

This is a difficult book which, along with some frustrations, offers many challenging and rewarding moments. One wishes that so complex an argument had been expressed in a less convoluted style.

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Poems to the Child-God: Structures and Strategies in the Poetry of Sūrdās. By KENNETH E. BRYANT. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978. xvi, 247 pp. Glossary, Bibliography, Index. \$12.50.

Sūrdās was, according to legend, a blind Krishna-devotee and poet of sixteenth century Vṛndāvan, and has long been considered one of the chief literary figures of medieval Hindi. It is therefore surprising that this is the first comprehensive English study of the poet and his work. Sūrdās has found an eloquent spokesman in Professor Bryant, whose work demonstrates that Hindi literary criticism can reach a level of sophistication hitherto seen chiefly in studies of classical Sanskrit, and among the modern languages, of Bengali and Tamil.

Bryant quickly disposes of the topics that often obsess Hindi scholarship on Sūrdās: the historical character, biography, later hagiography, his Hindu or Muslim origins, and his connection with the sect of Vallabhacārya. For him "Sūr" is a tradition, the key to a "climate of opinion." Such an interpretation (I believe a correct one) allows him to trim away such extraneous considerations in order to examine the poems of that tradition (the *Sūrsāgar*) themselves.

The author begins his work with a general introduction which presents a compact overview of the poet's life and times, the mythology of Krishna, the revival of Mathura in the sixteenth century and its Bengali associations, and a comparison of Krishna and Rāma devotionalism. Generalizations are always difficult, but Bryant handles them well. He does suggest here and elsewhere (p. 103), however, that the Krishna-bhakti poets dealt exclusively with the figure of the god as child and cowherd:

While the martial exploits of other gods captured the popular imagination, Kṛṣṇa's did not. The poets of Sūr's time all but ignored Kṛṣṇa's dealing with Kaṁsa, as well as the episodes of his later life in Dwārakā, treating these rather as a frame, almost an excuse, for that part of Kṛṣṇa's life which most singularly defined his character: his exile among the cowherds. (p. 11)

Although this is true for poets of Brajbhāṣā and the Bengali lyricism that influenced them, it excludes the major Krishna devotional expression of at least Rajasthan and Gujarat, where the epic dimensions of the heroic Krishna and his wife Rukmiṇī served as major inspiration for poets of the medieval period.

The work following the introduction is divided into two parts which, to his credit, offer something for both the general reader and the scholar. Part Two comprises a broad sampling of translations (many for the first time in English) from the *Sūrsāgar*, "intended to present a cross-section of Sūr's work," but "weighted rather heavily towards poems on the child Krishna" (p. xi). Bryant informs us that he has attempted to strike a compromise between the literal and the impressionistic in translation. And here he does an admirable job, rendering Sūr's lyrics into modern, often colloquial English. At times it seems almost too colloquial: "Gopāl does love that flute, sisters!" (p. 198), with vague suggestions of the exclusiveness

of, say, black English. Often, however, there are verses of which Sūr himself would have approved: "What is this Braj but a pond to play in?/ I will worship Nanda's son,/ and know a fuller joy" (p. 201). For scholars who wish to refer to the original, Bryant carefully cites the sources in his appended "Notes." In addition, he introduces each translation section with a summary of the pertinent Krishna mythology and attaches a useful glossary of terms.

In Part One Bryant offers fresh approaches to the study of Sūr's poetry, often taking issue with the bias and methodology of Hindi scholars. His own methodology, essentially formalist in approach, is of special interest to scholars of Indian literature. Its major assumption is that Sūr's strategy is an attempt to draw his audience into a continual participation in Krishna's *līlā*:

His intention was rather to enable his audience to participate in the *Kṛṣṇa-līlā*, by leading them through an experience paralleling that of the characters in the *līlā* itself. It is this audience experience, this "meta-*līlā*," that I have called the *Sūr-līlā*: for just as Kṛṣṇa creates a universe for his own sport, and puts his created characters through their paces, so does Sūr manipulate his audience in a parallel universe of poetry. (p. 23)

It is thus the poet's responsibility to somehow recreate and make new a world with which the omniscient audience is already totally familiar. To examine this strategy the author concentrates on a set of Sūr's poems he terms the "epiphanies": "poems in which the divine facet of Kṛṣṇa's dual nature is revealed *against the background of the human*" (p. 24). They are thus poems of ironic contrast, the eternal paradox of man-child and god in one form—hence the book's title.

Bryant leads his audience through chapters of cogent and careful analysis of Sūr's technique (narrative, structural framework, figures of speech, and prosody), illustrated with detailed attention to individual poems. Drawing upon the work of Western critics and comparativists, he convincingly demonstrates that the sophistication of Western critical analysis can be successfully applied to a non-Western literature. Employing the technique of Barbara Herrnstein Smith's *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), for instance, Bryant devotes much of his chapter "The Verbal Icon" to showing how "the commonplace and the cosmic . . . are isolated within the confines of some structural frame; correspondences are fixed between elements of the child's temporal world and the atemporal universe of Viṣṇu" (pp. 74–75). In the same chapter, however, he observes that "such poems present in effect a three-part 'argument': thesis; examples; summation. The structure is seen most clearly in those poems that are explicitly polemical" (pp. 92–93). The omission of Louis Lohr Martz's *The Poetry of Meditation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962) is odd, since that author's observations of the influence of meditation techniques on the structure of European Catholic poetry, such as Robert Southwell's poems on the child Jesus, could only have helped to strengthen his own arguments.

Bryant does not claim that his methodological approach is the "last word" on the subject. Scholars of medieval Hindi literature should take to heart his closing observations (p. 133): Western categories of literary analysis can go only so far in our understanding of medieval literature. An important facet of the poetry of Sūrdās still to be investigated is its function in the Vallabhite ritual, which is the method of arrangement in one of Bryant's major sources, the *Sūrsāgar* edited by the late Jawaharlal Caturvedi. Literary critics and historians, folklorists, anthropologists, and musicologists must ultimately join forces.

Finally, the inclusion of a comprehensive annotated bibliography of Sūr studies would have been extremely useful for Hindi scholars. This is not an oversight on the author's part, but a felt need arising from what I believe to be the landmark importance of the work itself. *Poems to the Child-God* presents a model of sophisticated criticism of medieval Hindi literature.

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Epigraphical Hybrid Sanskrit: Its Rise, Spread, Characteristics and Relationship to Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit. By TH. DAMSTEEGT. Leiden: E. J. Brill (Orientalia Rheno-Traiectina Vol. 23), 1978. xiv, 345 pp. Abbreviations, Notes, Index. D.Glds. 96.

"Epigraphical Hybrid Sanskrit" (EHS) is the name given by Th. Damsteegt to the inscriptional dialect current from the first to the fifth centuries A.D. in Mathura and other parts of north and central India, on the analogy of Franklin Edgerton's "Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit" (BHS) designation for a similar literary dialect. In detailed, scholarly fashion, Damsteegt's book describes and analyzes this language, which, like BHS, is essentially a Middle Indo-Aryan (MIA, or "Prakrit") dialect considerably, though not uniformly, "Sanskritized," i.e., infiltrated by phonetic and morphological Sanskrit forms. Typical of EHS are words like *Dharmavṛddhisya* (p. 108) and *bhikṣuṇo* (p. 110), with MIA endings applied to Sanskrit stems, or *Suriyasya* (Lüders *Mathura Inscriptions*, no. 46), with a proper Sanskrit ending on an MIA stem.

Damsteegt proceeds from a painstakingly close analysis of the often difficult materials. The study is based mainly on the Buddhist, Jaina, and Hindu inscriptions in and around Mathura collected by Georg Bühler in *Epigraphia Indica* I (1892), pp. 371–97, and II (1894), pp. 195–212; and by Heinrich Lüders in *Mathura Inscriptions* (ed. Klaus L. Janert, Göttingen, 1961). These are supplemented by inscriptions in similar dialects from other regions. The author has worked, as far as possible, from actual inscriptions, on the grounds that printed facsimiles are not always reliable. For many he suggests revised or improved readings, some of which are evaluated below. The first three chapters of the book contain a detailed description of the phonetic, morphological, and lexical structure of EHS as attested in these materials.

What makes studying a dialect of this peculiar mixed type from epigraphical data so valuable is the incorruptibility of the evidence. Edgerton was badly hindered in analyzing BHS by the corruption of the Buddhist manuscripts involved. As he notes, "The text tradition of most BHS texts is wretched" (*Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar*, New Haven, 1953, p. 6, note 15). Epigraphic sources present no such problem; they can be confidently taken to show the dialect as it was when the text was written. On the other hand, of course, inscriptional sources entail problems and limitations of their own. For example, they are frequently damaged or fragmentary, their contents are likely to be repetitive and limited, and the scribes or carvers were often careless or ignorant.

Working with these advantages and disadvantages, Damsteegt has produced an admirably comprehensive picture of a dialect which, not surprisingly, turns out to be essentially similar to BHS. In addition, his last two chapters offer some well-documented conclusions about the historical and cultural circumstances which led