flat. We're back to "purposes to be served," of course, and to the really quite futile discussions of beauty and fidelity that give translation discourse a bad name.

I should say, to set the record straight, that the decision to put the Princeton *Rāmāyaṇa* into prose, with which I didn't wholly agree, was dictated more by such considerations as the translators' own sense of their literary qualifications, their notion of the historicity of genres or the obsolescence of verse in the contemporary American literature. One could argue that the verse epic is long dead and to translate *Vālmīki* into poetry is to fail to understand that the prose novel is its contemporary formal equivalent. One could, on the other hand, point to Fitzgerald, Mandelbaum, Fagles, Pinsky, all translators of western "epics", for substantial counterevidence. When I was asked to translate the "Ajavilāpa", the eighth *sarga* of Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśa*, for an anthology of poetry to be published by the Sahitya Akademi, I did try to honor this principle of form, not by anything so mechanical as a reproduction of the *vaitālīya ardhasamavṛtta* quatrain of the original, but by means of a loose three-line pentameter (a form that shows such vivacity in Derek Wolcott's recent "epic", *Omeros*):

Aja mourns:

"Strength is gone, joy vanished, music silenced,
springtime is dead, adornment has lost its charm,
and my bed is now forever empty.

"Wife, adviser, friend, and favorite pupil
in the secret arts of love -- when pitiless death
took you from me, what, tell me, did he leave?
. . . .

"Perhaps still king, but hereby ends all joy
for Aja, nothing can ever move me again,
for all that gave pleasure was all to do with you."

And his *guru* consoles him:

"Death is the natural state, the wise concur,
and life an accident -- to draw a single
breath upon this earth is great good fortune.

"A lover's death is an arrow piercing the heart
for the ignorant man; for the wise, an arrow
extracted, an open door to highest bliss.

"When the very body and soul are joined only
to be unjoined in an instant, should the wise
suffer pain at the loss of fortuitous things?"[23]

By "form" I of course mean verse form; it is altogether misguided to view Sanskrit syntax as a formal value and to strive for its systematic reproduction in the target language. Syntax does not have formal value in Sanskrit poetry except when subject to serious dislocation (extreme instances of what Sanskrit critics call *bhinnakramatā*), and for those instances appropriate devices have to be found. Here's an example: Near the end of book 2 of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāma's mother and other family members set out, broken-hearted, to visit Rāma, Sītā, and Lakṣmaṇa in exile. This is her first sight of where they have made their home:

a B a b
idaṃ teṣām anāthānāṃ kliṣṭam akliṣṭakarmaṇāṃ |
A b
vane prāk kevalaṃ tīrthaṃ ye te nirviṣayīkṛtāḥ || (2.96.4)

"This must be where they come to bathe -- poor children. It has recently been disturbed by them, whom nothing had ever disturbed before. Once it was deserted, off here in the forest but they have been driven from their country!"

This complex kind of syntactical interlacement (schematically: a B a b A b) is something Vālmīki typically deploys at moments of high drama (see also the example in 3.50.21 cited earlier), and we must find some way to communicate the semantics of this syntax. Less easy was it for me to suggest in English the insistent contrapuntal, contrastive syntax in the following verses of Vālmīki:

sumukhaṃ durmukhī rāmaṃ vṛttamadhyaṃ mahodarī |
viśālākṣaṃ virūpākṣī sukeśaṃ tāmramūrdhajā ||
priyarūpaṃ virūpā sā susvaraṃ bhairavasvanā |
taruṇaṃ dāruṇā vṛddhā dakṣiṇaṃ vāmabhāṣiṇī ||
nyāyavṛttaṃ sudurvṛttā priyam apriyadarśanā |
śarīrajasamāviṣṭā rākṣasī rāmam abravīt || (3.16.8-10)

Rāma was handsome, the *rākṣasa* woman was ugly, he was shapely and slim of waist, she misshapen and potbellied; his eyes were large, hers were beady, his hair was jet black, and hers the color of copper; he always said just the right thing and in a sweet voice, her words were sinister and her voice struck terror;
he was young, attractive, and well mannered, she ill mannered,

[23] Forthcoming in T. R. S. Sharma *et al.*, eds., *Anthology of Ancient Literature*, New Delhi, Sahitya Akademi.

repellent, an old hag. And yet, the god of love, who comes to life in our bodies, had taken possession of her, and so she addressed Rāma. . . .

If form and occasionally syntax present the contemporary translator of Sanskrit with challenges, there are other circumstances that, although the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* itself does not present me with materials to demonstrate this, render translating Sanskrit poetry impossible. A good deal of this poetry is in fact an exploration of the very potentialities and capacities of the Sanskrit language; language itself becomes the subject of poetry, and the very proliferation of possible meanings in language becomes the principal meaning of the poetry. This impulse should not be seen, as it has always been seen, as a debility or a sign of "decadence" of later Sanskrit poetry. On the contrary, it is present at virtually the inauguration of the literature, in Aśvaghoṣa, for example (I'm thinking of such features as the poetry of grammatical forms in the second chapter of *Saundarananda*); it is found in moderate dimensions in Kālidāsa (for instance, in the *yamakas* of the ninth chapter of the *Raghuvaṃśa*), intensifies in Bhāravi and Māgha (as in the celebrated *ekākṣara* verse of *Kirātārjunīya* 15.14, *na nonanunno nunnono nānā nānānanā nanu*, etc.), and reaches its apogee in the *dvisaṃdhāna* tradition -- which tells two stories simultaneously -- an old tradition that begins at the latest with Daṇḍin and achieves perfection in the great (and unjustly undervalued) work of Kavirāja, the *Rāghavapāṇḍavīya* (ca. 1190). This poetry, which for the translator constitutes the very horizon, the aporia, of translatability, is one of the great triumphs of Sanskrit, a stunning affirmation of its unfungibility with any other language in the world.

In the realm of "purposes to be served," it is very much worth keeping in mind that an important, perhaps basic and unifying, purpose all translation of Sanskrit poetry shares -- why in fact we would want to read Sanskrit poetry in translation at all -- is precisely that it is a version of **Sanskrit** poetry, and **not** American or English poetry. If translation transplants, nativizes, domesticates totally, why bother with it? For in that case a (potentially) radically different historical literary imagination and cultural project will have disappeared without trace, and we will have gotten nothing from the experience of reading Sanskrit poetry except the false idea that it is exactly like W. S. Merwin's poetry (where the comment the eighteenth-century classicist, Richard Bentley, is said to have made about Pope's Homer in heroic couplets -- "that it was a very pretty poem, but that he must not call it Homer" -- finds just reapplication). Whether or not my late colleague A. K. Ramanujan was reproducing "a nineteenth-century native response to colonialism," I do think Tejaswini Niranjana has a point when she argues that his translations of the *vacanas*, "try to show how [these medieval Kannada texts] are always already . . . 'modernist' and therefore worthy of the West's attention."[24]

Let me emphasize, in conclusion, this real and important difference regarding **difference** in translating ancient Sanskrit poetry (as compared with translating, say, contemporary French or German poetry in the contemporary global ecumene), and repeat that it raises difficulties for which I have no simple answers. One of these is how to resist homogenization, to preserve difference and effectively defamiliarize the reader without at the same time "reproducing the Orient" as a failed, deformed, or ridiculous shadow of the West. Another is that this sort of ethnographic *Verfremdung* and aesthetic pleasure are often -- in practice, not by metaphysical necessity -- contradictory values. In order to address this second difficulty, the trick is to find the right compromise, and that is something I don't think can be reduced to rules, but rather consists in those countless micro-adjustments where philology and poetry push each other to their limits. To address the first, a new political-cultural value -- openness to heterogeneity -- is required. But of course in the production of this, through an unending dialectic, translation itself plays a crucial role.

24 *Siting Translation*, p. 180.