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The Self-Destruction of the Translator: The Value of Literal Translation in Sanskrit Poetry

In the field of translation of foreign languages, translators often do not transmit the original text, but rather reinterpret it, leaving the reader with an unclear concept as to the workings of the original language and text; this is an especially important issue when it comes to the translations of literary works. Pure translation, fundamentally, is an impossible task, but when it comes to poetry, the choices of a translator are especially difficult. If the translator is attempting to convey a finished product that approaches the original as nearly as possible (as opposed to purposely deviating from the text in order to consciously create a new literature), he or she should attempt to be loyal to the original language and text as strictly as possible.

In this paper, I show the importance in literal (yet still readable) translations of poetry, focusing on a certain Sanskrit verse. Arguing for the philological basis of loyally adhering to a text and expanding Roland Barthes' ideas about the death of the author into the role of the translator, I argue that the reader should be able to have the freedom to read a text without the imprint of an overly-literary translator. The translator should be the guide, the conduit, between the original foreign text and the finished, re-worked product, so that the final reader may be able to get a glimpse of the paradigm from which the first text originated.