

No More Cattle Raising on the Planet of the Trees

A study of Śrīla Prabhupāda's last instructions on book editing

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ABSTRACT

To this day, almost forty years after the passing of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, confusion still reigns among some devotees about his desires and instructions regarding how he wanted his main legacy, his transcendental books, taken care of. Thus some devotees continue to express doubts regarding the posthumous editing and correcting that have been done on Śrīla Prabhupāda's books by his publishing company, The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust. These doubts have in some places escalated to the point of causing schisms among His Divine Grace's followers.

To help clarifying this situation, the following is an analysis of Śrīla Prabhupāda's two last instructions regarding his desires for his books, which he expressed shortly before his departure. One of these is the famous "Rascal Editors" conversation from June 1977; the other is the last instruction from Śrīla Prabhupāda to his BBT, a letter dated July 22, 1977, from Śrīla Prabhupāda's secretary, Tamāl Krishna Mahārāja, to the leader of the North American BBT in Los Angeles, Rāmeśvara Swami. The conclusion is that the BBT and its editors appear in general to have understood and honored Śrīla Prabhupāda's last instructions and desires regarding the editing of his books.

"I have seen the '1977 Rascal Editors' conversation with Śrīla Prabhupāda misquoted, misused, and presented out of context numerous times, especially by the tireless proponents of 'no editing,'" Rameśvara Prabhu, former leader of the North American BBT, commented in an email. (1)

Others are convinced that in the "Rascal Editor" conversation (RE) which took place in Vṛndāvana on June 22, 1977, Śrīla Prabhupāda issued a clear and unequivocal instruction: he wanted absolutely no changes or corrections in his books at any point, what to speak of posthumous editing. Thus Rūpānuga Prabhu, an early disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda, writes about the editing of *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*:

"... Had a proposal been made to him in 1977 (the sixth year of its publication) for an extensive revision, it wouldn't be very hard to imagine the strength of his refusal. There would be nothing equivocal about it, especially in the light of his remarks during his now famous 'rascal editor' discussion recorded on June 22, 1977 in Vṛndāvana, just five months before his disappearance."(2)

However, contrary to what Rūpānuga Prabhu considers true, a close analysis of the RE discussion doesn't reveal such a simple and obvious conclusion. To understand why, it's helpful to go through the conversation from beginning to end to see how it evolved and what its conclusions actually were.

In the transcript that follows, I have inserted my comments here and there between points. To read the entire RE without these interspersed comments, please see appendix 1.

The conversation starts with Śrīla Prabhupāda having Tamāl Krishna Mahārāja read a verse from the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (1.2.5). During the reading, Śrīla Prabhupāda detects a mistake and criticizes his BBT editors for overstepping their mandate.

Prabhupāda: Where are others?

Tamāl Krishna: Shall I get other people? Śatadhanya Mahārāja? (long pause)

Prabhupāda: That ... Find this verse, munayaḥ sādhu pṛṣṭo 'ham... [SB 1.2.5].

Tamāl Krishna: There's no index. It's not a new Bhāgavatam. There's no index in this Bhāgavatam.

Munayaḥ sādhu ...? “The Effects of Kali-yuga” chapter? Is that the verse – about the effects of Kali-yuga? No. (background talking, looking for verse)

*munayaḥ sādhu pṛṣṭo ‘ham
bhavadbhir loka-maṅgalam
yat kṛtaḥ kṛṣṇa-sampraśno
yenātmā suprasīdati*

munayaḥ—of the sages; *sādhu*—this is relevant; *pṛṣṭaḥ*—questioned; *aham* ...

Prabhupāda: No? What is that? *Sādhu*? What is that? *Munayaḥ*?

Tamāl Krishna: Says “*sādhu*—this is relevant.”

Prabhupāda: Relevant?

Tamāl Krishna: That’s what it’s translated as – “this is relevant.” Maybe a mistake.

Devotee (1): It’s a mistake.

One thing that may have contributed to some confusion about the conversation is that from the outset, both the devotees present and the devotees who later heard a recording of the conversation misunderstood what Prabhupāda was upset about. Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami describes the incident thus in his *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*:

“But one day while sitting in the garden with Tamāl Krishna, Svarūpa Dāmodara, and others, Śrīla Prabhupāda became very disturbed when he detected a mistake in one of his already printed books. Tamāl Krishna was reading aloud a verse from the First Canto which began, “Munayaḥ sādhu pṛṣṭo ‘ham.” Śrīla Prabhupāda had him read the synonyms.

Tamāl Krishna read: “*munayaḥ*—O sages; *sādhu*—this is relevant; *pṛṣṭaḥ*—questioned ...”

“*Sādhu*?” asked Śrīla Prabhupāda. Thus he uncovered a thoughtless mistake made by the Sanskrit editors. *Sādhu* means “devotee,” not “this is relevant.” Śrīla Prabhupāda became very angry and denounced the “rascal Sanskrit scholars.””

In other words, even Satsvarūpa Mahārāja got it wrong when presenting what Śrīla Prabhupāda was objecting to. It was not the translation of *sādhu* as “this is relevant” that disturbed Śrīla Prabhupāda. Although *sādhu* means “devotee,” in this context it actually does mean “this is relevant.” Rather, Prabhupāda became angry because of the incorrect translation of *munayaḥ* as “of the sages.” The correct translation is “O sages.” [In Satsvarūpa Mahārāja’s rendering, he has Tamāl Krishna Mahārāja read “*munayaḥ*—O sages,” but what was actually read was “*munayaḥ*—of the sages.”] In Prabhupāda’s original Delhi edition of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* the translation had been given correctly: “O the sages.” Of course, the “the” should have been removed by an editor for better English, but his translation had at least correctly given the word in the vocative. Now an editor had incorrectly changed it to the genitive (possessive).

Prabhupāda: *Munayaḥ*?

Tamāl Krishna: “*Munayaḥ*—of the sages; *sādhu*—this is relevant ...”

Prabhupāda: The nonsense, they are ... They are correcting my trans ... Rascal. Who has done this? *Munayaḥ* is addressing all these *munis*.

Tamāl Krishna: It’s addressing the *munis*?

Prabhupāda: Yes.

Tamāl Krishna and the other devotees present continue to think the issue centers on the word *sādhu*. But Prabhupāda doesn’t dwell on the particulars and instead moves on to a more general criticism of some of his editors, with one editor, Jaya Śācinandana, mentioned specifically. Tamāl Krishna then continues reading the synonyms. When he gets to the verse’s translation, Śrīla Prabhupāda again interrupts him and again makes it clear that *munayaḥ* was mistranslated in the synonyms. Then he criticizes his Sanskrit editor, saying a little learning is dangerous.

Tamāl Krishna: *Sādhus*, great sages.

Prabhupāda: Yes. *Sādhu* means they are very pure. What can be done if it goes there and these rascals becomes Sanskrit scholar and do everything nonsense? One Sanskrit scholar strayed, that rascal ... He take ... What is his ...? Śacī-suta? Śacī-sandana?

Tamāl Krishna: Jaya Śacīnandana?

Prabhupāda: And they are maintaining them. Different meaning.

Tamāl Krishna: “*Bhavadbhiḥ*—by all of you; *loka*—the world; *maṅgalam*—welfare; *yat*—because; *kṛtaḥ*—made; *kṛṣṇa*—the Personality of Godhead; *sampraśnaḥ*—relevant question; *yena*—by which; *ātmā*—self; *suprasīdati*—completely pleased.” Translation: “O sages ...”

Prabhupāda: Now here is “O sages,” and the word meaning is “of the *munis*.” Just see. Such a rascal Sanskrit scholar. Here it is addressed, *sambodhana*, and they touch(?) it—“*munayaḥ*—of the *munis*.” It is very risky to give to them for editorial direction. Little learning is dangerous. However proper Sanskrit scholar, little learning, dangerous. Immediately they become very big scholars, high-salaried, and write all nonsense. Who they are? (pause) Then?

At this point, the conversation changes into a more general criticism of several of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s editors. Tamāl Krishna Mahārāja and Svarūpa Dāmodara weigh in with further examples of what they perceive as editors transgressing their mandate:

Tamāl Krishna: “O sages, I have been ...”

Prabhupāda: No, they cannot be reliable. They can do more harm. Just see here the fun(?).

Tamāl Krishna: Yeah. We’re finding out in the Fifth Canto that there’re words that are so off, the meaning is completely changed, completely changed. I mean, in the three chapters that we read, Bhakti-prema Mahārāja made at least half a dozen corrections of serious corrections. They had changed the meaning.

Svarūpa Dāmodara: Some of the mistakes in the numbers, the figures.

Tamāl Krishna: Oh, yeah, they’re all ...

Prabhupāda: So how they can be reliable, so-called, this way ...? (background whispering) Hm?

Yaśodā-nandana: In the gurukula we were teaching Īsopaniṣad class to the children. So we took ... [break] ... Prabhupāda, and the words which the recent edition of the Press is wrong. Many changes were brought. They were trying to make better English, but sometimes, to make better English, I think they were making philosophical mistakes also. There is not so much need of making so much better English. Your English is sufficient. It is very clear, very simple. We have caught over 125 changes. They’re changing so many things. We are wondering if this is necessary. I will show you today. I have kept the book.

At this point, Śrīla Prabhupāda starts naming some of the editors whom he considers rascals. Of course, as their spiritual master he has every right to criticize his disciples. However, for the record, I want to mention that I consider this his exclusive prerogative. For my part, I do not think I have the right to criticize or think unnecessarily negatively about these devotees who rendered so much service to Śrīla Prabhupāda and who had his direct association.

Prabhupāda: I know that these rascals are doing. What can be done? How they can be relied on?

Svarūpa Dāmodara: It’s not the responsibility of the BBT trustee, to see these things don’t change without Prabhupāda’s sanction?

Prabhupāda: And Rāmeśvara is indulging this. The great rascal is that Jagannātha? He’s there in Los Angeles.

Tamāl Krishna: Jagannātha Dāsa?

Prabhupāda: Maybe.

Indian devotee (2): Jagannātha-suta.

Prabhupāda: Jagannātha-suta.

Tamāl Krishna: No ...

Prabhupāda: And the one rascal is gone.

Tamāl Krishna: Nitāi.

Prabhupāda: It is starting. What can I do? These cannot ... These rascals cannot be educated. Dangerous. Little learning, dangerous. So how to correct? The leader of these dangerous – Rādhā-val-labha.

Tamāl Krishna: Rādhā-vallabha?

Prabhupāda: Hm. He’s a dangerous, who maintains these rascal with this work. He’ll always have questions and alteration. That is his business. That is American business. They take that always. What can I do? Ultimate, it goes for editorial. They make changes, such changes.

However, not all editors are bad. Jayādvaita is next mentioned as a good editor who is now editing the original work that Śrīla Prabhupāda is writing.

Tamāl Krishna: Your original work that you’re doing now, that is edited by Jayādvaita. That’s the first editing.

Prabhupāda: He is good.

Tamāl Krishna: He is good. But then, after they print the books, they’re going over. So when they reprint ...

Prabhupāda: So how to check this? How to stop this?

Tamāl Krishna: They should not make any changes without consulting Jayādvaita.

Prabhupāda: But they are doing without any authority.

Thus so far we have seen that among the editors, Śrīla Prabhupāda trusts Jayādvaita and invests him with a certain authority. Prabhupāda agrees to Tamāl Krishna’s assertion that the other editors should not make any changes without consulting Jayādvaita. In other words, Jayādvaita appears at this point to be authorized by Prabhupāda to make editorial changes in his books; if changes have to be made, the other editors have to go through him.

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s trust in Jayādvaita seems to have been well-known to everyone in the BBT. For instance, in a letter to Rādhā-vallabha on September 7, 1976, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote: “Concerning the editing of Jayadwaita Prabhu, whatever he does is approved by me. I have confidence in him.” And Rāmeśvara commented in a letter from July 13, 1977, which will be discussed later: “... we must recognize that Srila Prabhupada has given authority to Jayadwaita.”

By the way, this passage offers an example of how this conversation sometimes becomes misrepresented. Rūpānuga Prabhu writes in one place:

“... when Tamal Krishna suggested to Srila Prabhupada Jayadwaita check any changes before reprinting, Srila Prabhupada countered: ‘But they are doing without any authority!’ In other words, no need for Jayadwaita to become an inspector of changes because nobody was authorized to make such changes in the first place!” (3)

However, the very opposite was said. When Prabhupāda says, “But they are doing without any authority,” he was referring to editors other than Jayādvaita and agrees with Tamāl Krishna that “they” should consult with Jayādvaita before making changes. Thus changes can be made – if Jayādvaita is consulted and involved. Śrīla Prabhupāda actually said the opposite of the understanding Rūpānuga Prabhu is propounding.

Svarūpa Dāmodara will now suggest a solution to the problem, namely, that all the books already printed should be checked, and mistakes be corrected, before the next printing.

Svarūpa Dāmodara: I think we should make whole survey, all books already printed, before printing the next batch, and check any mistakes so that it should be all corrected. Otherwise, if the scholars find out that there are so many mistakes in the books, then the quality and the appreciation will be reduced.

Girirāja(?): (indistinct)

Svarūpa Dāmodara: Yes. We find so far that they are appreciating so much within the scholarly circle, and we want to maintain that, actually.

Prabhupāda: Very serious feature. It is not possible for me to check, and they are doing all nonsense, freedom. (pause)

In the next sentences Śrīla Prabhupāda continues pondering what can be done. Tamāl Krishna Mahārāja repeats Svarūpa Dāmodara's proposal and suggests that Jayādvaita be the one to check the books. Prabhupāda likes that idea and adds Satsvarūpa Mahārāja's name along with Jayādvaita's. Yaśodā-nandana then adds Bhakti-prema Mahārāja's name as one editor who can be trusted. Tamāl Krishna Mahārāja then asks Śrīla Prabhupāda if he thinks having these persons review the books is a good solution and Prabhupāda confirms it is.

Yaśodā-nandana: Jaya Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Prabhupāda: What to do?

Tamāl Krishna: I think Svarūpa Dāmodara's point – that all the books should now be checked before they're reprinted again ... And they have to be checked not by some so-called learned Sanskrit man but by a learned devotee. Just like you always favored Jayādvaita because his Kṛṣṇa consciousness ...

Prabhupāda: Jayādvaita, Satsvarūpa ...

Yaśodā-nandana: Bhakti-prema, Satsvarūpa is there.

Tamāl Krishna: So Bhakti-prema ... That's a good solution?

Prabhupāda: Yes.

I added the question mark after Tamāl Krishna Mahārāja's "That's a good solution." Somehow the question mark was not there in the transcript, although if you listen to it, you'll hear that Tamāl Krishna Mahārāja is clearly asking Śrīla Prabhupāda whether he thinks they've found a good solution. Prabhupāda confirms his agreement with his "Yes."

The conversation continues with more criticism of rascal editors, in particular Nitāi and Hayagrīva. Prabhupāda also inserts an important order: "Now do the needful, otherwise everything will be spoiled." In this context, it doesn't appear that "the needful" means that Prabhupāda's books should be left or frozen, as they are with their mistakes. Rather, the "good editors" – Jayādvaita, Satsvarūpa Mahārāja, and Bhakti-prema Mahārāja – should go through the books before the next printing and fix any mistakes, as discussed above.

Tamāl Krishna: You know, the real point is that the Sanskrit is often not translated properly in the translation, what Nitāi and others have done.

Prabhupāda: He's a rascal. That's ... He's finding out guru and job for filling the belly. That is the latest news.

Tamāl Krishna: What is he doing?

Prabhupāda: To find out some job to fill up the belly. Otherwise he'll starve if he doesn't get any

job. And he's finding out guru. Job-guru. (pause) Now do the needful. Otherwise everything will be spoiled. These rascal editorial ... That Easy Journey, original, this (indistinct) Hayagrīva has changed so many things.

Tamāl Krishna: He actually took out the whole part about their going to the moon being childish. He deleted the whole section.

At this point the crux of the matter surfaces – what it is that's giving Śrīla Prabhupāda concern: some of the editors have deliberately changed the meaning of what he wrote by taking out sections they don't like or with which they don't agree. The incident with Hayagrīva deleting the section about going to the moon in Easy Journey to Other Planets was recorded by Hari-śauri Prabhu in his diary and retold in his Transcendental Diary.

Hari-śauri:

May 23rd, 1976

Early this morning, before going out for his walk, Prabhupāda questioned Hayagrīva about the editing of the first book Prabhupāda wrote in 1959, Easy Journey to Other Planets.

Several days ago, Prabhupāda was preaching to me about the defects of modern science. He spoke about the bluff of modern space travel, referring me to Easy Journey. "I have written there that the attempts to go to the moon are simply childish. You have read?" he asked. I could not recall it specifically and I excused myself by saying I had not read the book since I had first seen it in 1972. Prabhupāda looked thoughtfully at me for a second and then asked me to get him a copy. I did so, and he has read the whole book through himself in the last few days. He discovered that his statement was actually edited out.

So when Prabhupāda questioned him now, Hayagrīva admitted having omitted it. He tried to defend himself, "Well, that was written before they went there, and afterwards I left it out."

Prabhupāda was very, very upset. He spent most of his morning walk criticizing Hayagrīva for thinking the spiritual master an ordinary man subject to mistakes, and for accepting the words of the scientists above the word of the guru. "This means I cannot trust you," he told him.

Later, back at the temple during breakfast I went into Hayagrīva's room. "What's he so angry at?" he asked me sullenly, referring to Śrīla Prabhupāda. He was petulant, like a child, his ego stung by the chastisement of his father. I didn't like it, and I told him so. We began to argue, me angrily berating him for his overly familiar attitude, and he sulkily defending his actions, declaring that no one would believe the statement that you can't go to the moon. I condemned him for not relying on his spiritual master and for watering down the philosophy to suit the mentality of the nondevotee masses.

"The masses won't accept a book that declares it impossible to journey to the moon," he pouted testily. "They simply won't accept Prabhupāda's statements. They're only going to believe the scientists."

"We don't care what people believe," I snapped back. "People believe one thing now and in twenty years time they'll believe exactly the opposite. We don't care what they accept. We accept what Prabhupāda says, and our only business is to present Prabhupāda's exact words without altering them or imposing our own concocted ideas about what is or is not acceptable. It is not our business to pander to the whims of the masses."

I left him to eat his breakfast and returned to my room next to Śrīla Prabhupāda's. A few minutes later Hayagrīva went past in the corridor, entered Prabhupāda's room, and with tears welling in his eyes apologized to His Divine Grace. Prabhupāda was pleased and accepted his penitent regrets. Still, the book needs to be changed. Prabhupāda gave instructions to inform the BBT that Easy Journey has to be reedited to include the missing passage." (4)

That Prabhupāda was upset and worried by Hayagrīva’s changing his books is also clear in other places, such as this February 27, 1977 conversation in Māyāpur with Rādhā-vallabha Prabhu:

“... That is being done by this rascal. I don’t want. And the Hayagrīva has ..., the Easy Journey, he has changed so many things. That ... He is now bad character. You should not maintain him.”

That Śrīla Prabhupāda’s worry was justified was further revealed when sometime around 1980, Jayādvaita Mahārāja was revising *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, which Hayagrīva had worked on extensively over two periods, one from 1966–67 and the other around 1970–71. A most glaring example of Hayagrīva’s changing Prabhupāda’s words where he didn’t agree with him can be found in the purport to 10.21, where he edited out the following (this section is missing in both the 1968 and 1972 printings):

“Among the stars, the moon is the most prominent at night, and thus the moon represents Kṛṣṇa. It appears from this verse that the moon is one of the stars; therefore the stars that twinkle in the sky also reflect the light of the sun. The theory that there are many suns within the universe is not accepted by Vedic literature. The sun is one, and as by the reflection of the sun the moon illuminates, so also do the stars. Since *Bhagavad-gītā* indicates herein that the moon is one of the stars, the twinkling stars are not suns but are similar to the moon.”

Only the first sentence of this paragraph is found in the 1972 edition of *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, although the full paragraph is there in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s original manuscript.

Now the conversation continues with Śrīla Prabhupāda giving the direct order that “the next printing should again be to the original way.”

Yaśodā-nandana: Also in the *Bhāgavatam*, where Prabhupāda was talking about Lord Buddha ... You mentioned that if the followers of Lord Buddha do not close the slaughterhouse there is no meaning to such a caricature. That word was very nice. But in new book that word is not there anymore. They have pulled the word. The meaning of the word is not ... So many times.

Prabhupāda: It is very serious situation. Rāmeśvara is in direct ...

Svarūpa Dāmodara: I think they’re working too independently without consulting properly.

Yaśodā-nandana: Sometimes they appeal that “We can make better English,” so they change like that, just like in the case of *Īśopaniṣad*. There are over a hundred changes. So where is the need? Your words are sufficient. The potency is there. When they change, it is something else.

Svarūpa Dāmodara: That’s actually a very dangerous mentality.

Yaśodā-nandana: What is it going to be in five years? It’s going to be a different book.

Prabhupāda: So you ... What you are going ... It is very serious situation. You write one letter that “Why you have made so many changes?” And whom to write? Who will care? All rascals are there. Write to Satsvarūpa that “This is the position. They are doing anything and everything at their whim.” The next printing should be again to the original way. [my emphasis]

Tamāl Krishna: They should have a board of Satsvarūpa and Jayādvaita.

Prabhupāda: Hmm.

Tamāl Krishna: Those two men are both in Los Angeles now.

Prabhupāda: So write them immediately that “The rascal editors, they are doing havoc, and they are being maintained by Rāmeśvara and party.”

Again Tamāl Krishna states the point that a board of Jayādvaita and Satsvarūpa Mahārāja should bring the books back “to the original way,” which Prabhupāda confirms with a “Hmm” and then tells Tamāl Krishna to write them immediately.

Now the devotees give more examples of how changes are being made:

Tamāl Krishna: Sometimes there's a fear that some word will be unpopular, and on account of desire to gain popularity or acceptance, they lessen the strength of the word. They change the word. They choose a word which is more so-called acceptable.

Svarūpa Dāmodara: Same thing is with the Back to Godhead. Just publish some photo, try to change so many things in order to make it popularized. They have been doing that even with the philosophy. (pause)

Śatadhanya: I remember when Rāmeśvara was here, he had mentioned that in one article you had denounced the Christians strongly, so he said he left one part out because he was afraid there would be a bad reaction from the Christians in America.

Prabhupāda: That is possible. That is possible. He should be careful. Then?

It's interesting to note that in this instance, Prabhupāda seems to support Rāmeśvara's editing of a section that might have angered American Christians.

Tamāl Krishna: I think in addition to Satsvarūpa and Jayādvaita checking the English, that Bhakti-prema Mahārāja has to check all the Sanskrit of all of the books ... He's translating now, so as he's translating, he can check. He's going, starting from the First Canto.

This passage shows that ongoing Sanskrit correction of Prabhupada's books was taking place. Rāmeśvara Prabhu confirmed this in his letter, which we will discuss later, when he writes, "As late as January 1977, when I was secretary, I read Prabhupada a list of corrections in Sanskrit for the complete Gita sent by Jagannatha dasa, which Prabhupada approved." (5)

Svarūpa Dāmodara: I think this is very appropriate, because checking English doesn't have any meaning without checking the Sanskrit, the original.

Tamāl Krishna: There was one verse in the Fifth Canto. From the way that they translated it, there was no way that anyone could possibly have understood what the verse meant. I mean, it was made unintelligible by the translation. So we were reading. Finally Bhakti-prema says, "Wait a minute. This translation is wrong. They have edited an extra statement here that is not there, and it makes it completely not understandable." Then suddenly, when he corrected the Sanskrit, it was easy to understand. It was very clear.

Prabhupāda: So what to do?

Tamāl Krishna: So I think we just have to be slow but sure. We have to go over all of the books and make sure that they're perfect before they're printed again. Not be in such a rush, print, print, and print all nonsense.

This last passage is interesting. Tamāl Krishna Mahārāja again proposes that they should go over all of the books, this time adding that they should take whatever time is required to make them perfect. There is no rush to publish because the books are already available. We can assume that although Śrīla Prabhupāda is not commenting on this, he is agreeing to what is being said, because otherwise he would have objected. So here it seems he approves of the appointed devotees spending whatever time is necessary to make the books perfect before they are printed again. Anyone familiar with editorial work will know that this is an enormous task and, given the volume of material, one bound to stretch over several years.

Svarūpa Dāmodara: One time I had a strong talk with Rāmeśvara Mahārāja about our article for printing in the Back to Godhead. I didn't want them to be printed in Back to Godhead because they made so many changes ...

Prabhupāda: Oh, he has dared to change yours also?

Svarūpa Dāmodara: Oh, yes. They change so many things in our article. And it was on the telephone. I was speaking to him in Atlanta from Los Angeles. And I told him that “This article should not be printed because they have made so many changes.” And I didn’t like that. Then they answered that “It has already been offset, and BBT policy is always to be rushing. It’s always BBT policy.” Then I told him that “If you sacrifice quality on the strength of rushing, then it is your business, but that’s not my way, so please don’t print it.” But in any case, they have printed anyway that article. And we all had a bad reaction.

Prabhupāda: So you bring this to Satsvarūpa. They cannot change anything.

Now, what does Śrīla Prabhupāda mean here by “They cannot change anything”? He cannot mean that every syllable, every punctuation mark, should remain as it is forever forward from that moment in time, because he already gave the order that everything should be changed “back to the original” – that the errors should be fixed. Śrīla Prabhupāda does not, of course, want the kind of editing Hayagrīva had been making when he changed the meaning of what Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote or omitted text from his manuscripts. From the context it’s also clear that these are the kinds of changes Svarūpa Dāmodara is objecting to.

Tamāl Krishna: (indistinct)

Svarūpa Dāmodara: So we stopped writing article for Back to Godhead since then because ...

Tamāl Krishna: Now, I think, with Satsvarūpa there, you won’t have that problem of changing like that. He wrote a letter saying that one of his first things is that he will not change what is given there unless ... He will not make changes.

Svarūpa Dāmodara: No, if they consult us, even with changing, that’s all right. But they just edit here and there and cut it out, certain things. They’re changing the whole meaning. And that makes sometimes nonsense instead of making sense.

Again we see, that the objection is to changing the meaning, not to correcting errors.

Prabhupāda: So on the whole, these dangerous things are going on. How to check it?

Tamāl Krishna: There has to be strong philosophical leaders who can check this, like Satsvarūpa and Jayādvaita.

Prabhupāda: Hmm.

Śrīla Prabhupāda again seems to agree that Satsvarūpa Mahārāja and Jayādvaita check what is finally being printed in his books.

Tamāl Krishna: They have to also be included in the decisions of the BBT. It can’t simply be that managers make decisions.

Prabhupāda: Yes. Without their sanction, there will be ... Let them ... These all rascals ...

Svarūpa Dāmodara: One time in that article they made a change. Saying that the whole Vaiṣṇava philosophy became Māyāvādī in that scientific article. So I told them that “You are better than ..., a better (indistinct).” It all became Māyāvādī, so it became all mad. That is why I strongly told them that “This shouldn’t be the way. If you want to change, you have to consult with those who are writers.”

Prabhupāda: So they are doing very freely and dangerously. And this rascal is always after change, Rādhā-vallabha. He’s a great rascal. (pause) Read.

At this point, the conversation continues with further reading from Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam and is no longer related to editing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books.

In conclusion, Śrīla Prabhupāda pointed out a problem – that meanings were being changed in his books without authorization. He also pointed out a handful of culprits – four or five “rascal editors” (it is unclear to me whether Jaya Śācīnandana and Jagannātha Dāsa are the same person). Furthermore, a solution was offered: the “good editors,” Jayādvaita, Satsvarūpa Mahārāja, and Bhakti-prema Mahārāja check all the books before the next printing and bring them back “again to the original way.”

Thus contrary to the perception of some, the “rascal editors” conversation doesn’t seem to mark a break with the editorial policy Śrīla Prabhupāda had established over the years, where he had his editors go over what was to be printed and correct whatever mistakes they found. (Please see appendix 3 for a series of quotes from Śrīla Prabhupāda’s letters regarding his desires for the editing of his books)

Two letters of July 1977

According to Rāmeśvara Prabhu, who at that time was the leader of the North American BBT, the “rascal editors” conversation was the second last instruction he received from Śrīla Prabhupāda regarding the editing of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. The last instruction came one month later in a letter from Śrīla Prabhupāda’s secretary, Tamāl Krishna Goswāmī.

The RE conversation was transcribed almost immediately after the conversation and copies were sent to relevant devotees around the world, including Rāmeśvara, who was based in Los Angeles. Consequently, on July 13, 1977, he wrote a four-page letter to Tamāl Krishna Goswami, asking him to present some questions to Śrīla Prabhupāda about the editing of his books. At this time, Śrīla Prabhupāda had almost entirely stopped writing letters due to his declining health, so letters were directed to his secretary, who would read him the letters, note down his replies, and then himself respond to the correspondence.

Rāmeśvara’s letter (which can be read in its entirety in appendix 2) offers an interesting insight into the workings of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s BBT editorial staff. He replies in his letter to many of the points discussed in the RE conversation on June 22. He points out that some mistakes in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books may have been caused by the *māyā* of editors overstepping their mandate, but also that mistakes are inevitably created during the production process itself. That was especially true in those days, when all manuscripts were retyped (rather than manipulated electronically) at least three times. Every time a typist created a new draft, typos and other types of mistakes might again be created which, if not caught, found their way into the printed books.

Rāmeśvara also discusses “transcendental mistakes,” or mistakes made by Śrīla Prabhupāda himself – an idea that may confuse neophyte devotees, who think a pure devotee must be absolutely perfect in every skill and never commit a mistake. This is, of course, a misunderstanding. The pure devotee is spiritually perfect in his Kṛṣṇa consciousness, because all his endeavors are for the satisfaction of guru and Kṛṣṇa. But although a pure devotee is also generally expert in many different skills, for Kṛṣṇa’s satisfaction, he or she may still not be perfect in everything. It is not that he never makes a mistake, for example, when writing, or dictates the wrong word, or makes some other mistake. It is an editor’s service to catch such mistakes. Some might think the editors were rascals for fixing mistakes, but Rāmeśvara points out that they were only rascals if they didn’t.

Rāmeśvara explains:

“The conclusion is that the editors have a very unique position, and are directly empowered by Srila Prabhupada to work on his books. If the editors become contaminated and misunderstand

Prabhupada's transcendental perfections and think he is making mundane mistakes of scholarship, etc., then they have to be removed, as we have done with Hayagriva and Jagannatha dasa, and as Krsna has done with Nitai. On the other hand, if the editors, like Jayadvaita, keep firm faith that Prabhupada is infallible and edit only as a sacred act of devotion, trying to be Prabhupada's instrument, then the results we all want are achieved. And, as Satsvarupa pointed out in his letter to Yasodanandana Swami, the kind of corrective work that Prem Maharaja is talking about is exactly the kind of work Prabhupada has Pradyumna doing (and formerly, Nitai and Jagannatha)."

Rāmeśvara also points out that most mistakes being discovered are in the older books, and he suggests that, in the future, any errors discovered should be reported to Jayādvaita, Rādhā-vallabha, Satsvarūpa Mahārāja, or himself, and they will do the needful.

Tamāl Krishna Mahārāja subsequently presented Rāmeśvara's letter to Śrīla Prabhupāda and wrote back to Rāmeśvara on July 22, 1977 (again, please see appendix 2 to read this letter in its entirety). Prabhupāda went along with Rāmeśvara's analysis of the different types of mistakes and agreed to Rāmeśvara's suggestion that responsible editing continue.

Tamāl Krishna Mahārāja:

"Your suggestion that in the future any mistakes which are found can be reported to Satsvarupa Maharaja, Jayadvaita Prabhu, Radha Ballabha Prabhu, or yourself, and after sufficient investigation and confirmation these mistakes can be rectified, is accepted."

And:

"Although He [Śrīla Prabhupāda] has certain doubts in regard to the perfectness of our service, He is quite confident that you will do the needful to make any corrections that are required. I explained the contents of your letter and Satsvarupa's, and Radhaballabha [sic] and He seemed satisfied that things were not being unathorizedly changed, while at the same time whatever corrections needed to be done were being made."

According to Rāmeśvara, this was the last instruction Śrīla Prabhupāda gave on the editing of his books, barely four months before his passing in November 1977. If Prabhupāda had wanted all his books "frozen" and no more corrections and editing done after his departure, everyone involved would have received a clear instruction in that regard. But Śrīla Prabhupāda never gave such an instruction, nor did any of his trained editors ever have that impression. As Rāmeśvara himself commented on the letter from Tamāl Krishna Goswami:

"They are the last instructions I ever received about editing from Srila Prabhupada and they confirmed that proper editing was to be continued." (6)

Appendix 1 The Rascal Editors conversation

Recorded in Vrindavana, India, on June 22, 1977

Prabhupāda: Where are others?

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Shall I get other people? Śatadhanya Mahārāja? (long pause)

Prabhupāda: That... Find this verse, munayaḥ sādhu pṛṣṭo 'ham... [SB 1.2.5].

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: There's no index. It's not a new Bhāgavatam. There's no index in this Bhāgavatam. Munayaḥ sādhu...? "The Effects of Kali-yuga" chapter? Is that the verse, about the effects of Kali-yuga? No. (background talking, looking for verse)

munayaḥ sādhu pṛṣṭo 'ham
bhavadbhir loka-maṅgalam
yat kṛtaḥ kṛṣṇa-sampraśno
yenātmā suprasīdati

[SB 1.2.5]

"munayaḥ—of the sages; sādhu—this is relevant; pṛṣṭaḥ—questioned; aham..."

Prabhupāda: No? What is that? Sādhu? What is that? Munayaḥ?

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Says, "sādhu—this is relevant."

Prabhupāda: Relevant?

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: That's what it's translated as, "this is relevant." May be a mistake.

Devotee (1): It's a mistake.

Prabhupāda: Munayaḥ?

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: "Munayaḥ—of the sages; sādhu—this is relevant..."

Prabhupāda: The nonsense, they are... They are correcting my trans... Rascal. Who has done this? Munayaḥ is addressing all these munis.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: It's addressing the munis?

Prabhupāda: Yes.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Sādhus, great sages.

Prabhupāda: Yes. Sādhu means they are very pure. What can be done if it goes there and these rascals become Sanskrit scholar and do everything nonsense? One Sanskrit scholar strayed, that rascal... He take... What is his...? Śacī-suta? Śacī-sandana?

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Jaya-śacīnandana?

Prabhupāda: And they are maintaining them. Different meaning.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: "Bhavadbhiḥ—by all of you; loka—the world; maṅgalam—welfare; yat—because; kṛtaḥ—made; kṛṣṇa—the Personality of Godhead; sampraśnaḥ—relevant question; yena—by which; ātmā—self; suprasīdati—completely pleased." Translation: "O sages..."

Prabhupāda: Now here is "O sages," and the word meaning is "of the munis." Just see. Such a rascal Sanskrit scholar. Here it is addressed, sambodhana, and they touch(?) it—"munayaḥ—of the munis." It is very risky to give to them for editorial direction. Little learning is dangerous. However proper Sanskrit scholar, little learning, dangerous. Immediately they become very big scholars, high salaried, and write all nonsense. Who they are? (pause) Then?

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: "O sages, I have been..."

Prabhupāda: No, they cannot be reliable. They can do more harm. Just see here the fun(?).

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Yeah. We're finding out in the Fifth Canto that there're words that are so off, the meaning is completely changed, completely changed. I mean, in the three chapters that we read, Bhakti-prema Mahārāja made at least half a dozen corrections of serious corrections. They had changed the meaning.

Svarūpa Dāmodara: Some of the mistakes in the numbers, the figures.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Oh, yeah, they're all...

Prabhupāda: So how they can be reliable, so-called, this way...? (background whispering) Hm?

Yaśodā-nandana: In the Gurukula we were teaching Īśopaniṣad class to the children. So we took... [break] ...Prabhupāda and the words which the recent edition of the Press is wrong. Many changes were brought. They were trying to make better English, but sometimes, to make better English, I think they were making philosophical mistakes also. There is no so much need of making so much better English. Your English is

sufficient. It is very clear, very simple. We have caught over 125 changes. They're changing so many things. We are wondering if this is necessary. I will show you today. I have kept the book.

Prabhupāda: I know that these rascals are doing. What can be done? How they can be relied on?

Svarūpa Dāmodara: It's not the responsibility of the BBT trustee, to see these things don't change without Prabhupāda's sanction?

Prabhupāda: And Rāmeśvara is indulging this. The great rascal is that Jagannātha? He's there in Los Angeles.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Jagannātha dāsa?

Prabhupāda: Maybe.

Indian devotee (2): Jagannātha-suta.

Prabhupāda: Jagannātha-suta.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: No...

Prabhupāda: And the one rascal is gone.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Nitāi.

Prabhupāda: It is starting. What can I do? These cannot... These rascals cannot be educated. Dangerous. Little learning, dangerous. So how to correct? The leader of these dangerous-Rādhā-vallabha.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Rādhā-vallabha?

Prabhupāda: Hm. He's a dangerous, who maintains these rascal with this work. He'll always have questions and alteration. That is his business. That is American business. They take that always. What can I do? Ultimate, it goes for editorial. They make changes, such changes.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Your original work that you're doing now, that is edited by Jayādvaita. That's the first editing.

Prabhupāda: He is good.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: He is good. But then, after they print the books, they're going over. So when they reprint...

Prabhupāda: So how to check this? How to stop this?

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: They should not make any changes without consulting Jayādvaita.

Prabhupāda: But they are doing without any authority.

Svarūpa Dāmodara: I think we should make whole survey, all books already printed, before printing the next batch and check any mistakes so that it should be all corrected. Otherwise, if the scholars find out that there are so many mistakes in the books, then the quality and the appreciation will be reduced.

Girirāja(?): (indistinct)

Svarūpa Dāmodara: Yes. We find so far that they are appreciating so much within the scholarly circle, and we want to maintain that actually.

Prabhupāda: Very serious feature. It is not possible for me to check, and they are doing all nonsense, freedom. (pause)

Yaśodā-nandana: Jaya Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Prabhupāda: What to do?

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: I think Svarūpa Dāmodara's point, that all the books should now be checked before they're reprinted again... And they have to be checked not by some so-called learned Sanskrit man but by a learned devotee. Just like you always favored Jayādvaita because his Kṛṣṇa consciousness...

Prabhupāda: Jayādvaita, Satsvarūpa...

Yaśodā-nandana: Bhakti-prema, Satsvarūpa is there.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: So Bhakti-prema... That's a good solution.

Prabhupāda: Yes.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: You know, the real point is that the Sanskrit is often not translated properly in the translation, what Nitāi and others have done.

Prabhupāda: He's a rascal. That's... He's finding out guru and job for filling the belly. That is the latest news.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: What is he doing?

Prabhupāda: To find out some job to fill up the belly. Otherwise he'll starve if he doesn't get any job. And

he's finding out guru. Job-guru. Now do the needful. Otherwise everything will be spoiled. These rascal editorial... That Easy Journey, original, this (indistinct) Hayagrīva has changed so many things.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: He actually took out the whole part about their going to the moon being childish. He deleted the whole section.

Yaśodā-nandana: Also in the Bhāgavatam, where Prabhupāda was talking about Lord Buddha... You mentioned that if the followers of Lord Buddha do not close the slaughterhouse, there is no meaning to such a caricature. That word was very nice. But in new book that word is not there any more. They have pulled the word. The meaning of the word is not... So many times.

Prabhupāda: It is very serious situation. Rāmeśvara is in direct...

Svarūpa Dāmodara: I think they're working too independently without consulting properly.

Yaśodā-nandana: Sometimes they appeal that "We can make better English," so they change like that, just like in the case of Īsopaniṣad. There are over a hundred changes. So where is the need? Your words are sufficient. The potency is there. When they change, it is something else.

Svarūpa Dāmodara: That's actually a very dangerous mentality.

Yaśodā-nandana: What is it going to be in five years? It's going to be a different book.

Prabhupāda: So you... What you are going... It is very serious situation. You write one letter that "Why you have made so many changes?" And whom to write? Who will care? All rascals are there. Write to Satsvarūpa that "This is the position. They are doing anything and everything at their whim." The next printing should be again to the original way.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: They should have a board of Satsvarūpa and Jayādvaita.

Prabhupāda: Hm.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Those two men are both in Los Angeles now.

Prabhupāda: So write them immediately that "The rascal editors, they are doing havoc, and they are being maintained by Rāmeśvara and party."

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Sometimes there's a fear that some word will be unpopular, and on account of desire to gain popularity or acceptance, they lessen the strength of the word. They change the word. They choose a word which is more so-called acceptable.

Svarūpa Dāmodara: Same thing is with the Back to Godhead. Just publish some photo, try to change so many things in order to make it popularized. They have been doing that even with the philosophy. (pause)

Śatadhanya: I remember when Rāmeśvara was here, he had mentioned that in one article you had denounced the Christians strongly, so he said he left one part out because he was afraid there would be a bad reaction from the Christians in America.

Prabhupāda: That is possible. That is possible. He should be careful. Then?

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: I think in addition to Satsvarūpa and Jayādvaita checking the English, that Bhakti-prema Mahārāja has to check all the Sanskrit of all of the books... He's translating now, so as he's translating, he can check. He's going, starting from the First Canto.

Svarūpa Dāmodara: I think this is very appropriate, because checking English doesn't have any meaning without checking the Sanskrit, the original.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: There was one verse in the Fifth Canto. From the way that they translated it, there was no way that anyone could possibly have understood what the verse meant. I mean, it was made unintelligible by the translation. So we were reading. Finally Bhakti-prema says, "Wait a minute. This translation is wrong. They have edited an extra statement here that is not there, and it makes it completely not understandable." Then suddenly, when he corrected the Sanskrit, it was easy to understand. It was very clear.

Prabhupāda: So what to do?

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: So I think we just have to be slow but sure. We have to go over all of the books and make sure that they're perfect before they're printed again. Not be in such a rush, print, print, and print all nonsense.

Svarūpa Dāmodara: One time I had a strong talk with Rāmeśvara Mahārāja about our article for printing in the Back to Godhead. I didn't want them to be printed in Back to Godhead because they made so many changes...

Prabhupāda: Oh, he has dared to change yours also?

Svarūpa Dāmodara: Oh, yes. They change so many things in our article. And it was on the telephone. I was speaking to him in Atlanta from Los Angeles. And I told him that “This article should not be printed because they have made so many changes.” And I didn’t like that. Then they answered that “It has already been offset, and BBT policy is always to be rushing. It’s always BBT policy.” Then I told him that “If you sacrifice quality on the strength of rushing, then it is your business, but that’s not my way, so please don’t print it.” But in any case, they have printed anyway that article. And we all had a bad reaction.

Prabhupāda: So you bring this to Satsvarūpa. They cannot change anything.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: (indistinct)

Svarūpa Dāmodara: So we stopped writing article for Back to Godhead since then because...

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Now, I think, with Satsvarūpa there, you won’t have that problem of changing like that. He wrote a letter saying that one of his first things is that he will not change what is given there unless... He will not make changes.

Svarūpa Dāmodara: No, if they consult us, even with changing, that’s all right. But they just edit here and there and cut it out, certain things. They’re changing the whole meaning. And that makes sometimes nonsense instead of making sense.

Prabhupāda: So on the whole, these dangerous things are going on. How to check it?

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: There has to be strong philosophical leaders who can check this, like Satsvarūpa and Jayādvaīta.

Prabhupāda: Hm.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: They have to also be included in the decisions of the BBT. It can’t simply be that managers make decisions.

Prabhupāda: Yes. Without their sanction, there will be... Let them... These all rascals...

Svarūpa Dāmodara: One time in that article they made a change. Saying that, the whole Vaiṣṇava philosophy became Māyāvādī in that scientific article. So I told them that “You are better than..., a better (indistinct).” It all become Māyāvādī, so it became all mad. That is why I strongly told them that “This shouldn’t be the way. If you want to change, you have to consult with those who are writers.”

Prabhupāda: So they are doing very freely and dangerously. And this rascal is always after change, Rādhāvallabha. He’s a great rascal. (pause) Read.

Appendix 2

The July 1977 exchange between Rāmeśvara and Tamāla Kṛṣṇa Goswāmī

July 13, 1977

Dear Tamal Krsna Gosvami,

Please accept my most humble obeisances in the dust of your feet. All glories to Srila Prabhupada! After reading the conversation sent by Yasodanandana Swami about mistakes in Prabhupada’s books, I felt it necessary to write you an explanation so that in the future, as secretary, you can help Prabhupada avoid great anxiety and headaches based on comments of uninformed devotees. Firstly, we all acknowledge that some mistakes are the fault of editors who overstep the limit of their duty and deliberately omit or change sections of Prabhupada’s books. Hayagriva’s changes in Easy Journey are a glaring example. However, I think devotees sometimes hastily assume that whenever an apparent inconsistency appears, it is due to

changes made by editors, and that if the editors would stop making changes, such mistakes would disappear. Since such complaints are being voiced directly to Srila Prabhupada, there is no doubt anxiety created, what to speak of doubts instilled in devotees who hear rumors that the books are full of mistakes. It is my opinion as a trustee that this is the most dangerous type of rumor, and that it must be smashed immediately, whenever it appears. All trustees should be well informed about the system for dealing with such inconsistencies in order to dispel such doubts.

The “mistakes” that appear in the books are basically of three kinds:

1) Typographical errors. (The manuscript is typed at least three times -- by Arundhati, by Jayadvaita’s typist, and by the composers -- and any of these three may generate an error which, if not caught, will appear in the final book. The “O the sages -- of the sages” error is an example of a typo which was caught and corrected in the 1976 printing of S.B. 1.2.)

2) Mistakes made by English and Sanskrit editors because of maya or a poor fund of knowledge. (In this area we must recognize that Srila Prabhupada has given authority to Jayadvaita, and up to about six months ago, he gave authority to the Sanskrit editors. For example, during the CC rush, Prabhupada allowed Nitai to come and see him every day for at least one hour to review the corrections Nitai wanted to make, and Prabhupada personally told me that the Sanskrit editors were authorized to make “necessary corrections”. When they overstepped their limits by making the fatal mistake of thinking that Prabhupada is ordinary and makes mistakes, Prabhupada took away their authority – since they were thinking that they could not only make corrections, but make improvements on what was basically Prabhupada’s transcendental interpretation. At that point they were of course nipped from further work. As late as January, 1977, when I was secretary, I read Prabhupada a list of corrections in Sanskrit for the complete Gita sent by Jagannatha dasa which Prabhupada approved.)

3) Transcendental “mistakes” dictated by His Divine Grace himself. (For example, in Fifth Canto, Volume Two, page 348, the purport should say, “The stars referred to herein are 1,600,000 miles above the moon...” but “sun” is what His Divine Grace said. Some devotees may think that the source of the inconsistency is some puffed-up, knucklehead editors who changed Srila Prabhupada’s words. “Leave the manuscript as it is!” they would say. But the fact is just the opposite: if the editor is a stupid knucklehead, it’s because he neglected to make a change when he should have. Prabhupada sometimes dictates quickly over certain details, numbers, etc., which he may not consider very significant. He may leave “transcendental errors” to give his editors some service, etc. Who can know his mind? It is the editors’ duty to not only go over spelling and grammar, but also, when necessary, to help “clarify” what Prabhupada dictates, so that the meaning intended by His Divine Grace is clear.)

Sometimes even Srila Prabhupada personally changes his opinion about how a verse should be translated. For example, Prabhupada once commented that there was a mistake in CC Adi-lila, Ch. 1, text 5. Prabhupada said that since the word pura means “formerly”, the translation should say “previously They separated Themselves”, not “They separated Themselves eternally”. Looking back at Srila Prabhupada’s original translation of this verse as it appeared in this BTG in the 1950’s, “separated Themselves eternally” is verbatim what he said. Here’s an interesting question: if Jayadvaita or the Sanskrit editors had caught this, should they have changed it?

Some devotees may be dissatisfied with what they feel are unnecessary changes from the manuscript, but I’m not sure that they wouldn’t be even more dissatisfied if we didn’t make changes. For example, the time chart in “Calculation of Time from the Atom” (Third Canto) works out only because Jayadvaita spent hours and days doing mathematical work on paper, having Radhavallabha and Harikesa Swmi make corrections, and then changing Prabhupada’s original figures. His Divine Grace said at that time, “just do the

needful”, so that’s what was done. Similarly, just the other day a Tenth Canto manuscript said that Brahma’s day equals 23 lakhs of years. Should it have been left as it was?

And without peeking at the edited version published, how would you edit this verse from S.B. 5.22.2 --

“SG answered: My dear king, it is exactly like the big wheel which is moving and along with him the small ants which have taken shelter of the big wheel, they are also moving, that is to say, the big wheel is moving toward northern side, the small ants are also moving towards that side. Similarly, with movement of the big orbit, the small stars appear to be moving along with it, so when passing through the Dhruvaloka and Sumeru mountain, the small ant-like stars also move like that. So with the movement of the sun and other small planets and stars which have taken shelter of the big orbit moves in the same direction, therefore, it sometimes appears to be moving differently in different directions.”

For the published version of the above verse, as you can see, the Sanskrit dept. did some heavy editing and my understanding is that they did this with Srila Prabhupada’s approval. If Sanskrit hadn’t made their changes, what would Jayadvaita have done on this?

The conclusion is that the editors have a very unique position, and are directly empowered by Srila Prabhupada to work on his books. If the editors become contaminated and misunderstand Prabhupada’s transcendental perfections and think he is making mundane mistakes of scholarship, etc., then they have to be removed, as we have done with Hayagriva and Jagannatha dasa, and as Krsna has done with Nitai. On the other hand, if the editors, like Jayadvaita, keep firm faith that Prabhupada is infallible and edit only as a sacred act of devotion, trying to be Prabhupada’s instrument, then the results we all want are achieved. And, as Satsvarupa pointed out in his letter to Yasodanandana Swami, the kind of corrective work that Prem Maharaja is talking about is exactly the kind of work Prabhupada has Pradyumna doing (and formerly, Nitai and Jagannatha).

Anyway, these are just some examples of the kinds of problems we frequently must deal with in the course of routine editing work. I hope they will be useful for understanding better what is involved in trying to present Prabhupada’s words in print without changing his message. Immature devotees cannot even be informed that editors are making changes -- they will either doubt Prabhupada’s infallibility or else doubt the published books -- and either way could cause a genuine crisis within ISKCON.

My conclusion is that we, as trustees, should thoroughly understand what is involved in publishing Prabhupada’s books. We should externally and officially smash any and all rumors about Prabhupada making mistakes, and about his books having mistakes. The major mistakes that have been discovered are in the older works edited by Hayagriva, and they are gradually being corrected. Any further disclosures of errors should be reported with the utmost discretion to Jayadvaita, Radhavallabha, Satsvarupa Maharaja or myself and the other trustees involved in publishing, and we will do the needful. There is practically no validity to the rumor that is “spreading” that the new books are full of mistakes. As for the Fifth Canto “mistakes”, since Harikesa Swami was the editor-transcriber, he should give his view regarding the criticism about figures, Sanskrit synonyms, etc. in addition to the analysis I have tried to present. As for Dr. Svarupa Damodara’s complaints, I would reserve judgement at this time since he would have to look at the original manuscript, comparing it to the published edition of Fifth Canto to see who he is actually criticizing. As for his BTG article, I believe Satsvarupa Gosvami mentioned that he submitted a “book” instead of an article, so naturally sections were omitted in order to publish in BTG.

One last note is that, since His Divine Grace has expressed displeasure publicly with the Sanskrit editors correcting his work, we have been extremely conservative in making any clarifications here at the Press, and then only after consulting Srila Prabhupada have any changes been made. For Jayadvaita’s routine

work, however, it is necessary for him to occasionally consult with our senior Sanskrit editor, Duryodhana Guru dasa, when some verse, etc. may require some transcendental clarification. This is done with utmost discretion, supervised by Jayadvaita.

Jai, Maharaja. I hope this finds you well, and absorbed in the ecstasy of relieving Prabhupada from as may headaches as possible. This one about his books is no doubt a super-headache, and I trust you will do the needful to clarify the situation.

Haribol.

Your unworthy servant,

[signed] Ramesvara dasa Swami

Ramesvara dasa Swami

Letter to: Ramesvara

—

Vrndavana,

July 22, 1977

From: Tamal Krishna - SL_770722_A2

Los Angeles

My dear Ramesvara Maharaja,

Please accept my most humble obeisances at your feet. I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated July 13th, 1977.

Your letter has clarified how all of the editing work is done and also how mistakes are likely to appear. I think however you are mistaken in saying that those who were present during the conversation caused undue anxiety within Srila Prabhupada's mind. As you have pointed out in your letter, and as everyone is willing to acknowledge (both Satsvarupa Maharaja and Radha Ballabha Prabhu) there are many mistakes due to 1) typographical errors, 2) mistakes made by English and Sanskrit editors because of maya or poor fund of knowledge and 3) transcendental mistakes dictated by His Divine Grace Himself. These are the categories under which you have grouped the mistakes. The persons who were present at that meeting with Srila Prabhupada were not ordinary devotees. Bhakti Prem Maharaja is quite expert at Sanskrit, so much so that Srila Prabhupada feels confident that we do not have to look for a Sanskrit pandit for explaining how the planetarium should be arranged according to the Bhagavatam, now that we have found him. Dr. Svarupa Damodar is a scientist, and Srila Prabhupada has the greatest respect for his opinion. Yasodanandan Maharaja is an advanced sannyasi devotee, very knowledgeable in the philosophy. And I am simply a rascal. At least the opinions of the first three persons are valuable. The actual fact is that during that conversation, it was His Divine Grace who found this particular error (as you now explain it was a typographical error). Furthermore if you read the conversation you will see that it was His Divine Grace who said this is due to the "rascal Sanskrit scholars." It was not the devotees present who blamed the editors or Sanskrit department, but it was His Divine Grace. And Srila Prabhupada's opinion of the editing work, both English and Sanskrit, was not formed simply by seeing this mistake, but has developed over many years. When editors such as Hayagriva, Nitai, and Jagannatha, all turned out to be so bad, it is not surprising that His Divine Grace has developed strong opinions.

As you have rightfully pointed out in regard to transcendental mistakes, it is the duty of the editor to

right the situation. However I must humbly inform you that in the Fifth Canto, this has not been done. The editors did not correct all the transcendental errors which were made. In all due respect to His Holiness Harikesa Swami, he is not a Sanskrit scholar and cannot be expected to have caught all of these transcendental errors.

Your suggestion that in the future any mistakes which are found can be reported to Satsvarupa Maharaja, Jayadvaita Prabhu, Radha Ballabha Prabhu, or yourself, and after sufficient investigation and confirmation these mistakes can be rectified is accepted. As we are working on this Fifth Canto planetary system, whatever corrections are required to be made, we will get approved by His Divine Grace and then send them on to you so that the new edition will be free from any of these discrepancies.

So far as rumors that are “spreading” that the new books are full of mistakes, this could not have come from Yasodanandan Maharaja’s letter as no one ever saw that letter here in India. We both know that LA is famous for being “rumor-loka”.

I am trying my very best as secretary, to relieve Srila Prabhupada of anxieties and headaches. But this particular anxiety was not caused by uninformed devotees (as I have pointed out earlier in this letter these devotees are not ordinary uninformed devotees and furthermore Srila Prabhupada already had very established opinions about the editing work.) And as you have yourself described in your letter, the mistakes actually do exist; it is not that they are not there and someone was finding fault for no reason. Srila Prabhupada has not thought over this matter since the day of that conversation. Although He has certain doubts in regard to the perfectness of our service, He is quite confident that you will do the needful to make any corrections that are required. [handwritten:] I explained the contents of your letter and Satsvarupa’s, and Radhaballabha and He seemed satisfied that things were not being unauthorizedly changed, while at the same time whatever corrections needed to be done were being made.

Hoping this meets you well.

Your servant,

Tamal Krishna Goswami

Secretary to Srila Prabhupada

His Holiness Ramesvara Swami

c/o ISKCON Los Angeles

/tkg

[handwritten:]

Today’s nectar:

I was telling Srila Prabhupada how much the devotees feel grateful that He is giving us everything. Prabhupada’s voice was choked with tears thinking of the devotees love for Him, “Your intense love for me, I am simply living for you. All over the world everything is going on. Money is coming and being spent. I don’t have to worry. I am so much indebted. I am taking so much service.” I said, ‘Srila Prabhupada there is no way we can ever repay our debt to you, how you tirelessly work to enlighten us? And Srila Prabhupada said: “That is Brihat Mrdanga. I am beating from this room and the sound is going 10,000 miles away. Our enemies are surprised, ‘How this man is going on beating?’”

Appendix 3

Quotes on editing

The following are some quotes from Prabhupāda’s letters to give an idea what his desires were for the editing of his books:

“I am glad that you are not omitting anything, but just making grammatical correction, and phrasing for force and clarity...” (to Hayagriva, November 18, 1968)

“[M]ake the Srimad-Bhagavatam revised edition in such a nice way that it may be accepted in any scholarly society.” (to Pradyumna, November 18, 1968)

“When a person is willing to help with our mission, he is also a devotee, so there is no question of him being non-devotee. But they must translate as it is, they must not deviate.” (to Kṛṣṇa dāsa, 13th February, 1969)

“Yes, we want that businessmen, economists, religionists, students, etc. will all be carrying Bhagavatam and Gita. Yes, do every word of our books meticulously and perfectly accurately transcribed so the most erudite and deep thinking men of the world can enter into the intricacies of meaning in each verse.” (to Pradyumna, October 13, 1969)

“[W]e should be very much careful about grammatical and printing mistakes. That will mar the prestige of the Press and the Institution.” (to Brahmānanda, December 10, 1969)

“We have to do things now very dexterously, simply we have to see that in our book there is no spelling or grammatical mistake. We do not mind for any good style, our style is Hare Kṛṣṇa, but still we should not present a shabby thing.” (to Satsvarūpa, January 9, 1970)

“I wish that all copies, before finally going to the press, must be thoroughly revised and edited so that there may not be any mistakes, especially of spelling and grammar, or of the Sanskrit names.” (to Satsvarūpa, 25th January, 1970)

“I have read the transliteration of Bhagavad-gita verses, but I think you have to do it very carefully because there are some mistakes in some of the verses.” (to Pradyumna, February 10, 1970)

“In Kṛṣṇa, Chapter 87, on page 4, the last line, it is said, ‘known as budbuvasa which is manifested by Govinda.’ I do not know what is this editing. The correct word is bhur-bhuvah-svah as it is in the gayatri mantra, and everybody knows it. This budbhuvasa is an extraordinary word, neither it is Sanskrit nor English, so how it has avoided the vigilance of the so many editors? So if none of the editors knew this word, why was it pushed? There should be no such negligences like this, nothing uncertain should be pushed. Now what other discrepancies there may be like this? Or what is the use of such editing? Everything must be done very carefully and attentively.” (to Brahmānanda, April 17, 1970)

“Regarding Topmost Yoga, in the blueprint there are many mistakes. I am pointing out some of them as follows: Page 2 ‘... decided to kill his sister.’ not sisters, because only Devaki was there.

‘The Lord’s compromise was that He had Vasudeva propose to the brother-in-law.’ This sentence is obscure. The actual fact is Vasudeva made a compromise and said to his brother in law ‘such and such.’

Then everywhere there is yogins, gosvamins, sannyasins, etc. in many places. The ‘n’ is not required—that I have already informed Pradyumna.

On page 17 there is a word ‘enfuriated’; this is a spelling mistake, it should be ‘infuriated.’

Then on page 48, ‘on the bank of the Ganges near Didbee.’ This is not ‘Didbee,’ it is ‘Delhi.’

On page 49 there are so many ‘gosvamins,’ but there should be no ‘N.’

In this way I have read the book sporadically, not very minutely. I think it should be gone through once more very carefully and all the mistakes that are still existing there should be corrected. If the books are printed with spelling mistakes and other mistakes, that will be a discredit for our publication. So please see that editorial work is done very nicely.” (to Brahmānanda, April 22, 1970)

“Even it is 99% all right, still that 1% must be corrected.” (to Tamāl Krishna and Gurudāsa, August 23, 1971)

“It is not our philosophy to print errors. Of course, our spiritual subject matter is transcendental and therefore it remains potent despite mistakes in grammar, spelling, etc. But this type of translation may only be allowed if there is no other way to correct it, then it is all right. But if you know the correct order, then you must make it perfect. That is our philosophy: everything perfect for Kṛṣṇa.” (to Maṇḍalī-bhadra, January 20, 1972)

“It is not that we may present anything crude translation and that is acceptable. No, even though the transcendental subject matter of Vedic literature is still spiritually potent despite the crudest translation, still, because we have got facility to make it perfect, that is our philosophy.” (to Hamsadūta, January 20, 1972)

“Regarding the English editing discrepancies, how can I know? Let them point out which part and on which page so I can see.” (to Rādhā-vallabha, August 26, 1975)

“Regarding the corrections you have sent, these kind of changes are admissible. There is no harm.” (to Rādhā-vallabha, September 21, 1975)

“Concerning the editing of Jayadvaita Prabhu, whatever he does is approved by me. I have confidence in him. Your changes which I have seen of the Sanskrit synonyms is also approved by me.” (to Rādhā-vallabha, September 7, 1976)

All in all, the general message going through Srīla Prabhupada’s instructions to his editors seems to be that they should be loyal to the meaning of what he wrote and at the same time make whatever corrections were necessary to remove all mistakes and make his message clear and forceful. Nothing seems to have changed in the last months of Prabhupada’s life, not even in the famous “rascal editors” conversation, where Prabhupada clearly ordered that some qualified editors should go through all of his books and make whatever changes were necessary (“now do the needful”) to bring them back “again to the original way.”

For further information about the BBT’s editing of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, please visit www.bbtedit.com.

Footnotes

1. From an email conversation between Rameśvara and Jayādvaita Swami on September 30, 2013.
2. See www.rupanugadas.com/2013/12/taking-credit-where-credits-due_23.html
3. See <http://www.rupanugadas.com/2013/12/where-angels-fear-to-tread.html>
4. From A Transcendental Diary, volume 2
5. Rameśvara to Tamāl Krishna, July 13, 1977
6. See footnote 1.