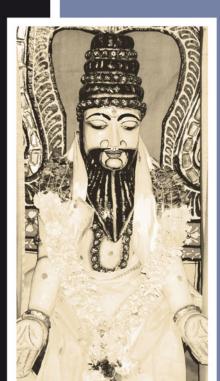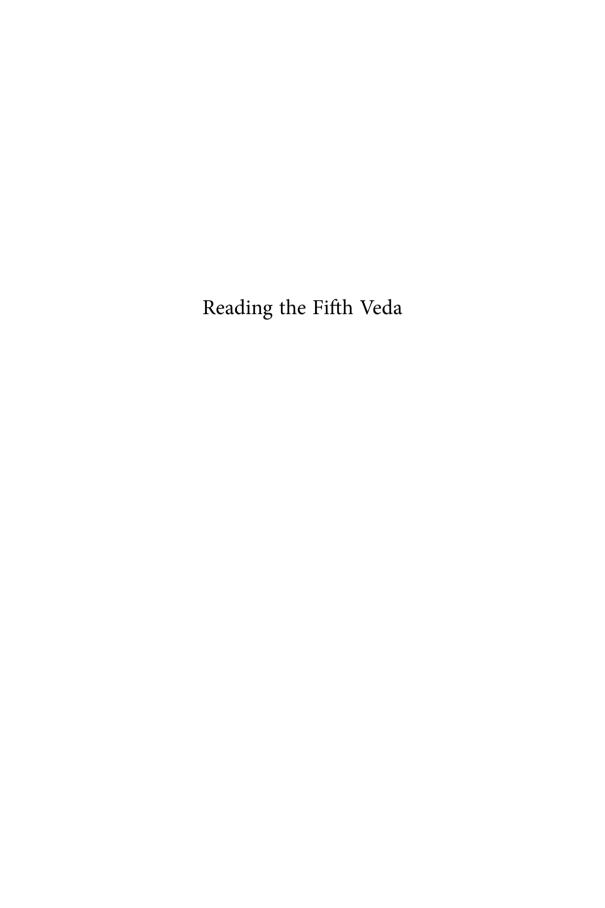# Reading the Fifth Veda

Studies on the Mahābhārata

Essays by Alf Hiltebeitel, Volume 1

Edited by

Vishwa Adluri &
Joydeep Bagchee

BRILL

Reading the Fifth Veda

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VOLUME 131

Reading the Fifth Veda

Studies on the *Mahābhārata*—
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Madeleine Biardeau

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Alf Hiltebeitel's publishing career has been extraordinarily prolific. Since 1976, the year he published his first book, *The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhāratra*,[1] a revised version of his doctoral dissertation, he has averaged over a book a decade. His completed monographs include a two-volume field study of the cult of Draupadī published in 1988[2] and 1991[3] and his two "Rethinking" books published in 1999[4] and 2001.[5] And two books on *dharma* are now coming out in 2010[6] and 2011.[7] Additionally, since 1972, the year he published his first article, he has published 72 articles, 25 of them in the last decade alone.[8] In narrowing down the list of articles for re-publication in this edition, we as editors adopted two basic principles to guide our selection. While Hiltebeitel's interests are unusually broad, one can identify two broad areas of inquiry: the classical Sanskrit epics (principally the *Mahābhārata* and, to a lesser degree, the *Rāmāyaṇa*), and the goddess, as his field-work finds her in the south Indian cult of Draupadī and the related cult of Kūttāṇṭavar/Aravāṉ. We decided that the best way to present Hiltebeitel's long career of publishing was to create two volumes: one on the *Mahābhārata* and the other on goddess cults. Even with this decision, however, we still faced the difficult task of narrowing down our selection from 35–30 articles each on the epic and on the goddess

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[1] Alf Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976; 2nd ed.: Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

[2] Alf Hiltebeitel, *The Cult of Draupadī*, vol. 1: *Mythologies: From Gingee to Kurukṣetra* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[3] Alf Hiltebeitel, *The Cult of Draupadī,* vol. 2: *On Hindu Ritual and the Goddess* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[4] Alf Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking India's Oral and Classical Epics: Draupadī among Rajputs, Muslims, and Dalits* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[5] Alf Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

[6] Alf Hiltebeitel, *Dharma*, Asian Spiritualities Series, ed. Henry Rosemont (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010).

[7] Alf Hiltebeitel, *Dharma: Its Early History in Law, Religion, and Narrative*, South Asia Research Series, ed. Patrick Olivelle (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[8] See the enclosed Chronology of Works for a list. Articles included in this volume have been marked by an asterisk; those included in volume 2 by a double asterisk.

to 20 articles per volume. Anything more, and the two volumes would have been unwieldy.

Once we had decided to group the articles into two volumes, each centered around a different thematic area, it also became clear that each volume would have to follow a slightly different organizing principle. While Hiltebeitel's scholarship on the epics has undergone a series of clearly delineated stages, his goddess studies present a comparatively homogeneous picture. This is not to suggest that one cannot discern a comparable development in Hiltebeitel's ideas in his work on the goddess, but there is a basic methodological difference between the two groups of articles. Whereas Hiltebeitel's work on the epic is primarily concerned with theoretical issues (spanning, among others, literary theory, theories of textual composition, textual dynamics, history, etc.), his studies of the goddess adopt a primarily topical approach. There are, of course, theoretical issues at stake here as well (as becomes especially clear in his article, "Śiva, the Goddess, and the Disguises of the Pāṇḍavas,"[9] one of the most significant of these for an appreciation of the epic's meaning and literary form). Moreover, there is an unavoidable amount of overlap between the two groups of articles (the article just cited, for example, could be considered to belong in volume 1 just as much as in volume 2). All the same, the basic difference between the more theoretical pieces (on the *Mahābhārata*) and the fieldwork-related studies of the goddess holds. Consequently, volume 2, we decided, should adopt a roughly chronological approach,[10] since its ethnographic thread remains as valid as ever today and, in fact, highlights Hiltebeitel's early advances in the field. Even the earliest of these, "The Indus Valley Proto-Śiva" (originally published in 1978), is not "dated" in any sense of the term, as it presents a view that continues to be influential in contemporary scholarship.[11]

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[9] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Śiva, the Goddess, and the Disguises of the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī," *History of Religions* 20 (1980): 147–74.

[10] In practice, however, it was necessary to cross the chronological approach with a thematic approach, organizing the articles around three thematic focii: Draupadī, the cult of Kūttāṇṭavar/Aravāṇ, and more general reflections in a third section titled "Companion Studies." The chronological order is nonetheless evident: the first section features articles from 1981, 1980, 1980 (two articles), 1985, 1991, 1997, 1995, 1992, 2003, 2000 in that order; the second from 1995, 1998, 1999, and one new article written for the volume; the third from 1978 (the oldest in the volume), 1999, 1999, 1999 (three articles), 2005, 1985, and 1992. (See the enclosed Chronology of Works for full references; the articles are all marked by a double asterisk.)

[11] An assessment that is borne out in Gregory Possehl's recent citation of the article: "An interesting and provocative paper has been published by A. Hiltebeitel, who drew

Volume 1, in contrast, we felt, would be much more useful if it provided a prospective on the future direction of Hiltebeitel's researches into the Indian epic, rather than a retrospective of his previous work. While there are continuities between Hiltebeitel's early and late work on the epic, there is a much clearer sense of development here. In particular, Hiltebeitel's work is articulated into two distinct stages by what he has called his "literary turn" taken around the early 90s. In the first stage, Hiltebeitel approaches the epic in keeping with dominant theories about a common Indo-European epic tradition; in the second "literary" stage, his thinking undergoes significant revision and becomes increasingly critical of the dogmatism of established views. A chronological approach akin to that adopted in volume 2, it was clear, would be of more use to the doxographers than those interested in thinking (or perhaps, in *re*thinking) about the epic.

Volume 1 is thus unusual in that it does not provide an overview of the thinker's development (as such retrospective collections usually do). Rather, it makes a cogent case for a certain view of the epic that Hiltebeitel has been developing since 1991 and arguing for since the mid-1990s: that the *Mahābhārata* is a "product of conscious literary design" and must hence be read with a view to this conscious artistry rather than being saddled with our scholarly expectations of what it *ought* to look like.[12] In practice, this has meant that of the twenty-one

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heavily on the work of B. Volchok, one of the Russian scholars who worked on their attempted decipherment of the Indus script [Hiltebeitel 1978]. Hiltebeitel's critique is much like Srinivasan's, but he makes much of the fact that the horns on the central figure are those of a buffalo. Indian tradition is rich in mythology and symbolism concerning Mahiṣa, the buffalo god. Water buffalo also seem to occur in various contexts in the Indus Civilization. For example, there is seal 279 showing a man hurling a spear at a buffalo [Mackay 1937–8]. 'This has been regarded as depicting a mythic scene: a prototype of *Skanda* killing *Mahisasura,* the "Buffalo Demon," with a spear (*sakti; Mahābhārata* 3:221, 66, Poona Critical Edition) or *Valin* killing the buffalo *Dundubhi* (*Ramayana*, 4, 11, 7–39; Baroda Critical Edition), or the prototype of a Dravidian style buffalo sacrifice.' [Hiltebeitel 1978, 773–4] Turning to other iconography on seal 420, Hiltebeitel begins to deal with the surrounding animals: the elephant, rhinoceros, tiger and buffalo.... [Hiltebeitel] tries to associate these animals with the 'vehicles' (*vāhana*s) of later Indian tradition, particularly those of deities of the four quarters, the *dik-* or *lokapalakas*], or 'World Regents.' This was first suggested by Marshall, but relegated to a footnote he never pursued in his commentary [Marshall 1931e: 53 n.1]. This proposition between the anima iconography on the seal and *vāhana*s remains interesting but not proved." Gregory L. Possehl, *The Indus Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective* (New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, fifth printing 2009; first pub. 2002 by AltaMira Press), 142–3.

[12] A view first advanced at the 1st Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas (DICSEP), although, as one might imagine, to a less than entirely persuaded audience, and since recorded in the Proceedings of that conference:

articles in volume 1, only four are older than 1998[13] and, of these, only one is older than 1977.[14] Of Hiltebeitel's earlier "Indo-European epic theory"-inspired work, only one article has been included: the article "Brothers, Friends, and Charioteers" from 1982,[15] included as it demonstrates how, even in this early phase of his research, Hiltebeitel was already seeking bridges between Indo-European epic theory and the texts of the Indian tradition.

From theories of Indo-European epic to a "literary turn"

Hiltebeitel's earliest work on the *Mahābhārata* clearly demonstrates the influence of Dumézil and Wikander. His first published article, "The *Mahābhārata* and Hindu Eschatology,"[16] begins with an extended discussion of Dumézil's work on the parallels between the apocalyptic scenario of the Scandinavian myth of Ragnarök and the *Mahābhārata's* own, equally apocalyptic, vision of the Kurukṣetra. His next two articles, "Dumézil and Indian Studies"[17] and "Comparing Indo-European 'Epics'" (a review of Dumézil's *Mythe et épopée*, vols. 2 and 3),[18] owe even more to Dumézil. Nonetheless, a sense of dissatisfaction with the Indo-European paradigm is already in evidence in these early essays.

"the largest inadequacy in *Mahābhārata* scholarship, including my own," Hiltebeitel writes, "is simply the failure to appreciate the epic as a work of literature. The western scholarly reception of this epic is straightforwardly built on and entrenched in the premise, aired most magisterially by Moriz Winternitz and Hermann Oldenberg—that the *Mahābhārata* is a 'literary monster'." Alf Hiltebeitel, "Reconsidering Bhṛguization," in *Composing a Tradition: Concepts, Techniques, and Relationships*, ed. Mary Brockington and Peter Schreiner (Zagreb: Croatian Academy of Sciences and the Arts, 1999), 156.

    [13] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Nahuṣa in the Skies: A Human King of Heaven," *History of Religions* 16,4 (1977): 329–350; Hiltebeitel, "Brothers, Friends, and Charioteers: Parallel Episodes in the Irish and Indian Epics," *Homage to Georges Dumézil*, ed. Edgar Polomé, *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, Monograph No. 3 (1982): 85–112; Hiltebeitel, "The Two Kṛṣṇas on One Chariot: Upaniṣadic Imagery and Epic Mythology," *History of Religions* 24 (1984): 1–26; "Kṛṣṇa at Mathurā," in *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, ed. Doris M. Srinivasan (New Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies, 1989), 92–102.

    [14] I.e., the article "Nahuṣa in the Skies: A Human King of Heaven"; see n. 13 above for full citation.

    [15] See n. 13 above for full citation.

    [16] Alf Hiltebeitel, "The *Mahābhārata* and Hindu Eschatology," *History of Religions* 12 (1972): 93–115.

    [17] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Dumézil and Indian Studies," *Journal of Asian Studies* 34 (1974): 129–37.

    [18] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Comparing Indo-European 'Epics'," *History of Religions* 15 (1975): 90–100.

In his 1972 article, for example, he already voices "doubts" about some of Dumézil's "Indo-European comparisons," while simultaneously underscoring "the close connections between the epic crisis and the ideology of the Brāhmaṇas."[19] In his 1974 article, the question of how this Indo-European background relates to its Indian context once again comes to the fore. While retaining the basic Dumézilian approach, he concludes by noting the need to consider how this prototypical Indo-European material would have been "reshaped by Indian reformulations of traditional Indo-European concepts of kingship, and by such specifically Indian themes as reincarnation, yoga, *dharma*, and *bhakti*."[20] The most decisive break with the Duméziliam paradigm, however, can be correlated with his first visit to India in 1974–75. His review of Dumézil's *Mythe et épopée* concludes by calling into question the very premise of Indo-European epic theory. Citing Wikander's work, which "demonstrates that certain narrative epic features of the *Mahābhārata* may be very old," Hiltebeitel asks: "How then can Dumézil speak of the design of its authors as 'de transposer en épopée aussi completement que possible un ensemble mythologique et un seul' (ME, 3:144)?" "The *Mahābhārata* narrative," he concludes, "is more than simply the result of a transposition of a set of mythological types and one eschatological drama."[21]

Here one must mention the other major influence on Hiltebeitel's work and the person who perhaps more than any other played a role in his distancing himself from the dominant ideology in *Epenforschung*: Madeleine Biardeau. In Hiltebeitel's 1972 article, Biardeau is already a dominant influence, her "general distrust of the Indo-European comparison" preceding and signaling Hiltebeitel's own attempts to distance himself from the Dumézilian paradigm. In many ways, one can read Hiltebeitel's early work as an attempt to reconcile Dumézil's method of approaching the Indian epic via an allegedly original Indo-European epic tradition with Biardeau's method of using the Purāṇas to retrospectively illuminate the epic. While Biardeau has been frequently criticized for her rejection of the German text-historical method, a critical clarification of the underlying premises of 19th–20th century German scholarship on the Indian epics brings to light major problems.

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[19] Hiltebeitel, "The *Mahābhārata* and Hindu Eschatology," 133.
[20] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Dumézil and Indian Studies," 137.
[21] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Comparing Indo-European 'Epics'," 100.

Far from being an objective science of texts, as German Indologists like to claim, German Orientalism plays into peculiarly Germany anxieties about religious, cultural, and ethnic identity.[22] Indeed, one can trace the origins of the Indo-European theory back to 19th century *Indogermanische Forschungen*, which in turn originate in a characteristically 19th century German anxiety with establishing authentic (i.e., Āryan) origins for Germans.[23] Scholars such as Pollock and Figuiera have already illuminated the complicity of German Indology in the *Rassenideologie* of the National Socialist state,[24] but what is surprising is that this thinking continues to take on some of its old forms in contemporary German scholarship.[25] Obviously, whether one approaches

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[22] C. Lassen (1837), for example, sought to reconstruct Indian ethnology and prehistory on the basis of the epic, with the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas being identified with "white Aryans [weisse Arier]" and "black aborigines [schwarzen Urbewohner]" respectively and the epic as a whole being interpreted as the record of a historical conflict for white supremacy. His racial hypothesis lays the fundament for over two centuries of German epic studies, beginning with Holtzmann, Sr. (1854), author of the infamous "inversion hypothesis," according to which, the Kauravas were the heroes of the "original" epic and were later denigrated by scurrilous "Brahmanic" redactors. Goldstücker (1879) sought to anchor Holtzmann's thesis in the text through distinguishing a *Bhārata* of 24,000 verses from the *Mahābhārata* of 100,000 verses. Becker (1888) continues this strain of "Indo-Germanic" thinking, by setting up explicit comparisons between the *Mahābhārata* and the *Nibelungenlied* (Dhritaraschtra = Armenrich, Bhischma = Rüdiger, Karna = Siegferd, Arjuna = Iring, Krischna Kesava and Krischna Draupadi = Kriemhilde, etc.). Finally, Holtzmann, Jr. (1892) saw in the epic evidence of a "Brahmanic Counter-Reformation [Gegenreformation]" against a supposed Buddhist Enlightenment, explicitly describing Aśoka as a mixture of Frederick the Great and Lessing.

[23] One must cite here Pascale Rabault-Feuerhahn's remarkable disciplinary history *L'archive des origines: Sanskrit, philologie, anthropologie dans l'Allemagne du XIXᵉ siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2008) for its nuanced overview of some of these issues.

[24] Sheldon Pollock, "Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power beyond the Raj," in *Orientalism and the Post-Colonial Predicament*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); Dorothy Figueira, *Aryans, Jews, Brahmins: Theorizing Authority* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002); see also *The Exotic: A Decadent Quest* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994).

[25] To cite but two recent instances, Malinar, in her recent book on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, dismisses classical Indian philosophical commentaries on the *Bhagavad Gītā* as well as "modern Hindu interpretations of the text" on the grounds that "each author establishes his own hermeneutics on the basis of the religious or philosophical tradition he adheres to." Angelika Malinar, *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 17. Are we to understand by this statement that German scholars have achieved perfect *Standpunktfreiheit*? Or are we to understand by it that their hermeneutics are acceptable, while "Indian" hermeneutics are not? Or that every single Indian author does so, ignoring the important differences between different schools, traditions, periods, philosophies, and standpoints? Surely, one of the contributions of the text-historical school has been its greater sensitivity to historical and textual variation, not to mention the subtle differences between different schools and traditions? Yet von Stietencron, a scholar known for his contribution

the *Mahābhārata* as the detritus of a heroic archaic civilization (one to which German scholars, merely in virtue of *being* German, would have privileged access) or as a work of fundamental theological, cosmological, and philosophical relevance, cannot any longer be considered a neutral issue. Rather, it bears upon issues of identity, colonialism, and race. While the present work does not allow us space for a consideration of these issues, we would like to draw the reader's attention to a forthcoming work by the editors titled *The Nay Science: A History of German Indology*, in which we raise some of these issues.

Biardeau also played a role in yet another decision that led to a significant realignment in Hiltebeitel's work: his decision to study the reception and continued development of the epic tradition among indigenous communities in India. As Hiltebeitel recounts, in 1974, after finishing his first book on the *Mahābhārata*, he made his first trip to India with a sense that the Indo-European connections he had argued for in that book were getting less and less compelling. Hiltebeitel had a hunch that he might find the *Mahābhārata* known better on the ground there than in Western, or for that matter, Indian halls of academe. In particular, he had begun to notice, while proposing his project on a suggestion from Biardeau that he study the Tamil Draupadī cult, that there was total bifurcation between knowledge of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and knowledge of *Mahābhārata* vernaculars. If Sanskritists owned the text, vernacular *Mahābhārata*s, not to mention a Tamil *Mahābhārata* of Śūdra farmers, were only to be belittled.

In effect, although Hiltebeitel perhaps could not have realized the full implications at the time, his ethnographic work on the Draupadī cult would lead to a significant break with two centuries of German scholarship on the epic. Since Holtzmann and Oldenberg, German Orientalists had distinguished between an "Indo-Germanic" or an "Āryan" *Urepos* whose "homeland" (*Heimat*) would have been in the "Northwest,"[26]

to the dialogue between India and Germany, voices near-identical sentiments in his foreword to Malinar's 1996 book: "The analytic thinking of Western interpreters who were schooled in historico-philological methods stands in contrast to the traditional Indian commentators, who not only harmonized and freely downplayed all breaks in the text [i.e. the *Bhagavad Gītā*], but, above all, sought to read their own philosophical-theological concepts out of individual textual passages, in order to secure Kṛṣṇa's divine authority for them." Angelika Malinar, *Rājavidyā. Das königliche Wissen um Herrschaft und Verzicht* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1996), 1. For a recent review of Malinar's work, see Vishwa Adluri, Review of *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*, by Angelika Malinar, *History of Religions* 50,1 (August 2010): 102–107.
[26] Cf. Adolf Holtzmann, for whom, "Instead of the elegiac softness, the resignation, being tired of life, [characteristic] of later Indian literature, the raw war-like air of the

and the epic in its present form which they attributed variously to the influence of Brahmin ideology, the "worshippers" (*Verehrer*) of Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva, or to *bhakti*. Given their obsession with isolating this epic "core" from the *Mahābhārata*, these scholars were less interested in the Indian reception of the text. Hiltebeitel was not unaware of this gap in research: in his 1979 bibliographic essay on Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*,[27] he writes, "startling as it may be, there had up to this point been no real effort to place the *Mahābhārata* in the direct line of India's own *literate* religious tradition."[28] One can thus view his fieldwork on the Draupadī cult as an attempt to rectify this state of affairs. It would also lead to one of the most productive periods in his career, with approximately 26 articles published on the cults of Draupadī and Kūttāṇṭavar in the two decades between 1980 and 2000. As most of these articles have been published in volume 2 and are also reviewed there (see now the introduction to vol. 2), we shall forego a longer discussion here.

Hiltebeitel's researches into the reception of the epic within indigenous communities also led to the publication of a two-volume study of the cult of Draupadī between 1988 and 1991. In these two books, Hiltebeitel first mapped the distribution of approximately two thousand Draupadī temples across Tamilnadu and neighboring states and identified the cult's "core area." Volume 1 treated the core area's mythology,[29]

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old Germanic north [altgermanischen Nordens] blows against us here." Indeed, for him, "the unreservedly *warlike world-view* [*Weltanschauung*]… "constitutes the genuine soul of the old portions of the epic"; "If we were ever to succeed in determining the oldest cultural phase of the Indian race accessible to research," he writes, "and to dissolve away as though by a chemical process all influences of the Brahmanism that is already slowly developing…we would find conditions before us only a little different from those described by *Tacitus* as unique to the ancient Germans. But even in its contemporary ruined form the *Mahābhārata* often delivers us the best commentary on Germania [!]" *Das Mahābhārata und seine Theile* (Kiel: C. F. Haessler, 1892), 45; editors' translation. Cf. also Hermann Oldenberg, who writes that "North India, which overwhelmingly enters into consideration for antiquity as the homeland [Heimat] of Āryan culture, is divided into two main areas: a western and an eastern… In the West live the tribes [Volksstämme], of whom the oldest transmissions report: there arose the Vedas, there the Vedic culture had its seat. The great epic belongs to the West." *Das Mahābhārata: seine Enstehung, sein Inhalt, seine Form* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1922), 2; editors' translation. Cf. also Oldenberg's claim that "the Mahābhārata is the powerful link between old and new India, the India of the Āryan [Indien des Ariers] and of the Hindu [des Hindus]" (ibid., 1).

    [27] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*: A Bibliographical Essay," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 60 (1979): 65-110.
    [28] Ibid., 94 (italics in original).
    [29] See n. 2 above for the full citation.

while volume 2 focused on its rituals.[30] While adopting anthropological modes of inquiry (indeed, a review in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* described Hiltebeitel as an "honorary anthropologist"),[31] his approach was also notable for its sensitivity to local traditions of interpretation and reception. Unsurprisingly, the reception was unanimously positive. In 1992, Hiltebeitel was invited to Paris as Directeur d' Études Invité to give a course on "Le *Mahābhārata* dans les traditions populaires de l'Inde du Sud" at the École Pratiques des Hautes Études, Vème Section, Section des Sciences Religieuses. And in 1994, he was invited to be coordinator and main lecturer for a five-week Ford Foundation workshop on folk religion at the Folklore Research Center, St. Xavier's College, Palayamkottai, Tamilnadu.

One could, of course, say more of Hiltebeitel's extraordinarily fruitful engagement with Biardeau, whose presence can be felt even today in his work. Her sense of the epic as a symbolic universe all its own—one that can neither be reduced to some "Indo-European"/"Indo-Germanic" *Urepos* nor adequately clarified through a theory of interference between indigenous "Vedic" or "para-Vedic" traditions and an Indo-European tradition—is perhaps the single most important factor in Hiltebeitel's attempting, since the early 1980s, to engage questions of the epic's *meaning* rather than historical origins. An article from 1984 ("The Two Kṛṣṇas in One Chariot: Upaniṣadic Imagery and Epic Mythology"; originally published in *History of Religions* and reprinted as chapter 16 of this volume) illustrates perfectly the incipient conflict between these two principles as it plays itself out in Hiltebeitel's work in this new phase of his thought:

> Classical *bhakti* Hinduism [he writes], the nonsectarian Hinduism whose social theory, cosmology, and theology are first fully articulated in the two Hindu epics and the *Harivaṃśa,* developed in these mythological texts a theological language of images that has ever since retained its power in mainstream devotional Hinduism. This essay is an exploration of such imagery as it is worked out through the narrative of the *Mahābhārata*, the most fundamental of these texts, "le monument principal, et sans doute le plus ancien, de la *bhakti.*" The point of departure for this study is thus an assumption not widely shared but, nonetheless, compelling in its widening application, that the *Mahābhārata* in its classical form is a

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[30] See n. 3 above for the full citation.
[31] C. J. Fuller, Review of *The Cult of Draupadī*. 1: *Mythologies: From Gingee to Kurukṣetra*, by Alf Hiltebeitel. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 53 (1990): 165–66.

work of *bhakti* through and through. In other words, no matter what one hypothesizes by way of sources for the story in earlier mythology, heroic legend (I am still of the view that it presupposes an Indo-European and Āryan heritage that distinguishes it from its companion texts) or possible history, there are no passages or incidents which on their own permit the reconstruction of either pre-*bhakti* stages of mythologization or a historical pre-"divinized" or premythological core. Indeed, it is more pointless to look for original human-historical figures and elements than earlier forms of the story since in the latter case there is at least something comparative to go on. Rather than being a patchwork of myths, legends, and historical reminiscences overlaid with *bhakti,* what the narrative builds up to and works around are a series of what I would call "*bhakti* tableaux," scenes which present images that hold themselves before the hearer's mind. Ultimately, they present ways of seeing the divine through the stories that are akin to the contemporaneous development of temple iconography, and it is no accident that many of these epic *bhakti* tableaux continue to find their places on mass market oleographs in India today.[32]

One can see how Biardeau's approach to the epic of studying the way the Purāṇas both emerge from and reciprocally illuminate the *Mahābhārata* provides a major impetus for Hiltebeitel in this article to begin thinking about the text in terms of itself. Crucially, his attention turned from an engagement with scholarly theories *on* the epic to the epic itself: what did it have to say to the reader? How was it able to provide a vital framework of meaning (ethical, social, and political) for so many centuries across such a wide area, while recognizably maintaining its textual integrity? What were the literary strategies the epic made use of in presenting itself?

Sometime in the early 1990s, Hiltebeitel recalls taking a "literary turn" in his *Mahābhārata* studies. At its simplest, this means that he increasingly came to think about the *Mahābhārata* as a work of literature as opposed to a palimpsest of textual and historical strata as was the accepted scholarly convention. Although he claims to have aired the idea first in 1994 during a talk on the epic at the Śiva-Viṣṇu temple in Lanham, Maryland, it is clear from his writings that the idea had been slowly maturing for a long time. Articles such as "The Folklore of Draupadi: Sārīs and Hair" from 1991 already reveal a preoccupation with the literary qualities of the epic,[33] as does the back and forth

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[32] Hiltebeitel, "The Two Kṛṣṇas," 1.
[33] Alf Hiltebeitel, "The Folklore of Draupadi: Sārīs and Hair," in *Gender, Genre, and Power in South Asian Expressive Traditions*, ed. Arjun Appadurai, Frank J. Korom, and

comparison between Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa's Sanskrit drama *Veṇīsaṃhāra* ("The Binding-Up of the Braid") and the *Mahābhārata* in his 1981 article on Draupadī's hair.[34] The concern with literary aspects is even more prominent in his 1995 article on the *Rām, Rās*, and *Pāṇḍava Līlā* traditions of north India,[35] and ultimately culminates in a virtuoso analysis of the epic's strategies of literary self-presentation through its use of frame-narratives in the article "Conventions of the Naimiṣa Forest."[36] Both as a paper and, later, as a section of a central chapter in his 2001 book, "Conventions" provides compelling evidence for rethinking some of the more dogmatic historicist claims about the epic, such as the thesis of an older, compact "*Bhārata*" that is later expanded to form the "*Mahā-*" or "Great-" *Bhārata*. While scholars were not about to give up positions on which they had built up entire careers (not to speak of identities!), by moving the frame-narratives center-stage in "Conventions," Hiltebeitel had effectively turned the received theory of "accretion of secondary materials to the central story" (van Buitenen)[37] on its head. The *Mahābhārata*, he had shown, had to be read from the outside inward, rather than being read from the inside outward. Perhaps alone of the "Western savants" (Sukthankar),[38] Hiltebeitel had dared think what Western scholars had long been unwilling to concede: that perhaps the epic had always been preserved, understood, and transmitted in an exemplary manner in the Indian tradition, without the need for Western "critical" surgeries. Indeed, if this approach was correct, then the epic could no longer be seen as a "monstrous chaos" (Oldenberg)[39]

Margaret A. Mills (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1991), 395–427. (This article has been reprinted in vol. 2 of this collection.)

[34] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Draupadī's Hair," in *Autour de la déesse hindoue*, ed. Madeleine Biardeau, *Purushartha* 5 (1981): 179–214. (This article has been reprinted in vol. 2 of this collection.)

[35] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Draupadī Cult Līlās," in *The Gods at Play: Līlā in South Asia*, ed. William Sax (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 204–24. (This article has been reprinted in vol. 2 of this collection.)

[36] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Conventions of the Naimiṣa Forest," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 23 (1998): 69–79.

[37] J. A. B. van Buitenen, trans. *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 1: *The Book of the Beginning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), xix.

[38] V. S. Sukthankar, *On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata* (Bombay: Asiatic Society, 1957), 29; cf. also p. 31 and 67. On p. 25, Sukthankar speaks, perhaps more accurately, of "European savants."

[39] Hermann Oldenberg, *Das Mahābhārata*, 1. In all, the term *Ungeheuer* and derivatives occur 33 times in Oldenberg's *Mahābhārata*, with the greatest concentration of occurrences (7 in total) occurring between pages 80–82. The most frequent usage is as a description of the epic, in the forms: "ungeheures Gedicht," "ungeheures Werk"

or as a "literary monster" (Winternitz),[40] but had to be understood as a product of conscious literary and artistic design.

One must appreciate the radicality of this suggestion, which basically broke with two hundred years of Orientalist scholarship and pseudo-critique on the epic. The Śūdras and the low-status Alis (transsexual "brides" of Kṛṣṇa), Hiltebeitel was implicitly suggesting, had understood

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(twice)," ungeheuren Umfang," "ungeheures Schatzhaus," "ungeheures Hauptstück," "ungeheuren Stoffmassen," and "ungeheures Epos." The term is also used twice of the main battle (variously described as an "ungeheure Schlacht" or as an "ungeheure Kampf"), and a total of four times to describe various aspects of the epic: its transformation into a didactic poem ("ungeheurliche Verwandlung"), the didactic expansion of the poem ("ungeheueren lehrhaften Erweiterungen"), and its expanses ("ungeheuren Weiten"). But the most interesting occurrences for our analysis are those that serve to characterize its aesthetic character: the events narrated in the epic spread out into "monstrous dimensions" ("ungeheurliche Dimensionen"), it contains events that have been enlarged into the "monstrous" ("das Ungeheure"), it conjures up or is the product of "monstrous visions" ("ungeheueren Visionen"), it itself contains actual "monsters" ("Ungeheuren") and "monstrosities" ("Ungeheurlichkeiten"). To this we may add a final class: those usages that serve to characterize the Indian aesthetic in the widest sense, namely, its very outlook on becoming. Thus, the Indian aesthetic contemplates the life of the universe as permeated by "monstrous tensions and discharges" ("ungeheueren Spannungen und Entladungen"); contemplates, in the epic, an image of the "monstrosity of natural- and divine existence" ("ungeheueren Natur- und Götterbegebenheit"); sees, "in the whole of nature," "a monstrous realm of life" ("ungeheueres Reich des Lebens"); sees human and divine fate as being suffused with a "monstrous All-Life" ("ungeheuren Allleben"); as merely a wave in the "monstrous stream of Saṃsāra" ("ungeheuren Strom des Saṃsāra"); pushes narrative occurrences into the "most monstrous dimensions of the event" ("ungeheursten Dimensionen des Geschehens"; note the superlative degree!) or sees them steered along "monstrous paths" ("ungeheure Bahnen"); and fashions itself out of "masses of material" drawn from an existence that is "monstrous, wonder-filled, [and] terrifying" ("ungeheuren wunderfüllten furchtbaren") at the same time. Crowning this vast picture of uncontrolled, teeming becoming and its corresponding aesthetic, as its symbol and archetype, is Śiva: the "supreme god" whose "monstrous agency" ("ungeheure Tun") Oldenberg dimly perceives to be at work in all this fantastic cosmological and narrative unfolding. (This note excerpted from the editors' forthcoming work *The Nay Science: A History of German Indology*.)

[40] Moritz Winternitz, *Geschichte der indischen Literatur*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Amelang, 1909), 272. The full citation reads: "For us, however, who contemplate the *Mahābhārata* not as faithful [gläubige] Hindus, but as critical literary historians [kritische Litterarhistoriker], it is nothing less than an artificial work [Kunstwerk]; and in no case can we see in it the work of an author, indeed, not even of a capable collector and arranger. The *Mahābhārata* is a literary monster [litterarisches Unding]. Never had an artist's hand attempted—and it would, indeed, hardly have been possible—to unify the conflicting elements to a uniform poem. Only unpoetic theologians and commentators and talentless hacks [Abschreiber] finally welded parts that are in truth irreconcilable and date back to different centuries together into a disordered mass" (editors' translation).

the epic better than an array of German (and some other) "experts" had ever succeeded in doing.[41]

It is thus unsurprising that when Hiltebeitel published his next two books, they both included the word "Rethinking" in the title. In effect, Hiltebeitel had spent the time since his first book in 1976 reappraising the issue of what epic studies as such meant or ought to mean from the ground up. The two intervening books, his studies of Draupadī from 1988 and 1991, marked important milestones in this process, while themselves fuelling further bouts of "rethinking." The two "Rethinking" books (published in 1999[42] and 2001,[43] respectively) signaled Hiltebeitel's "matured" view of the epic. Even an ardent critic of Hiltebeitel's like Fitzgerald was inclined to concede, "Alf Hiltebeitel has been the single most open-minded and fearlessly imaginative Western reader the authors and editors of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* (MBh) have ever had for their masterpiece."[44]

The two books are very different in style and substance. At 560 pages plus a 15 page introduction, Hiltebeitel's 1999 book was his longest yet—and its subject appropriately ambitious: a comprehensive overview of the regional martial oral epics of India and of the way they relate to or "rethink" the classical epics. To that end, it demonstrated that, if one were to consider the Sanskrit epic tradition *as a whole* rather than addressing its *disjecta membra* as both traditional scholars of the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* and modern scholars of India's vernacular oral epics till then had done, the only approach capable of encompassing this whole was *literary hermeneutics*. The following passage from the

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[41] As one might imagine, some responses were less than enthusiastic. A reviewer of volume 3 of the Proceedings of the Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas lashed out at Hiltebeitel's contribution ("Weighing Orality and Writing in the Sanskrit Epics," 2005; presented in 2002) accusing him of "presenting his own opinion of the genesis of the *Mahābhārata* with great eloquence, but to a great extent eschewing [the need for] scientific demonstration" and, not content with this *ad hominem* attack, turned around and accused the "Peer-review-system" of "breaking down" in this one case. Andreas Bigger, Review of *Epics, Khilas, and Purāṇas: Continuities and Ruptures*, ed. by Petteri Koskikallio, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 158,2 (2008): 496. Yet another German reviewer contented himself with repeating the accusation; cf. Thomas Oberlies, Review of *Epics, Khilas, and Purāṇas: Continuities and Ruptures*, ed. by Petteri Koskikallio, *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 104.3 (May–June 2009): 358–359.

[42] See n. 4 above for the full citation.

[43] See n. 5 above for the full citation.

[44] James Fitzgerald, "The Many Voices of the *Mahābhārata*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123,4 (Oct.–Dec., 2003): 803.

introduction is especially illuminative of how Hiltebeitel, since 1999, has been thinking about the task of epic studies:

> …rethinking India's epics has meant thinking more about literature and history than doing anthropology. No matter how important I continue to think they are for the study of Hinduism and South Asian religions, and indeed for the anthropological study of South Asia, India's classical epics are above all works of literature. This has meant recalling some of the reasons I was once an English major for my first three years of college, and giving some attention to recent studies in literature and literature theory.[45]

Hiltebeitel's next book, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King*, then sought to buttress this case for a literary reading of the *Mahābhārata* by examining the way the author of the epic, Vyāsa, and its main kingly protagonist, Yudhiṣṭhira, interact throughout the epic. In contrast to the reigning orthodoxy of an oral Kṣatriya epic rewritten to legitimate a newly-instituted Brahmin hierarchy, Hiltebeitel argues for seeing the Brahminic Vyāsa as a "narrative fiction," just as the references to orality are "literary tropes." Thus, rather than reducing Yudhiṣṭhira or Vyāsa to historical personages and interpreting their interaction as evidence of a historical conflict between the Kṣatriya and Brahmin castes, Hiltebeitel argues for a complete shift in perspective: the epic, he suggests, is from the very beginning the product of Brahmins, who make use of tropes such as orality and bardic transmission (in the many references to the *sūta*), in order to articulate a comprehensive view of the proper *dharma* and of the way a righteous king (such as the fictional Yudhiṣṭhira) might be instructed in maintaining this *dharma*. Oral epic theory, he suggests, is not only of little use in a clarification of this philosophical and literary project; it has actively distorted our perspective on the epic:

> Western scholarly reception of the *Mahābhārata* is built squarely upon the premise, aired most magisterially by Moritz Winternitz and Hermann Oldenberg, that the *Mahābhārata* is a "literary unthing" (*literarisches Unding*), a "monstrous chaos" (*ungeheuerliches Chaos*). Although our time is now one in which "literary monstrosity" might imply a kind of artistry (one thinks first of Henry James writing on the art of the novel as "such large loose and baggy monsters"), the phrase is simply not adequate to the critical task. Nonetheless, the premise of monstrosity has served a purpose. It has allowed scholars of very different persuasions and interests

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[45] Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking India's Oral and Classical Epics*, 7.

to design a *Mahābhārata* of convenience through which to nurture—with more bombast than debate, and with scarcely anything that could be called cumulative results—their own contradictory notions of origins and their equally contradictory developmental theories.[46]

Instead, Hiltebeitel "urges" that the *Mahābhārata* "must have been written over a much shorter period than is usually advanced…by 'committee' (Kirste 1902, 7 and 9) or 'team' (Dumézil 1968, 238), and at most through a couple of generations."[47] Indeed, as a sustained meditation on the problem of Yudhiṣṭhira's education in the *Mahābhārata* shows, the entire epic (including the so-called "narrative" and the "didactic" portions) coheres around the *Mahābhārata's* central problem: reconciling the violence that is an inevitable aspect of *pravṛttidharma* with the philosophical ideal of *nivṛttidharma*. "The *svadharma* of kings," he notes, "must include not only the means to violence, but the means to its appeasement… One of the chief objects of the *Mahābhārata* is thus to instruct kings and other Kṣatriyas in how to curb endless cycles of violence, particularly as such cycles affect and implicate Brahmans."[48] In chapter 5, Hiltebeitel then proposes that the concept of *ānṛśaṃsya* (which he translates as "noncruelty") which is recommended to Yudhiṣṭhira as a kingly ideal represents the epic authors' solution to the problem of violence as both necessary and repugnant.

Besides rethinking Western positions on the Indian epic from the ground up, Hiltebeitel has also continually sought to revise and expand the narrow methodological canon of Indological studies. As a student of Eliade's, he already displayed a sophisticated understanding of sacrifice and ritual in his early *oeuvre*. He has since then incorporated a number of interdisciplinary perspectives into his work, including the work of the French post-structuralists Derrida and Foucault. In his 2001 book, for example, a discussion of Foucault's question "what is an author?" in chapter 2 gives way to a reflection on "author function" and, finally, to a philosophical engagement with the work of the eminent phenomenologist and Heidegger scholar, J.L. Mehta. Other work has sought to reconsider the epic in light of the work of A.K. Ramanujan, Velcheru Narayana Rao, and even Freud. More recently, Hiltebeitel has been interested in thinking through affinities between

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[46] Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*, 1; see now n. 39 and 40 above.
[47] Ibid., 20.
[48] Ibid., 118.

the *Mahābhārata* and Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project. Hiltebeitel is also currently co-proposing (with Vishwa Adluri) a volume titled *The Emergence of Hinduism* (under consideration by Fortress Publishing), in which he hopes to show why thinking about Hinduism in terms of "emergences" rather than "origins" does more justice to it than the historicist approach hitherto.[49]

Position pieces and interpretative pieces: Parts I and II of volume 1

Since completing his 2001 book, Hiltebeitel's work has mainly focused on working out the implications of such a literary reading for the epic. As these articles constitute a coherent body of work no less significant than his other published monographs for an understanding of his intellectual trajectory, we were clear from the outset that, whatever the final form of volume 1, it would include a majority of these articles.[50] They perhaps more than any other body of Hiltebeitel's work constitute his "matured" view of the epic and this volume, in bringing them together, may be considered Hiltebeitel's most comprehensive statement to date on questions of approach, methodology, and interpretation looking back at over 40 years of *Mahābhārata* scholarship.

   But although we were clear from the outset that volume 1 ought to provide an overview of Hiltebeitel's evolving views on the epic, the task of selecting which articles to include was not easy. One of the first principles adopted was to include those articles which focused on carrying forward the argument of Hiltebeitel's 2001 book. Unusually for such an edition, this volume was planned from the very outset as a

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[49] The book's idea of "emergences" will be advanced by Vishwa Adluri, based on an attempt to articulate a philosophical rather than historical approach to Hinduism. Adluri draws on the distinction between "origin" and "originary" found in his teacher Reiner Schürmann's work to deconstruct essentialist approaches based upon privileging historical origins such as the entire German rhetoric of "Āryan origins" for the *Mahābhārata* (see n. 22 above). For a discussion of the distinction between "origin" and "originary," see Vishwa Adluri, *Parmenides, Plato and Mortal Philosophy: Return from Transcendence* (London: Continuum Publishing, 2011).

[50] Of the fifteen articles on approaches to the *Mahābhārata* published in this period, volume 1 includes all but three: "India's Epics: Writing, Orality, and Divinity," in *The Study of Hinduism*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 114–38; "Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita*: The First Known Close and Critical Reading of the Brahmanical Sanskrit Epics," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 34 (2006): 229–86; and "Mapping *Bhakti* through Friendship in the Sanskrit Epics," in *Epic and Argument in Sanskrit Literary History*, Festschrift for Robert P. Goldman, ed. Sheldon I. Pollock (Delhi: Manohar, 2010), 91–116. Note that this last article is not the same as the chapter titled "Mapping *Bhakti* in the Sanskrit Epics: Friendship, Hospitality, and Separation" in the present volume, which is new to this volume.

sort of "companion" volume to Hiltebeitel's *Rethinking* book. Thus, we opened with a selection of six articles in which Hiltebeitel argues for the literary character of the *Mahābhārata*, and the benefits of interpreting it as a work of literary art that holds together effectively. These include positions on writing, reading, and orality (chapters 1 and 2; originally published in 2005[51] and 2000,[52] respectively); textual representation of the author and the politics of devotion, or having gods be part of the story (chapter 3; 2004);[53] the epic's primary self-identification of its genre as *itihāsa* or "history" (chapter 4, new article);[54] the *Mahābhārata*'s Critical Edition and the epic's archetypal design (chapter 5, new article);[55] and on the epic's inclusion of substories (chapter 6; 2005).[56] Four of these articles had been previously published, while two were new "position pieces" written especially for the volume. Of these four, the aptly titled "Rethinking the *Mahābhārata*: Toward a Politics of *Bhakti*" (chapter 3), constituted Hiltebeitel's response to the critics of his 2001 book. Part I thus includes all of what might be called Hiltebeitel's "position pieces" to date, i.e., those in which Hiltebeitel has taken a stance on issues of the epic's genre, form, literary content, redactorial history, and interpretation.

In Part II, under the heading "Interpretive Pieces," we then chose to feature a set of six essays that follow from the positions developed in Part I. These are, in effect, applications of the positions taken in Part I to specific sections or themes in the epics. One of Hiltebeitel's main aims in these longer studies was to show that readers' knowledge of the text appreciates from working things out through the positions articulated in Part I. Part II opens with a discussion of the "*Nārāyaṇīya* and the

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[51] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Weighting Orality and Writing in the Sanskrit Epics," in *Epics, Khilas, and Purāṇas: Continuities and Ruptures.* Proceedings of the 3rd Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas, Sept. 2002, ed. Petteri Koskikallio (Zagreb: Croatian Acedemy of Sciences and Arts, 2005), 81–111.

[52] Alf Hiltebeitel, "The Primary Process of the Hindu Epics," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 4.3 (2000): 269–88.

[53] Alf Hiltebeitel, "More Rethinking the *Mahābhārata*: Toward a Politics of *Bhakti*." *Indo-Iranian Journal* 47 (2004): 203–27.

[54] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Why *Itihāsa*? New Possibilities and Limits in Considering the *Mahābhārata* as History." In spite of the resemblance in the titles, this is not the same article as the more preliminary "Why *Itihāsa*? New Possibilities in Considering the *Mahābhārata*'s Intention as 'History'," in *Ways and Reasons for Thinking about the* Mahābhārata *as a Whole*, ed. Vishwa Adluri (Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, forthcoming).

[55] Alf Hiltebeitel, "The Archetypal Design of the Two Sanskrit Epics." This chapter will also appear by agreement as an article in *Proceedings of the 5th Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas*, ed. Petteri Koskikallio (Zagreb: Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, forthcoming).

[56] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Not Without Subtales: Telling Laws and Truths in the Sanskrit Epics," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 33 (2005): 455–511.

Early Reading Communities of the *Mahābhārata*" (chapter 7; 2006),[57] an article that touches upon almost all of the positions taken in Part I. Subsequent pieces in Part II then address, in turn, *bhakti* (chapter 8; 2007),[58] the Aśvamedha sacrifice in both Sanskrit epics (chapter 9; new article),[59] and the narrative progression of the respective heroines of the two epics (chapter 10; 2010),[60] before returning once again to the theme of *bhakti* in "Mapping *Bhakti* in the Sanskrit Epics: Friendship, Hospitality, and Separation" (chapter 11; new article). The final chapter in this section (chapter 12; 2005)[61] then re-prints an extended-length review of Fitzgerald's translation of the *Śāntiparvan*. Unlike Part I, where there is a strong sense of chronological continuity and chronological development, the articles in Part II were intended more as self-standing pieces and hence do not follow a chronological order.

Recent/Early Companion Pieces: Part III

Part III, under the heading "Recent/Early Companion Pieces," then concludes volume 1 with a mix of recent pieces and earlier ones that display work on overlapping topics. Here, the positions and interpretative implications worked out in Parts I and II continue to find applications, but now in articles where one can see Hiltebeitel addressing topics both before and after his literary turn.

Chapters 13–14 both discuss ways the epic brings in cosmological considerations. "Bhīṣma's Sources" (chapter 13; 2001),[62] the first "recent"

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[57] Alf Hiltebeitel, "The *Nārāyaṇīya* and the Early Reading Communities of the *Mahābhārata*," in *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 BCE to 400 CE*, ed. Patrick Olivelle (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 227–55.

[58] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Among Friends: Marriage, Women, and Some Little Birds," in *Gender and Narrative in the Mahābhārata*, ed. Simon Brodbeck and Brian Black (London: Routledge, 2007), 110–43.

[59] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Epic Aśvamedhs." In spite of the resemblance in the titles, this is not the same article as "Epic Aśvamedhs," in *Papers from the Fourth International Vedic Workshop: The Vedas in Culture and History*, ed. Joel Brereton (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, forthcoming).

[60] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Authorial Paths through the Two Sanskrit Epics: Via the *Rāmopākhyāna*," in *Epic Undertakings: Papers of the 12th World Sanskrit Conference*, vol. 2, ed. Muneo Tokunaga and Robert P. Goldman (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2009), 169–214.

[61] Alf Hiltebeitel, "On Reading Fitzgerald's Vyāsa," review of *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 7, trans. by James L. Fitzgerald. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 125,2 (2005): 241–61.

[62] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Bhīṣma's Sources," in *Vidyārṇavavandanam: Essays in Honor of*

piece, deals with how the great patriarch Bhīṣma comes to know what he knows in the *Śāntiparvan*. The next piece, "Nahuṣa in the Skies," the oldest of the articles included in this volume (first published 1977),[63] was selected as providing an interesting comparison to the more recent "Bhīṣma's Sources." As in the 2001 article, Hiltebeitel's starting point is the question of how epic narrative introduces questions that are only solved through turning to cosmological considerations, but the treatment is quite different, invoking, for example, a significant amount of Vedic material. Nonetheless, one can note a remarkable continuity between the two articles, in that both are concerned with demonstrating the intrinsic connection between the epic's so-called "narrative" and "didactic" portions.

The two cosmological chapters then give way to a triad of "charioteer"-themed articles. The first, "Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*: The Death of Karṇa" (chapter 15; 2007[64]), is a "recent" piece that examines the role of Kṛṣṇa's actions in bringing about the death of Karṇa. The next two chapters, written in 1982[65] and 1984[66] respectively, may be seen as early "precursors" of chapter 15 in that they, too, focus on the pivotal confrontation between Arjuna and Karṇa. Chapter 16 focuses on Indo-European parallels to Irish epic, reflecting Hiltebeitel's early Dumézilian framework; but the next article, cited earlier for its paragraph on "*bhakti* tableaux"[67] and written just two years later, already displays a remarkable development away from this paradigm. Here, rather than the Indo-European connections, it is the Upaniṣadic background to the two Kṛṣṇas on one chariot that is foregrounded.

Chapters 18–19 are about Buddhism and the *Mahābhārata*. The first of these, "Buddhism and the *Mahābhārata*: Boundary Dynamics in Textual Practice" (chapter 18; 2005),[68] is a "recent" piece dedicated to a discussion of the work of scholars who have advanced the idea that Buddhism is one of the background forces that shapes the epic.

Asko Parpola, ed. Klaus Karttunen and Petteri Koskikallio (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 2001), 261–78.

[63] See n. 13 above for the full citation.

[64] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*: The Death of Karṇa," in *Krishna: A Sourcebook*, ed. Edwin F. Bryant (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23–76.

[65] See n. 13 above for the full citation.

[66] See n. 13 above for the full citation.

[67] See n. 32 above.

[68] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Buddhism and the *Mahābhārata*," in *Boundaries, Dynamics, and the Construction of Traditions in South Asia*, ed. Federico Squarcini (Florence: University of Florence Press, 2005), 107–31.

While Biardeau, Sutton, and Fitzgerald have made points in this regard favoring a post-Aśokan dating, Hiltebeitel was the first to advance a new discussion along these lines in his 1991 article "Kṛṣṇa at Mathura," included as the next piece (chapter 19)[69] in this section.

Finally, chapters 20–21, "Empire, Invasion, and India's National Epics" and "Role, Role Model, and Function: The Sanskrit Epic Warrior in Comparison and Theory," treat the epic's portrayals of warriors and kings. Published in 1998[70] and 2004,[71] respectively, but both written in 1997 as spin-offs of the writing of *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*, these last two articles address questions about the nature of epic in Indian national culture and different images of the warrior in classical, medieval, and modern India.

In its three parts, this volume is thus intended to carry the reader forward through a series of articles highlighting and defending positions taken in Hiltebeitel's *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*; in particular, his claim that the *Mahābhārata* was composed by a committee of "out of sorts Brahmins"[72] over a short period of time of no longer than two generations between the middle of the second century BCE and the turn of the millennium.[73] Many of these adduce additional evidence based on a closer study of the text; chapter 3, for example, offers further thinking about the epic's hints at what Hiltebeitel posits to be its two-generation committee in relation to the centrality of Vyāsa as "the author," while chapter 6 argues that the epic's "subtales" cannot be later than the archetype that includes them. *Post quem* and *ante quem* intertextual considerations are also raised in chapter 4 with respect to the seldom-studied *Yuga Purāṇa*; 9, 10, and 11 with respect to the *Rāmāyaṇa*; and in chapter 13 with regard to the *Mahābhārata*'s own manner of citing "sources." Chapter 4 also draws on collaborative projects undertaken along with other scholars[74] whose work supports Hiltebeitel's claim. Indeed, five of the six chapters that comprise the

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[69] See n. 13 above for the full citation.

[70] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Empire, Invasion, and India's National Epics," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 2,3 (1998): 387–421.

[71] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Role, Role Model, and Function: The Sanskrit Epic Warrior in Comparison and Theory," in *Playing for Real: Hindu Role Models, Religion, and Gender*, ed. Jacqueline Suthren Hirst and Lynn Thomas (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 27–50.

[72] Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*, 19.

[73] Ibid., 18–32.

[74] See *Ways and Means for Thinking about the* Mahābhārata *as a Whole*, ed. Vishwa Adluri (Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, forthcoming), a volume that

"Position Papers" in Part I (the exception is chapter 2) contribute to this discussion in one way or another. As Hiltebeitel's claim favoring a relatively brief period of composition constitutes the crux of the debate between Hiltebeitel and his critics, we turn next to a discussion of some aspects of this debate.

Vyāsa's *atelier*

Let us begin with a recent criticism of Hiltebeitel's view of the *Mahābhārta's* composition. Fitzgerald, a defender of oral epic theory,[75] has been adamantine in his opposition to the idea that the epic, roughly as we have it in the Pune Critical Edition, may have been *ab initio* a work of conscious composition. But why is Fitzgerald so opposed to the idea, and what is at stake in this debate? Consider Fitzgerald's characterization of Hiltebeitel's position, as articulated in a recent book on "epic and history":

> One major scholar of the *MBh*, Alf Hiltebeitel, has argued that an *atelier* of epic poets working under the guidance of a chief architect for a period of a few years (two generations at most, he says) created the *MBh* in a single *literary* effort. Arguing like intelligent design theorists in another anti-evolutionary arena, Hiltebeitel denies there was ever an oral *Bhārata* epic. He charges that oral epic theory is a large house of cards in relation to the *MBh*, and he claims that the few references we have in adjacent Sanskrit literature to a "*Bhārata*" as opposed to a "*Great Bhārata*" are of no significance. What Hiltebeitel gains by viewing the *MBh* in this way is a completely synchronous artistic creation (or one that is nearly so; he admits the possibility of a few additions to the text after its composition) that is the product of some kind of unified authorial vision. Hiltebeitel says that the archetypal text recovered in the Pune edition was produced in writing between "the mid-second century BCE and the year zero" (Hiltebeitel 2001: 18). Hiltebeitel's argument that the text was created

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includes contributions from T. P. Mahadevan and the editors based on papers originally presented as part of a panel at the 14th World Sanskrit Conference in Kyoto, Japan.
    [75] Fitzgerald's enthusiasm for 19th century German epic theory also extends to Holtzmann, Sr.'s hypothesis of an original Indo-Germanic saga of heroic deeds and knightly chivalry akin to the *Nibelungenlied* and to his nephew, Holtzmann, Jr.'s "inversion hypothesis," according to which the Kauravas were the original heroes of the old epic and were only later maligned through a Brahmanic revision that introduced the Pāṇḍavas as the ideal of Brahmanic kingship. Of Holtzmann's "inversion hypothesis," Sukthankar already remarked, "These wild aberrations of Holtzmann, which hardly deserve the name of a theory…have now little more than antiquarian interest." Sukthankar, *On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata*, 15.

in a single synchronous creative effort is, in my judgment, completely unsupportable, even paradoxical, but it has a helpful, clarifying effect on thinking about the *Mahābhārata's* development. On the other hand, I have no trouble imagining such an atelier producing a written *Great Bhārata* on and around some older oral *Bhārata*.[76]

Equating Hiltebeitel's idea with "intelligent design theorists" may be rhetorically effective, but what is the substantial criticism behind it? If, as Hiltebeitel has compellingly shown in his 2001 book, there *are* traces of "intelligent design" throughout the *Mahābhārata* (in its use of frame narratives, in its making the author of the work also the progenitor of the principal characters, in its sophisticated hermeneutic strategies), does that make Hiltebeitel an "intelligent design theorist" or does it make the *Mahābhārata* a work of literature? Is Hiltebeitel taking up an argument in an "anti-evolutionary arena" or is he, rather, suggesting that evolutionary models are of limited use in thinking about conscious poetic creations? And although Hiltebeitel does deny that there is any basis for thinking there was ever "some older oral *Bhārata*"—that is, an ancient oral *Bhārata* tribal epic—he does not deny that the *Mahābhārata* poets could have drawn on oral legendary and didactic sources.

Clearly, Hiltebeitel anticipated such challenges from those positing an ancient bardic oral core in *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*.[77] But one senses that he felt that the more important debate would continue over notions of what was "added" to the *Mahābhārata*, for he already noted in his 2001 book that, "The real challenges will continue to come from those who find one or another reason to argue that some portion or passage within the Critical Edition is late, such as the highly devotional *Nārāyaṇīya* portion of the *Śāntiparvan*, or the entire *Anuśāsana Parvan*." Acknowledging the possibility, Hiltebeitel nonetheless notes with characteristic precision that, "since no one is close to proving anything, let us be all the more cautious about what we try to disprove." He "would only argue that even these axiomatically late portions must be looked at with an eye fresh to the possibility that they are not any later—or at least much later: hours, weeks, or months rather than centuries—than

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[76] Fitzgerald, "No Contest," 110. It is to be noted that Fitzgerald gives no citations for what he calls "references we have in adjacent Sanskrit literature to a '*Bhārata*' as opposed to a '*Great Bhārata*'," nor does he discuss what significance might be imputed to them independent of what the *Mahābhārata* says itself. See chapter 6 of this volume for Hiltebeitel's discussion of these terms in the epic.

[77] See Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*, 8, 19 and n. 74.

the rest, once the rest, and its principles of composition and design, are better understood."[78]

At the time Hiltebeitel wrote this about the *Nārāyaṇīya* in his *Rethinking* book, he could not have anticipated the support for his argument that would come from researching the text fully and from Thennilapuram Mahadevan's researches into the Southern Recension. In a monograph published in 2008, although shared earlier with Hiltebeitel, Mahadevan compared the manuscripts of the Southern Recension against each other and against the CE text and correlated their variation with what he was discovering about Brahmin migrations to the south.[79] Using this data, he was able to date a bifurcation of Southern Recension manuscipts to the Kaḷabhra interregnum (ca. 350–550 CE)[80] and demonstrate that changes made in the baseline archetype, including the *Nārāyaṇīya*, would have had to have been made before that date.

In addition to this evidence, Hiltebeitel has also been able to show in two recent studies[81] that the Southern Recension redactor or "S" undertook a major revision of the Critical Edition's "baseline" archetypal text before the Kaḷabhra interregnum and that the Malayālam manuscripts of the *Nārāyaṇīya* modified this S Recension archetype rather than the baseline text itself (which S had already modified). Indeed, if Hiltebeitel's analysis here is correct, then this argumentation would also have to apply to S's nearly complete revision of a segment of the *Anuśāsana Parvan* known as the *Umā-Maheśvara Saṃvāda* (13.126–34), and thus to the *Anuśāsana Parvan* itself. One may then conclude that S had a baseline *Mahābhārata* already available to him

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[78] Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*, 29–30.

[79] Thennilapuram Mahadevan, "On the Southern Recension of the Mahābhārata, Brahman Migrations, and the Brāhmī Paleography," *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies* 15.2 (2008): 43–147.

[80] Hiltebeitel is now able to revise this date down from the 400–700 CE date offered in previous discussions thanks to a new dating made by the epigraphist Iravatham Mahadevan, as communicated orally to Thennilappuram Mahadevan (August 2010). See Alf Hiltebeitel, "On Sukthankar's "S" and Some Shortsighted Assessments and Uses of the Pune Critical Edition (CE)," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 19,2 (Spring 2011): 89–128 and Hiltebeitel, *Dharma: Its Early History in Law, Religion, and Narrative*.

[81] Alf Hiltebeitel, "The Southern Recension Reading of the Śakuntalā Story as Its First Reading: What It Can Tell Us about the Original and the Second Reading by Kālidāsa," in *Revisiting Kālidāsa's* Abhijñāna-śākuntalam: *Land, Love, Languages: Forms of Exchange in Ancient India*, ed. Deepika Tandon and Saswati Sengupta (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, forthcoming); Hiltebeitel, "On Sukthankar's 'S.'"

to modify, which suggests a much older date for the epic as a whole in line with Hiltebeitel's thinking on the topic.[82] If one considers the evidence above along with Hiltebeitel's continued exploration of *post quem* and *ante quem* considerations,[83] it is clear that, in spite of certain critics' dismissal of Hiltebeitel's chronological argumentation, there are indeed good reasons for thinking that the "*Great-Bhārata*" epic, which also called itself the *Bhārata*, was composed within a much shorter period of time than previously thought. As Hiltebeitel argues above, it puts the *onus* on those who argue for extensive "interpolation" over an extended period of time to provide more convincing evidence for their view.

Second, if this evidence further strengthens Hiltebeitel's standing argumentation, why does it matter? The importance of the *Mahābhārata's* dates cannot, of course, lie in the mere fact of dating, but must lie in what it tells us about the *Mahābhārata* text itself. Indeed, as Hiltebeitel suggests in his discussion of some "new possibilities and limits in considering" the *Mahābhārata* as *itihāsa* ("history") in chapter 4 of this volume, the evidence in favor of a shorter period of composition must lead us to rethink what the *Mahābhārata* means by its primary genre-identification of *itihāsa*. Why *itihāsa*? Why does the epic use this term, if it can no longer be understood in the sense that *we* use the term "history"? In raising these questions, Hiltebeitel

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[82] Indeed, one of the central intentions of Hiltebeitel's forthcoming "On Sukthankar's 'S'" is precisely to demonstrate this.

[83] Chapter 4 also considers *post quem* and *ante quem* and possibly contemporary intertexts; see also above following n. 72. To consider all the paths down which Hiltebeitel has been pursuing clarification on *post* and *ante quem* matters, see his groundbreaking study of Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita* ("Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita*: The First Known Close and Critical Reading of the Brahmanical Sanskrit Epics," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 34 [2006]: 229–86), which elaborates on the *Mahābhārata's* intertextual position to demonstrate that Aśvaghoṣa, in the first or second century CE, knew already a *Mahābhārata* with features that many have thought "late" or "Gupta," including Vyāsa's precedent as a poet-author, the episode of the killing of Jarāsaṃdha, and some kind of *Mokṣadharma Parvan*—the latter, a point that Hiltebeitel returns to in another new essay ("*Mokṣa* and *Dharma* in the *Mokṣadharma*"). The longer of his two new books on *dharma* (2011; see n. 7 above for citation), which updates the *Buddhacarita* article in its chapter 13, also takes these intertextual explorations further around evidence in the *Buddhacarita* and the *Yuga Purāṇa* (on which see chapter 4 of this book) that the *Harivaṃśa* would be integral to the *Mahābhārata* project as conceived and considerably earlier than is usually posited (see also Alf Hiltebeitel, "Between History and Divine Plan: The *Mahābhārata's* Royal Patriline in Context," papers from the international workshop on History of Genealogy, Cardiff University, ed. Simon Brodbeck and James Hegarty, *Religions of South Asia* [forthcoming]).

for the first time[84] begins to offer some answers as to why and how the *Mahābhārata* uniquely makes "history" its identifying genre term. Hiltebeitel looks at the major contexts in which the *Mahābhārata* uses the term *itihāsa* to construct what might be called an alternate Vedic history of the people of a total land.[85]

Conclusion

Hiltebeitel's approach is thus literary in realistic and pragmatic ways that other approaches, to date at least, are not. But it also takes in the historical implications of the epic's monumental grandeur and design. As we have shown above, Hiltebeitel has continued to spend much energy disputing what have been called diachronic or analytic approaches that imagine older "*Bhāratas*" or pre-"normative recension" strata in the *Mahābhārata*, plus layerings that would continue to have been made up to its reaching its present archetypal amplitude and which can supposedly be mined with the tools of "higher criticism" based on the axiom that it continued to undergo "fluid" composition into the fourth to sixth or seventh century CE. Scholars who advance these lines of research to remove such inconveniences as *yuga*s, *bhakti*, or the authorship of the author, are simply underestimating the text they are dealing with. But Hiltebeitel's studies have probably even greater implications for those who carry forward what has usually been called a synchronic or synthetic approach. Some who try to sustain or at least credit both approaches concede that a synchronic approach is necessary insofar as it is indeed necessary to see the text as at some point becoming a whole, such as the Critical Edition archetype reveals. For several such scholars, it could have reached this form any time from the 4th to 7th centuries CE or, for a smaller number, even during the earlier dates that Hiltebeitel proposes. Yet most of these scholars still allow for the unrealistic view that the Critical Edition gives us a text that could be the free-fall of numerous centuries rather than the monumental historically-situated work of genius and rapid textual dissemination and reception that we can now see that it would have to have been. For such

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[84] And still more recently in "Between History and Divine Plan" and in Hiltebeitel's larger book on *dharma* (see n. 7 above).

[85] See also Hiltebeitel, "The Southern Recension Reading of the Śakuntalā Story" (cited in n. 81).

scholars, the synchronic text is purely theoretical: a kind of convenient ahistorical literary artifact suitable for either diachronic analysis or a kind of stream of consciousness analysis, or both.[86]

On the contrary, for Hiltebeitel, the envisioning of the *Mahābhārata* archetype must have been carried forward by both the hard and enjoyable work of joint composition. As he says in chapter 3, it must mean something where the *Mahābhārata* says, "For three years the Muni Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana always got up making the superb *Mahābhārata* story" (*Mahābhārata* 1.56.32).[87] And it would also mean that its composition reflected plans for its rapid and universal dissemination, which would have soon enough included transmission to the south, where its custodians would have retailored it quite early for it to be appreciated by new audiences. Hiltebeitel's thesis is important for scholars and other readers today, who would simply be missing the boat if they dismissed the generative historical grandeur of this archetypal text as it was designed, composed, transmitted, and first received in the centuries around the turn of the first millennium.

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[86] While they agree on much else, Hiltebeitel is most opposed to Brodbeck's views (*The Mahābhārata Patriline: Gender, Culture, and the Royal Hereditary* [Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing], 7–8) on this matter of positing a more or less ahistorical and what Hiltebeitel calls virtually a stream of consciousness text (personal communication) for structural analysis. But these comments also apply to the ways Fitzgerald ("Many Voices") and others have used the terms synchronic and synthetic to define the limits of what they allow for in such an approach, and to critique Hiltebeitel's own approach. Hiltebeitel does not view his own approach to the *Mahābhārata* as either synchronic or synthetic; see Hiltebeitel, "On Sukthankar's 'S'."

[87] See now also Hiltebeitel, "The Southern Recension Reading of the Śakuntalā Story."

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1976   *The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata.* Symbol Myth
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       Press. Reprint ed., Albany: State University of New York Press,
       1990; Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1991.
1988   *The Cult of Draupadī,* vol. 1. *Mythologies: From Gingee to
       Kurukṣetra.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Reprint ed.,
       Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992.
1991   *The Cult of Draupadī,* vol. 2. *On Hindu Ritual and the Goddess.*
       Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
1999   *Rethinking India's Oral and Classical Epics: Draupadī among
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       Press. Reprint ed., Delhi: Oxford, 2001.
2001   *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: A Reader's Guide to the Educa-
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       Reprint ed., Delhi: Oxford, 2002.
2010   *Dharma.* South Asian Spirituality Series, Henry Rosemont ed.
       Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
2011   *Dharma: Its Early History in Law, Religion, and Narrative.*
       South Asia Research Series. Ed. Patrick Olivelle. New York:
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2. *Edited books*

1989   *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees: Essays on the Guardians
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1998 *Hair: Its Meaning and Power in Asian Cultures*. Co-edited with Barbara D. Miller. Albany: State University of New York Press.

2000 *Is the Goddess a Feminist? The Politics of South Asian Goddesses*. Co-edited with Kathleen M. Erndl. New York and London: New York University Press and Sheffield.

3. *Translations (from French)*

1969 Georges Dumézil, *The Destiny of the Warrior*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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[Articles included in this volume are denoted either with an asterisk (if in volume 1) or a double asterisk (if in volume 2)]

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1978** "The Indus Valley 'Proto-Śiva': Reexamined through Reflections on the Goddess, the Buffalo, and the Symbolism of *vāhanas*." *Anthropos* 73: 767–97.

1979 "Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*: A Bibliographical Essay." *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 60: 66–110.

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I. POSITION PIECES

CHAPTER ONE

WEIGHTING ORALITY AND WRITING IN THE SANSKRIT EPICS

> Once the divine seers foregathered, and on one scale they hung the four *Vedas* in the balance, and on the other scale *The Bhārata*; and both in size and weight it was heavier. Therefore, because of its size and its weight, it is called *The Mahābhārata*—he who knows this etymology is freed from all sins.[1]

In delivering a paper at the First DICSEP Conference in August 1997, I felt that I could detect sympathy for my views only from a small number of participants. When I began to prepare that essay for what was to become the DICSEP Vol. 1 (1999), I decided to preface it with a brief introduction to try to explain one of the unstated—yet basic—underlying ideas (see now Hiltebeitel 1999b: 155–157). I feel it is worth briefly quoting from it as a bridge to this essay: "I believe that the largest inadequacy of *Mahābhārata* scholarship, including my own up to

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[1] *MBh.* 1,1.208; van Buitenen: MBh, 1, p. 31 (this chapter reluctantly accedes to the editorial preference for the potentially misleading 'MBh' over 'Mbh' in the volume in which it appeared). I thank Christopher Minkowski and Yaroslav Vassilkov for their generous readings of this essay in accordance with that volume's editorial review policy: Vassilkov in a five-page single-spaced commentary cited as Vassilkov 2004; Minkowski in a smaller note and in the margins of a draft. Let me note, however, that in the case of Vassilkov—long an advocate of archaic oral epic behind the *Mahābhārata*—I will not be able to speak to all his reservations and indeed disagreements. But since this is meant to be a dialogical piece, I respond to his views from time to time. For starters, he finds my suggestion that this epigram 'could suggest a written book' to be 'highly doubtful': "…But if so, the same may be suggested for the four Vedas. Were they also a written book? And if they were, then in what historical period? In the time of the *MBh* (I would say—of the late *MBh*) it was considered that 'those who *write the Vedas*, these surely go to hell' (*MBh* 13,24.70, as quoted [later in this essay]). Now the only choice we have is: 1, to admit that the phrase about scale and 'weighting' has no literal meaning, or 2, to admit that the text of the 1st chapter in the *Ādiparvan* is much later than the text of the *Anuśāsanaparvan* (which is considered to be itself one of the latest parts of the *MBh*). I wonder which of the two possibilities the author would prefer" (Vassilkov 2004: 2). I do not accept the dichotomous reasoning. For a metaphor to work, it would be perfectly possible to imagine both sides of the scale bearing written texts even if only one of the texts might at that point have actually been written. Further, the cascade of 'laters' upon 'latests' has never had solid grounding or acceptable chronological scaffolding (see below, position 12, and Hiltebeitel 2004c).

1991, is simply the failure to appreciate the epic as a work of literature" (Hiltebeitel 1999b: 156).

While expressing the reservation that this new prologue did not have much to do with the piece's titled topic, the editors graciously found it pertinent enough to let me add it. In summer 2002, I was pleased to learn from Aditya Adarkar, author of a recent dissertation on Karṇa (Adarkar 2001), that he had found that introduction reminiscent of the development of his own ideas. As his dissertation indicates, he agreed with my recommendation that 'all *Mahābhārata* scholars mark the turn in Biblical scholarship achieved by Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative*', and was especially unnerved to find me describing something similar to his own experience in this footnote: "I first read Alter's books in September 1997 only to find that the wheel I was designing to approach the *Mahābhārata* was in many respects reinvented" (Hiltebeitel 1999b: 156–157, n. 9).

I find that there is a lot of convergent work on the *Mahābhārata* these days. It is, of course, not for us to decide whether we have been caught by a Zeitgeist[2] or are independently arriving at some valid insights.

Adarkar's dissertation also includes an emphasis on the *Mahābhārata's* writtenness, as does another dissertation on Karṇa by Patricia Meredith Greer (2002). On the other hand, a third recent dissertation on Karṇa by Kevin McGrath (2001) of Harvard, the fount and still, it seems, the bastion of oral theory, makes oral formulaic verse one of the tools he uses to look for what he finds to be 'archaic' and Indo-European in Karṇa as his titular 'Sanskrit hero'. I mention these recent works to suggest that the playing field seems to be evening out, and to call attention to work on Karṇa, on whom I will make some points in the third and final part of this paper.

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[2] See Egan 2000, similarly critiquing the application of oral formulaic theory to classical Chinese 'music bureau' poems—a reference for which I thank my colleague Jonathan Chaves.

A. *Cards on the Table, or Shadows on the Sundial*[3]

My cards have thus been on the DICSEP table at least since that introduction revealed the hand I was holding behind the delivery of my 1997 paper, and they are now declared all the more so since my more recent book, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata* (Hiltebeitel 2001a), makes further arguments in favor of writing. But I am not the only one whose cards are on the table over this issue, and there are many who have not yet attended DICSEP conferences, such as Adarkar, who have already played a hand or two. One such scholar just at her first DICSEP meeting in 2002, was Tamar Reich, who likewise favors an emphasis on writing, and offers an image of the *Mahābhārata* as a 'battlefield of a text' (Reich 1998), which we might extend likewise to a battlefield of the scholarly texts it has generated. But for a more irenic image, I would propose a twenty-four hour clock—an image I borrow with modification from Baba Ram Das, a.k.a. Richard Alper, the one-time Harvard associate of Timothy Leary. Ram Das' clock works as follows (I recall this allegory from his hilarious talk at The George Washington University some time in the late 1970s). Everyone is at some moment of this day. There are 5 a.m. people, 11:59 and 59 seconds p.m. people, and so on. Midnight is enlightenment. The thing that our two clocks have in common would be that everyone could find a unique place on the dial.

Like Salman Rushdie, let us date our current scholarly day back to August 15, 1947, the midnight moment that marks the independence of India and the end of British imperialism there. In terms of the *politics* of epic scholarship, this date marks the demise, after several decades of lingering decline, of a scholarly yesterday geared, among other things, to the question of the relation between epic and empire.[4] And it marks the dawn of a new scholarly interest geared, initially and above all—and this should surprise no one, since it provided new ways to reground and even extend Western interests in India—to a

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[3] I thank Minkowski for this alternative heading and add it (even though it doesn't work for the twenty-four hour clock soon to be described) for the parallelism it allows, and also for its suggestiveness, especially as a reminder that scholarship must seek to advance even in the dark.

[4] In taking up this topic in Hiltebeitel 1998a and 2001a: 5–10, I was not aware of Aurobindo Ghosh's fascinating and astute discussion of national epic and empire, covering both Sanskrit epics, in Ghosh 1991: 19–32 (written in 1901, according to the unnamed editor [p. 177]).

retheorization of Indo-European mythology[5] that soon had to share the lead with theory on orality and oral epic,[6] the latter loosely assumed by some to bear a loose relation to Vedic orality.[7] Sometimes these two approaches have been compounded by arguments for Indo-European continuities in both myth and metrics,[8] but for the most part they have been little reconciled.

Now, a word about how *this* clock works. On the one hand, at least judging from the length of its yesterday, it seems that a scholarly twenty-four hour day is roughly equal to a century. It includes a night and day of apparently equal duration. Although I would prefer to associate the position of writing with the night, I must reluctantly associate it with the day, since it is the only one of the two choices for which the *Mahābhārata* provides any visible evidence. All oral theory on the two Sanskrit epics relies on analogy in seeking behind the written the traces of the oral. From this standpoint, it operates in the dark, quests for origins, and catches as catch can. But the problem is that those who live within a scholarly day experience its night and day only in terms of everyday nights and days in which they find their communication with colleagues on these matters mixed with dawns and twilights and countless shades of gray. Positions are not so clear. There are inevitably mixed positions.

The question of the weighting of orality and writing is thus a new one, with increasing theory and sophistication about both topics. Before 1947, orality and writing were discussed in *Mahābhārata* studies, but naively. For instance, E. W. Hopkins admitted that there is 'no evidence of an epic before 400 B.C.' (1901: 397), but 'imagine[d]' 'lays' and the beginnings of an 'original Bhāratī Kathā' in a 'circling

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[5] See Wikander 1948, and Dumézil 1948 for this Indo-Europeanist project's start.

[6] Advocacy for bringing oral theory to the Sanskrit epics begins, as I now see it thanks to Vassilkov (2004), with Emeneau 1958, R. K. Sharma 1964, and Sen 1966, and then continues with M. C. Smith 1972 (and now 1992); P. A. Grintser (as summarized by de Jong 1975); J. D. Smith 1980, 1987; Ingalls & Ingalls 1991; Vassilkov 1995, 1999, 2002 (and in two early 1970s papers summarized by de Jong 1975); Brockington as early as 1969 and now in his 1998, 1999a, 1999b, and 2000: 339–352; and Söhnen-Thieme 1999. I thank Vassilkov for improving my account of this chronology and lineage. I have followed his suggestion that the list 'in fact should start with the name of M. B. Emeneau and with his article on oral poetry of the Todas, published, as it seems, in the late 1950s, since both Sharma and Sen 'developed [his] ideas'. But therein lies the difficulty that, while Emeneau does briefly discuss the oral features of the Sanskrit epics, I am not convinced that Toda oral poetry can inform us about them.

[7] See for example Brockington 1999a: 121; 1999b: 136; Vassilkov 2002: 26.

[8] See most notably Watkins 1995.

narration' that 'may lie as far back as 700 B.C. or 1700 B.C., for ought we know' (p. 386). Sukthankar (1933: cii) spoke loosely of oral fluidity, and Edgerton (1944: xxxvi–xxxvii) took him to task for it, favoring a written archetype. C. V. Vaidya, on the other hand, assumed Vyāsa, Vaiśampāyana, and Ugraśravas were all writers (Vaidya 1907: 21, 38–40, 69, 220–221, 266). Now we have sophisticated theory at each end of a spectrum that runs from Albert Lord to Jacques Derrida.

It is thus a complex question, and people who favor one approach or the other are not certain to agree on that much else, while people who disagree might otherwise agree about much else. Once one opens the box, all kinds of things fly out. Writing and orality cannot be reduced to a simple opposition, a dividing binary.[9] Yet the more one looks, the more one sees that the issue touches (or can touch, if one chooses to puzzle over it) virtually anything in the *Mahābhārata*—indeed, in both Sanskrit epics—that one wishes to discuss. I submit that if we defined this clock's hours and minutes by the issues that intersect with those of writing and orality and assign them numbers—10 a.m. for surface and 10 p.m. for depth; 11 a.m. for notions of what is historical and 11 p.m. for notions of what is archaic; noon for multiple authorship versus midnight for single authorship; 1 p.m. for a short period of composition versus 1 a.m. for a long one; 3 p.m. for pros of the Critical Edition and 3 a.m. for its cons; 4 p.m. for literary conventions and 4 a.m. for oral formulae and themes; 5 p.m. for Brahmans and 5 a.m. for Kṣatriyas and bards; dawn for parts and dusk for the whole…etc.—our current scholarly day, with not only hours but minutes and moments, would have singular nuanced positions for all DICSEP conferees, as well as for our friends and colleagues elsewhere, at every tick.

Let me illustrate, however, by the recent disagreement I find myself (and perhaps also Charles Malamoud)[10] in with Madeleine Biardeau: a scholar who has not ceased to inspire me since 1967, and one with whom I continue to be classified along with Georges Dumézil as 'structuralist' and/or 'symbolist' whenever scholars lately survey the

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[9] For a discussion recognizing this complexity and weighting the balance more toward orality, see Brockington: HdO [1998], pp. 115–116.

[10] See Malamoud 2002: 127–146 ('Noirceur de l'écriture'), especially 132 and 166–167, nn. 21–22. Biardeau (2002, I: 748, n. 2) cites an earlier 1997 article version of this chapter, leaving it uncertain whether she perceives Malamoud to disagree with her views mentioned below.

history of *Mahābhārata* studies.[11] The 'structuralist'/'symbolist' label is of course meant to date this so-called approach and provide a convenient means to kill three birds with one stone, usually at the expense of attending to ways in which the three scholars in question differ,[12] and more seriously, at the expense of recognizing that scholars revise and change their views over time, and often take up new tacks, including historical interests. That has certainly been the case with Biardeau's recent dating of both epics in relation to the reign of Aśoka, next to which she considers the problem of orality and writing 'secondary' and 'highly improbable' as an anachronism of the 'machine age'.[13] Nonetheless, recognizing that 'Today, certain specialists think that it is materially impossible to regard [the *MBh*] as an oral composition because of its dimensions', she weighs in for orality in the name of Brahmans' memories, the possibility that they could conceive a work on this scale,[14] and their habitation of a Vedic 'universe of sounds' (Biardeau 2002, II: 747–749). But what is the status of secondary problems? Is there not a difference between 'conceiving' the scale and dimensions of the *Mahābhārata* and producing it, not to mention remembering and reproducing it orally? Granted we must understand the epic poets to value the word in a world of Vedic sound. And let us also appreciate that Biardeau does not subordinate their creativity to a prior bardic oral tradition that they would have stolen, or appropriated. But I do not think one can so easily treat a rapport between the conversion of Aśoka and the composition of the *Mahābhārata* by leaving writing as a secondary problem imposed by the machine age. As with the Homeric epics, the question has been around for a long time, and we must admit it. It makes a difference. That, in any case, is the burden of this essay, for, as even my dearest friends are prone to ask me, *does* it really matter? Two remarks by A.K. Ramanujan provide a good point of departure: 'In India..., no one ever reads the *Rāmāyaṇa* or the *Mahābhārata* for the first time' (1991b: 46); and again, 'No Hindu ever reads the *Mahābhārata* for the first time' (1991a: 419).

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[11] See, e.g., Reich 1998: 285 Brockington: HdO [1998], pp. 65–75; Inden 2000: 98, n. 40; Sutton 2000: xv, 461; Greer 2002: 34–38.

[12] I would consider myself a post-structuralist structuralist in still eschewing nocturnal quests for origins, but not as a 'symbolist', which is a bit too problematic a label for a post-structuralist.

[13] See Hiltebeitel 2005b for a more detailed discussion of Biardeau's discussion of writing and orality and her hypothesis on Buddhism.

[14] '...concevoir une oeuvre à cette échelle' (Biardeau 2002, II: 748).

My underlying argument and indeed conclusion is that, whatever preceded the *Mahābhārata* orally, cultically, or in other unknown forms, the Poona Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata* shows that for *about* two millennia the work that has moved people is a book, and that in that sense one must speak of all its audiences—oral ones included—as *readers.* Indeed, the text created a 'reading community'.[15] One cannot posit a pre-written *Mahābhārata* simply on the analogy of other oral epics.[16] Nowhere has oral epic been found to have emerged in a literary vacuum, such as is now posited for Vedic India and, by and large, for pre-classical Hinduism. Medieval and later South Asian oral epics, such as we can find them, all presuppose not only surrounding literary worlds, but contemporaneous oral versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* themselves as part of the primary cultural work of 'reading' that they carry forward (see Hiltebeitel 1999a: 8). They are not convincing evidence of preliterate versions of the Sanskrit epics.

In favor of such an approach, let me now turn to the second part of this essay on positions, fancies, and evidence.

B. *Positions,*[17] *Fancies, Evidence*

Here I will try to set forth an orderly statement of the ideas about writing and orality that run through my recent work in the two 'rethinking' books on Indian oral and classical epics (Hiltebeitel 1999a; 2001a), but especially the second one on the *Mahābhārata*, and some more recent essays. I will mention the *Rāmāyaṇa*, or 'the two epics', where clarity requires, but the main focus is on the *Mahābhārata*. I will try to divide

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[15] See now Hiltebeitel 2003d, where I begin to adapt this terminology, so richly developed for the *Maṇimēkalai* by Anne Monius (2001: 9–10, 35–36 and *passim*), to the *Mahābhārata.*

[16] Here, I am not persuaded by Vassilkov's reconstruction of a formative phase of archaic oral *Mahābhārata* out of parallels in the use of similes in the *Karṇaparvan* (Vassilkov 2002); see below, section C.

[17] Originally, my term here was 'arguments', but 1 bow to Minkowski's counsel to call them something else (suggesting 'principles, assertions, or assumptions') since, as he puts it, 'nothing is argued in any individual one of them'. I have preferred 'positions', even after the thoughtful e-mail advice of T. P. Mahadevan (May 2004) to call them '19 theses, nailed with a wooden nail on the udumbara pole at Naimiṣa *yāgaśāla*'—as 'storming the orthodoxy' (presumably he means modern scholarly orthodoxy). Beyond the 'evidence' offered later in this section, back-up arguments can in most cases also be found in Hiltebeitel 1999a and 2001a, and additional arguments in my more recent essays footnoted below.

these ideas and their treatment into positions, fancies, and evidence, recognizing, of course, that evidence can at best be only cumulative and circumstantial, and that, as with 'facts' and notions of 'daylight', authors can have idiosyncratic ideas and a penchant to deceive themselves. I treat these matters briefly, skeletally, and telegraphically. The edifice is provisional, though I hope not a house of cards.

Nineteen positions

1. *There is no 800–1000 year post-Upaniṣadic 'epic period'* up to and including the Guptas during which the epic developed or accreted into being.
2. *It is not necessary to posit royal patronage* for the epic's production. Nor can a convincing case be made for any particular king as patron.
3. *The epic need not reflect the experience of one king or dynasty*, either at the beginning, in the case of the Aśoka and/or the Mauryas or Puṣyamitra and/or the Śuṅgas, or at its completion, in the case of the Guptas.
4. Rather, it is more plausible to regard the composers of the epic as *reflecting upon a long and from their perspective dismal period of history.*
5. There are ample reasons to consider the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* as 'epics' despite the fact that there is no common Indian term to designate them as such. This means we have an historical problem in explaining the introduction of this *new* genre.
6. This problem can be addressed by positing, as does David Quint (1993), *a link between empire and the epic genre.*[18]
7. This means that one must consider *the possibility of Greek influence.* Alternately, *India's experiences of empire* both outside and in

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[18] I have not wanted to be pinned down to defining 'epic' as a genre other than to invoke Quint's genric discussion of Western epics and their relation to empire as a useful comparison. But I am not persuaded by Vassilkov's use of the terms like 'pre-epic' and 'proto-epic genres' to aid the quest for archaic oral elements of the *Mahābhārata* (Vassilkov 2002: 25–26). In working toward a genric definition, however, I find Masaki Mori's attempt, itself based on an East-West comparison, quite congenial: 'a work can be called "epical" when it deals seriously with the question of death, involves the fate of a large group of people, and explores a vast spatial and temporal expanse' (Mori 1997: x), to which is appended 'a grand systematicity' (p. xi). It is interesting to see Vanstiphout introduce 'the world's first written epics' along similar lines (Vanstiphout 2003: 4–6, 9–11).

its own history could have been a sufficient catalyst to the develop-
ment of the epic genre.

8. The epics (and particularly the *MBh*) make numerous *concealed
    and knowing references to the heterodoxies* and subsume the het-
    erodox movements, including Buddhism, vaguely under the rubric
    of *nāstikya*, heresy. If Buddhism has pride of place here as the
    chief thorn in the poets' side, as seems more and more likely,[19] it
    is denied it by the non-specificity of the *nāstikya* category.

9. A history, traced back to the origins of the universe, is thus created
    that excludes the heterodoxies: 'Whatever is here may be found
    elsewhere; what is not here does not exist anywhere' (*MBh* 1,56.33;
    18,5.38) is not an encyclopedic slogan but an ontological claim
    about what counts as real, as the heterodoxies do not.[20] The terms
    itihāsa (perhaps implying cumulative if not consecutive tradition)
    and *purāṇa* ('stories of old') are probably equally important in
    understanding how this history is constructed.

10. One can also posit knowledge of other peoples' histories, and that
    such other peoples could be known not only by contact, proxim-
    ity, or invasion (as in the case of epic references to Greeks and
    Śakas), but *by* their histories, as in the case of the epics' mention
    of Cīnas, Hūṇas, Antioch, and Rome.

11. The *Mahābhārata*, and probably both epics, would thus have
    likely been composed (or produced) during a period that reflected
    such conditions. These are best met between *150 B.C. and the year
    Zero*—a time that could plausibly mark the early development of
    Sanskrit writing toward this end.[21]

12. I argue that *a short period* of one or two generations is sufficient
    to account for this composition or production and, more impor-
    tant, necessary to account for the epic's artistry and design.[22] If

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[19] See now Hiltebeitel 2005b.

[20] The term *nāstikya*'s semantic force is too philosophically precise to benefit from
Vassilkov's preference for an analogy with 'a typical epic use' of 'pagans' with reference
'not only to heathens, but also to Muslims and even to Christians of other denomina-
tions' (Vassilkov 2004: 3).

[21] Cf. Brockington 1999b: 136–137, noting that 'the *Dīpavaṃsa* records that the Bud-
dhist canon was committed to writing at a date toward the end of the first century B.C.
This is a little earlier than the period of the 1st century A.D.' favored by Brockington
for the transition to writing of the Sanskrit epics, but still a date that 'possibly suggests
a general trend towards writing of texts around then'.

[22] See now Hiltebeitel 2004c for extensive discussion on these interrelated matters
of design and timespan of composition.

we detect 5 interpolations or raw joins in the text of the Critical
Edition, we are entitled to ask the question, 'How late is late?'
An interpolation or loose join is not evidence of the haphazard
work of centuries. Within a two generation span, specific joins
could be the result of a week's work and waiting, or a month's,
or a decade's....[23] A corollary is that the *Mahābhārata* is neither
monstrous (see Hiltebeitel 2001a: 1) nor fluid.

13. Such production is best imagined as a work of *composite authorship*:[24]
by a committee, group, équipe, syndicate, symposium, *saṅgam,
sattra*, or whatever one wants to call it. Indeed, following a con-
versation with Michael Witzel at the 2002 DICSEP conference, I
would now propose that the best term might be 'atelier', on the
analogy with the workshops of the Italian Renaissance painters:
what is done under the master's name would follow his overall
guidance, inspiration and design, and have no more than his occa-
sional and final touches.[25] I also argue that such composite author-
ship has been represented in the text: particularly in its three
frames.[26]

14. As represented in this triple recitation, orality in the *Mahābhārata*
is thus *a literary trope*. It is likewise a literary trope in the

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[23] Finding himself 'astonished most of all' at my position on a short period of com-
position, Vassilkov (2004: 4) says, 'With full certainty I can say that it is absolutely
impossible'. He cites John Brockington's discussion (1999a: 134) of Vassilkov's contrast
between adjacent *Strīparvan adhyāya*s at a workshop on epic orality at the 1997 DICSEP
1 meeting: *MBh* 11,16 reveals late ideas and is 'unequivocally a later interpolation',
while 11,17 shows archaic ideas and represents 'the legacy of oral tradition'. Vassilkov
now summarizes his contribution further: *MBh* 11,17 makes use 'of epic formulaic style
(not the clichés, but flexible improvised formulaic expressions based on traditional pat-
terns)' along with 'typical epic vocabulary...[to] express archaic mythological concepts',
whereas 11,16 has 'a style similar to that of *kāvya* poetry...[and] words from Classical
Sanskrit vocabulary as well as religious notions and symbols totally opposite in their
meaning to the archaic world-view' (Vassilkov 2004: 4). But dating portions of a text
by one's own history of ideas is not reliable. Vassilkov is joined by von Simson (1990:
44–45) in permitting '*kāvya*-like syntax' to assign lateness, but here too the origins of
kāvya in and outside the *Mahābhārata* are unresolved. For instance, there has been
little resistance to dating Vālmīki's *Ādikāvya* to quite early periods, even before the
Mahābhārata.
[24] See now Hiltebeitel 2004c for further treatment.
[25] I note that von Simson (1990: 45) precedes me in speaking similarly of 'the
workshop of the later *Mahābhārata* authors', who generate passages that show '*kāvya*
influence' (p. 45 and *passim*)—but only once one has made 'the transition from oral
to written composition'.
[26] See Hiltebeitel 2006a.

Rāmāyaṇa's portrayal of the relation between Vālmīki and Kuśa
and Lava.

15. Further, in both epics, *bards are conduits between texts that origi-
nate with Brahmans*—both in the stories themselves, and in the
actual production and transmission that would have occurred.

16. Accordingly, *Mahābhārata* composition would have occurred along
the lines that Velcheru Narayana Rao (1993) attributes to *purāṇa*
composition, producing a kind of 'oral literacy' or 'literate orality',
with the composition done by 'scholars…proud of their knowledge
of grammar and their ability to possess a written text of what they
perform orally'. The text would promote itself through oral dissem-
ination, thereby producing a text by which 'professional literati'
could engage and create 'literate audiences' even among 'illiterates'
through oral performance.[27] A 'written dynamism' (M. M. Mehta
1971: 97), however, best explains this epic's composition both in its
inception and in its northern and southern redactorial variations.

17. Such authors would have been up to a mastery of varied meters,
and would have been well able to use them to stylistic ends, such
as juxtaposition above all, but also archaism and Vedic imitation
and/or overtones.

18. One of the two most important things to keep in mind in interpret-
ing the relation between Veda and epic is *allusion*. The *Mahābhārata*
is saturated with Vedic allusions; applying Eric Auerbach's memo-
rable phrase for the Bible, it is 'fraught with [Vedic] background'
(Auerbach 1968: 15; cf. Hiltebeitel 2001a: 137, n. 20).[28] Something
similar can be said of the *Rāmāyaṇa* if one recognizes that the

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[27] See above at footnote 15, and below, evidence item 9.

[28] Vassilkov (2004: 4) feels that '"Vedic allusions" cannot be used as an argument
for its [the *MBh*'s] "writtenness" or for its "Brahmanic" origin, because "Vedic" allu-
sions (most of them merely archaic mythological motifs, common for Veda and Epic)
penetrated of [all?] spheres of an Aryan's life. In the early Epic there are also many
unmistakable allusions to non-Vedic archaic culture (pre-classical, according to Jan
Heesterman).' I believe Vassilkov underestimates the specificity, complexity, and diver-
sity of Vedic allusions in the *Mahābhārata* and the investment of its Brahman authors
in keeping them vibrant and relevant, especially in the domain of ritual and sacrifice
that ranges far beyond 'merely archaic mythological motifs'. Even if such allusiveness
would only be circumstantial evidence for writing, it is clearly evidence of '"Brahmanic"
origin'. I would further argue that many allusions to 'non-Vedic archaic culture' (e.g.,
the Pāṇḍavas' polyandry; their hiding their weapons with their grandmother's corpse
in the *śamī* tree) are presented from this allusive 'Vedic' angle.

allusions in the latter are less enigmatic and less given to ironic distancing.[29]

19. Second, I continue to be persuaded by Biardeau's argument that the *Mahābhārata* undertakes a thoroughgoing *bhakti rereading of the Vedic revelation.* Notions of the divinization of such figures as Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, of 'inept mythification',[30] and axiomatic readings of *bhakti* figures or passages as 'late' interpolations have been sustained only by pseudo-histories and hermeneutics alien to these texts.

Two fancies

1. I am intrigued by the prominence that the epic poets give to the practice of *uñchavṛtti Brahmans*, Brahmans reduced to poverty who live a married life and feed their guests and family by 'gleaning' grain. The 'strict' (*śiṣṭa*) practice is described to Yudhiṣṭhira at several dramatic moments, and may, I suggest, be emblematic of the self-image of the epic poets, living at a time when not only Brahmans would be out of sorts, but when kings of a Brahmanical bent might be not much in evidence, not much in power, not much in position to grandly patronize poets, and not much in the way of being legitimate Kṣatriyas.[31]

2. I propose that the story of Śuka, Vyāsa's son, is an allegory of writing, describing the scene under which Vyāsa imparts the *Mahābhārata* as fifth Veda not only to the four Brahman disciples who include Vaiśampāyana, but to the son he has *before* his three other sons Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Pāṇḍu, and Vidura. That is, he imparts the *Mahābhārata* to Śuka and the other four disciples *before* it could have happened. This would be a sign of fiction. One of the images that suggests an allegory of writing is the churning of the firesticks that gives birth to Śuka, which I interpret as a metaphor for churning out semen (and with it, the production of instant character) as analogous to the churning out of text. I propose that

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[29] Cf. Biardeau 1997: 87: 'Personally, I was struck, as I have made clear, that the links with Vedic literature were looser in the R than in the MBh, though both epics have some connection with it.'

[30] See Vassilkov 2000: 13, here in agreement.

[31] On this latter point, see Hiltebeitel 1999a: 442–462; 2001a: 112–113, 181–192; 2004a: 27–36.

a second hint at writing comes with the impartation of this fifth Veda on the 'back of the mountain',[32] which seems to be where Vyāsa has his mysterious Himalayan hermitage, from which Śuka parts for *mokṣa*. I propose that 'the back of the mountain' is an image for the *mise en scène* of writing.

Fifteen types of evidence

1. *Epic vocabularies for empire*
Although Biardeau (2002, I: 299, 845; II: 771) argues that the epics do not mean empire by the term *saṃrājya*, it would seem she would have to concede that they use the term to talk about it if she considers Jarāsaṃdha a cryptic figure for Aśoka.[33] In any case, as Witzel has demonstrated, with the eastward movement of Vedic culture, the 'word *mahārājya*—"reign of a great king"—occurs for the first time in Vedic' in one of the 'later parts' of the *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa* (7.18), indicating that 'the concept of imperial overlordship, based on the *aśvamedha* sacrifice, has gained great importance and will lead, not too late after the Brāhmaṇa period, to the first large empire of Magadha' (Witzel 1987: 187). *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* 13.5.4.1–22 further describes fourteen kings (several overlapping with those mentioned in the *Mahābhārata's* 'Sixteen Kings Story', plus Janamejaya Pārikṣita) who gained sway by *aśvamedha*s. The epic would seem to revisit this Vedic material in the light of Magadha history.

2. *Writing by the 3rd century B.C.*
Current scholarship seems to hold that at least by the 3rd century B.C., Brahmans in 'the heartland of India' were literate (Salomon 1995: 279). But the only script in evidence at that time is Brāhmī, which was perhaps developed for the Aśokan inscriptions (Falk 1993: 177–239, 339; Salomon 1995: 273, 276; 1998, 28, 56). According to Harry Falk, 'a thorough reorganization of the northern Brāhmī happened around the turn of the millennium (*der Zeitenwende*), when an increasing number of authors used this new script for Sanskrit. Then in a few decades the system was so perfected that it survives almost unchanged in many

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[32] I discuss this particular convention further in Hiltebeitel 2004c.
[33] Biardeau 2002, 1: 219–220; II: 278–279, n. 10 and *passim*. See also Hiltebeitel 2005b.

different scripts based on the same system' (Falk 1993: 339). Following Dani (1963: 52), Falk relates these innovations to the introduction of the broad pen and ink (Falk 1993: 317–318), which Salomon (1998: 31–34) finds being used slightly earlier in the 1st century B.C. The *Mahābhārata* could have been one of the texts composed within such a culturally productive flurry (see footnote 21 above).

3. *The Critical Edition as textual archetype*
Some scholars, myself included,[34] have reached the conclusion that the Critical Edition is evidence of an archetype, and that this archetype must have been *written*. With this, there is some tendency to agree that such an archetype must define a synchronic moment.[35]

4. *Nothing of epic before what we have in writing*
The name Kṛṣṇa Devakīputra occurs in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.17.6. As with numerous other epic names that appear in Vedic texts, they provide an anchor for the epic poets in the Vedic revelation (Biardeau 2002, II: 319). But they miss providing us with the epic's main characters,[36] and they give no indication of an epic in Vedic times. Not until Pāṇini—probably from the mid-4th century B.C.—is there mention of distinctive *Mahābhārata* names, with citations of Arjuna and Vāsudeva (*Aṣṭādhyāyī* 4.3.98), "Mahābhārata" itself (6.2.38), and Yudhiṣṭhira (83.95) to exemplify various grammatical rules. If Pāṇini knows a *Mahābhārata* story in some genre and a cult for Arjuna and Vāsudeva, one cannot infer that he knew of a pre-2nd-century *epic*, much less an oral one. The *Rāmāyaṇa* supplies our most immediate analogy here, for if we know anything of a pre-Vālmīki Rāma story,

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[34] See Hiltebeitel 2001a: 24 for a list. For further discussion, see Hiltebeitel 2004c and 2006a.

[35] With, however, varied views on the historical dimensions of this moment: see Hiltebeitel 2001a: 24, and further discussion in Hiltebeitel 2004c, where I attempt to clarify my view that it would have taken 'somewhere between…three years and [a] couple of generations'. The three years comes from *MBh* 1,56.32: 'For three years the Muni Kṛṣṇa. Dvaipāyana always got up making this superb *Mahābhārata* story' (see Hiltebeitel 2001a: 169, n. 13). I believe John Brockington (1999b: 137) is not right to link this three-year span with time it might take to recite the epic in full.

[36] I cannot agree with Vassilkov that the 'mystic name' Arjuna/Phālguna for Indra 'even in some old Vedic texts, like *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* 2.1.2.11' refers to the Arjuna of the *Mahābhārata*, and thus that 'Arjuna's mythological connection and, in a sense, identity to Indra in the early layer of the MBh's content is indisputable' (Vassilkov 2002: 18–19). Rather, I take the epic naming of Arjuna 'Phālguna' as a case of probable allusion, at least in part, to this Vedic passage.

e.g., from Buddhist sources or from the *Mahābhārata*, it is that what we know is not epic.[37] Vassilkov (2004: 5) wonders what other genre than 'an epic story' could be behind Pāṇini's references.[38] Indeed, Pāṇini's references provide the most troubling counter-evidence to my argument, since they suggest something prior to the date I favor, and almost certainly something oral. But I believe there are other possibilities more likely than oral epic. As with the *Rāmakathā* material just mentioned, there could be praise narratives, golden age vignettes, folk-tales, cult legends, etc.[39]—as in 'the matter of Britain' that would have preceded Mallory. Alternately, though it is not my preferred type of explanation, one cannot rule out that these references in Pāṇini might have been interpolated.

5. *Writing mentioned in the epics*

As has long been known, the *Mahābhārata* does know and use terms for writing.[40] Recently, Malamoud has noted that among the rare passages where writing is mentioned, two refer explicitly to 'accountants and scribes' (*gaṇakalekhkāḥ*): *MBh* 2,5.62, where Nārada asks Yudhiṣṭhira whether he has such requisites in his royal court; and 15,20.71, where Yudhiṣṭhira relies on the very same to record the gifts he makes to Brahmans at the *śrāddha* death ceremonies he performs for Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Somadatta, Bāhlīka, and Duryodhana and the other Kauravas![41] Malamoud also cites the well known passage where Bhīṣma tells Yudhiṣṭhira, 'Sellers of the Vedas, corrupters of the Vedas, and those who *write* the Vedas, these surely go to hell',[42] asking whether we

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[37] See Hopkins 1930, especially p. 90: 'the original mythological Rāma', whom Hopkins posits on the basis of Rāma's portrayals in the *Mahābhārata's* 'Sixteen Kings Narratives', is a 'golden age' paragon whose model features 'were taken over by the epic writers…[who] added to these traits of Nārada's Rāma the whole story of Rāvaṇa, Laṅkā, and Hanumat…[and] Sītā'.

[38] Minkowski also comments on the margins of my earlier draft that I seem to be 'question-begging' here: how can we have these characters but not 'epic'.

[39] cf. Brockington 1999b: 136.

[40] Dalhmann 1895: 186–188; Falk 1993: 268–269, 304; Brockington: HdO [1990], p. 229.

[41] Malamoud 2002: 132, 166–167, translating the compound as 'comptables et scribes' and citing these verses in the 'Vulgate'. cf. van Buitenen: MBh, II, p. 42: 'tellers and recorders'; Ganguli 1970, XII: 212: 'tellers and scribes'. Allowing for mental accounts-keeping, I forego the first meaning for 'comptable' in *Harrap's Mini Dictionnaire*: 'bookkeeper'.

[42] *vedavikrayinaś caiva vedānāṃ caiva dūsakaḥ/vedānaṃ lekhakāś caiva te vai nirayagāminaḥ//*(*MBh* 13,24.70). See footnote 1 above.

must include it 'parmi les parties récentes' like the clearly interpolated Gaṇeśa-as-scribe passage (Malamoud 2002: 166–167, n. 21). Perhaps without quite saying so, this passage reflects a subtle distinction between the maintenance of oral Veda and the composition of a new 'fifth Veda'. Similarly, when the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha steal the Vedas from Brahmā at the time of creation, hide in the Rasā current of the great ocean, bind the Vedas together and throw them into Hell (the Rasātala), whence they are *orally* rescued by Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa in his form of Hayaśiras, the Horse's Head (MBh 12,335.21–26), it is not hard to appreciate that while the Vedas are oral in the horse's mouth, they are manuscripts—indeed, books—in the hands of demons.[43]

Again, when Ugraśravas tells us (in this article's opening epigram) that the *Mahābhārata* weighs more on a scale than the four Vedas, we must choose whether to take this weight metaphorically or to allow that it could suggest a written book, at least for the *Mahābhārata*. In any case, the *Mahābhārata* knows a whole vocabulary of texts that suggest books. When the Naimiṣa Forest sages request Ugraśravas to recite, they say,

> We wish to hear that wonderworker Vyāsa's collection (*saṃhitā*) of the *Bhārata*, the history (*itihāsa*), that most excellent communication (*ākhyānavariṣṭha*), diversified in quarter-lines and sections (*vicitrapadaparvan*), with subtle meanings combined with logic (*sūkṣmārthanyāyayukta*) and adorned with Vedic meanings (*vedārthair bhūṣita*), which the Ṛṣi Vaiśampāyana properly recited with delight at the *sattra* of Janamejaya by Dvaipāyana's command—holy, connected with the meanings of books (*granthārthasaṃyuta*), furnished with refinement (*saṃskāropagata*), sacred, supported by various Śāstras (*nānāśastropabṛṃhita*), equalled by the four Vedas, productive of virtue, and dispelling of the fear of sin (MBh 1,1.16–19).

Even while acknowledging such a bookish lexicon, this 'fifth Veda' wants to *appear oral*.[44]

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[43] See Hiltebeitel 2005b.

[44] Noting that this evidence ties in with position 14 above, Vassilkov (2004) asks, 'But what could be the reason for the tendency in the late Epic to describe its transmission in the past as oral transmission? The only possible answer seems to be that the transmission of the Epic in the past really was oral, and that such was the image of the Epic's transmission in the past preserved by the people's memory'. I believe, rather, that 'the people' could hardly be the source of these tropes, 'late' or otherwise, but rather that they had their epic memories constructed for them by the text's Brahman authors from the ground up. 'The people' are not further clarified, but they seem to be invoked repeatedly in an interactive dynamic that Vassilkov (2002: 16) imparts to 'the

6. *Joins, divisions, juxtapositions, fits*

Writing is suggested by the divisions of the epic texts: the *parvan*s ('joins') and *adhyāya*s ('readings')[45] of the *Mahābhārata*; the *kāṇḍa*s ('joints' as of a reed or cane)[46] and *sarga*s ('streams', 'cantos') of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In their juxtapositions, fits, beginnings and endings they often show artistry and careful design. I have yet to see a good argument from those who propose prior orality that such divisions are artificial and late. Regarding the different number and points of division in the *Rāmopākhyāna* (the Rāma story in the *Mahābhārata*) and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, I regard this simply as the work and artistry of two different written compositions, and not as grounds to argue for the artificiality of such divisions, or for the priority of one text over the other.[47]

7. *Fruits of hearing*

Among the most noticeable rough joins, and the most awkward to modern literary tastes, is the *phalaśruti*: the short passage, often coming at the end of an *adhyāya*, describing the highly variable 'fruits of hearing' that accrue to those who have heard the foregoing epic segment.[48] For textual excavators and surgeons,[49] *phalaśruti* passages axiomatically reveal that what precedes them is an interpolation, late, and often a sign of special pleading by the presumed inserters. If, however,

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bard's audience': p. 18 ('the Pāṇḍavas had been perceived by the epic singers and their audience to be children of the gods'); p. 20 (a 'sudden awareness by the audience' is preceded by what 'comes to the bard's mind'); p. 22 (the bard/narrator's recollection'); p. 24 ('at that moment the epic bard recollects and keeps in mind'); p. 26 ('then the bard starts to prepare the audience for a revelation'). Once again: the only audience of the bard in question—i.e., Ugraśravas—is that of the Brahman Ṛṣis of the Naimiṣa Forest. And in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Kuśa and Lava sing the *Rāmāyaṇa* to Rāma and other members of the establishment at Rāma's *aśvamedha*, that king of rites.

[45] I am aware that *adhyāya* has the older meaning of 'memorizing and reproducing a text by heart' (Vassilkov 2004: 5).

[46] Although Vassilkov (2004: 5) makes the interesting suggestion that 'such terms as *parvan*s and *kāṇḍa*s (both meaning 'joints' of a reed or cane) suggest rather a mnemonic use of a reed or cane by an oral performer—the hand could grasp one part of a reed after another to mark what particular units of a song had already been sung (a use similar to that of beads for counting prayers)', I think the 'textual' explanation more likely.

[47] For a different view on these matters, see Brockington 2000a: 289: 'However, it may be remarked that the ends of the [18] adhyāyas of the Rāmopakhyāna do not correspond at all closely to the division of the *Rāmāyaṇa* into [7] kāṇḍas, which implies that one or both divisions are later than the composition of the Rāmopakhyāna.'

[48] The closing sentence of the opening epigram is an implied *phalaśruti*.

[49] For this distinction among textual 'analysts', See Hiltebeitel 2004c.

the *Mahābhārata* is a work of collaborative authorship, such a view is in need of considerable adjustment. *Phalaśruti* passages would then be inserted but not necessarily late, or at least very late. But more important, their function is to call attention to the varied benefits of belonging to the epic's textual audience, its community of readers.

8. Mahābhārata *reading communities*

Turning for a moment to ethnographic evidence, here is a revealing vignette on the formation of a modern *Mahābhārata* reading community' among 'illiterates'[50] through the 'fruits of hearing'. It is from a Dalit woman's story of how she named a daughter after Draupadī:

> Every year I manage to go and listen to this story which I love so much.... When the sun sets, I put my bundle of sticks back on my head and go back to the *cēri* [the Paraiyars' quarters] to do the evening's work at home. Wherever I am, whatever sort of work I'm doing, I never fail to go and listen for a bit: I drop everything. I really like going into Madhava Reddi's field, the one next to the wall of Draupadi's temple [in the *ūr*, the village]. I can hear the Iyer [see n. 51] reading the *Bharatam* from there and at the same time I can't be seen. Apparently it's very good for you to listen, it absolves you of your sins. But that only happens in the *ur*. No one will ever agree to read for us, we're too unclean for that.... But again, who knows? In this *kaliyugam*, money's what matters. Perhaps if you paid a good price, a better price than people from the *ur*, you'd find a priest who'd agree. But that hasn't happened up till now. So I'll tell you how its done in the *cēri*. We all clubbed together to buy a big book of the *Bharatam*, where everything is marked. Our men who know how to read take this book, go and sit down near the *kulam* [tank] and, while the temple narrator reads and explains the *Bharatam*, our lads, who are intelligent and smart, write clown all the details on the book: here's the palace of wax, here's the descent into the fire, and so on. In the *cēri*, on days when there's no work, four or five of them sit on a *tinnai* [veranda] and start reading in front of about ten men. Hearing their stories we women go and listen as well. That's how I got to know Draupadi. (Viramma & Racine 1997: 81.)

And how had the men learned to read?

> [They] all learned to read from theatre books, there, on the ground in the square. [One] drew the letters for them on the sand. They understood by adding the letters together, little by little they started to read and one fine

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[50] 'It lasts eighteen days, when the *Bharatam* is read and everyone listens—those who understand its meaning and power for us, the illiterates, to atone for our sins' (Viramma & Racine 1997: 229). cf. position 16 above.

day they knew how to read fluently. They formed the *cēri* troupe. Yes, in the past we had a theatre troupe here in the *cēri.* My husband acted for a long time, but now he's too old for it. He played Karṇa, the husband of Anjalai played Bhima....My husband...could act all night and go to work the next day. In those days I'd go into the corner and admire him, my man! He didn't just act the part of the five Pandava brothers. He could play Kattavarayan, Vira Pandya and lots of others as well. He knew all the stories. (Viramma & Racine 1997: 120)

Although Viramma's one surviving son also acted, the *cēri* troupe no longer performs: according to Viramma because the younger generation now favors videos, which she laments (pp. 119–120); but probably more for economic reasons. No *ūr* Draupadī temples would contract for them, as they would for Vaṇṇiyar troupes.[51] As is well known, Vyāsa cleared the way for his Brahman disciples to transmit the *Mahābhārata* to all castes: a process that must always have had its hurdles. For Viramma, the cross-caste community generated by Draupadī festivals is clearly a *bhakti* community,[52] quite in harmony with what I believe the *Mahābhārata* author(s) intended.[53]

9. *'Author function'*

Although Vedic hymns have 'family books' and named poets, about whom legends have in many cases formed, and although certain names take on a representative quasi-authorial function for teachings and texts within different oral branches of Vedic learning, for Indian literature the epics mark the invention of a new type of 'author function' (Foucault 1979). The 'individualization' (Foucault 1979: 141) of authors—divine, fictional, or otherwise (p. 147)—first takes on literary proportions in early post- and para-Vedic *smṛti* texts, of which the two Sanskrit epics tackle the project of 'author-construction' (p. 150) most daringly. Vyāsa and Vālmīki are *new* authors and characters

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[51] Whose peccadillos regarding the *cēri* Viramma describes (Viramma & Racine 1997: 120). Viramma's translator-editors say that she mistook the *Pāratiyār* for an Iyer (Brahman) but that he was actually a Reddi (p. 291, n. 6); but she could have generalized from hearing other Iyer Pāratiyārs. See Hiltebeitel 1988: 138–139 on caste variation among drama troupes (including Untouchable troupes' restrictions to their own communities) and Pāratiyārs; pp. 153–164 on use by troupes of written manuscripts and chapbooks.

[52] Cf. the firewalking pit, she says: 'It's like a field of red hibiscus. The bhakti of that Mother is what makes this possible' (Viramma & Racine 1997: 231), Indeed, it is the goddess 'who shares'.

[53] See especially Hiltebeitel 2006a.

in their own texts. They insinuate themselves into other characters' minds, prompt them, and define the terms of the dissemination of their works.

10. *Overlap between author and deity*
The *Mahābhārata*, as J.L. Mehta puts it, gives a 'hint' of a 'mysterious relationship, like a deep and powerful undercurrent', between the author of the text and the supreme deity as cosmic author (J.L. Mehta 1990: 111). The *Mahābhārata* poets construct Vyāsa's author function in relation to author functions of the deity. For instance, it is only these two who give other characters the 'divine eye'.

11. *Shared conventions*
The production of the two epics generated numerous poetic conventions, among them, color conventions, in particular *bhakti* color conventions like the 'dark' names Kṛṣṇa and Rāma applied to multiple characters, often along with their skintones; a correlation between intervals of rites and gaps in stories; moments, winks, and twinkles (*nimeṣa*s) as suggestive of narrative turns; backs of mountains and waterfalls as images for scenes of composition and inspiration; the frame convention; the setting of the Naimiṣa Forest as a scene of epic transmission in both epics. The vitality and comprehension of such conventions does not last forever; their meanings have to be reconstructed.[54]

12. *Fiction, literary 'reality effects', literary experimentation*
For Mehta, and I concur, Vyāsa gives presence to authorial claims, processes, and literary experiments *in* the text. So does Vālmīki. With such authors we must thus raise the matter of fiction as distinct from myth (Kermode 1967: 39). The *Mahābhārata* poets have provided us not only with a fictional omniscient author, but *two* 'unreliable narrators' (Booth 1983: 158–159, 271–274, 295–296) as its main oral performers, two narrators (Saṃjaya and Bhīṣma) given the 'divine eye' to handle two immense stretches of text, and various other authoritative sources, mainly Ṛṣis.

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[54] See Hiltebeitel 2001a: 29, n. 120. I return to this point and develop it further in Hiltebeitel 2004c.

13. *Citation of sources*

A curious feature of the *Mahābhārata*, noticeable especially in connection with Bhīṣma (for whom the divine eye is thus not enough), is *its* interest in working out an apparatus of sources—in Bhīṣma's case, all the while holding in reserve the question of where he would have encountered all the celestial sources—gods, Ṛṣis—whom he cites. Bhīṣma's citation apparatus is certainly not typical of a Parry-Lordian oral epic, for which Albert Lord posits authorly anonymity and 'the tradition' itself as author (Lord 1960: 147). Bhīṣma makes his citations mainly in the *Śāntiparvan*, which, as James L. Fitzgerald (1980) has argued at least for the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*, seems to draw on some kind of library. But Bhīṣma also draws on celestial sources at other important moments: laid low on his bed of arrows, as he reconciles with Karṇa, he tells him: 'You are a son of Kuntī, not of Rādhā. It is known to me from Nārada and Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana and Keśava, no doubt about it.'[55] This is an interest not so much in bibliography but in being able to make authoritative citations (see Hiltebeitel 2001b). We are dealing here not with 'the birth of historical science', which, according to Paul Veyne, 'was made possible [in Greece] by the distinction between sources and reality, between historians and historical facts' (Veyne 1988: 108; cf. pp. 2, 12). Rather, it is a use of sources that fuses them *in reality*. Nonetheless, this intertwining of sources and reality is indicative of an intertextual situation that suggests a new kind of 'constitutive imagination'[56] concerned with the complexities of attribution. To be sure, one can still insist that such an imagination could still be reconstituting itself orally. But it is more likely that Bhīṣma's manner of *fixing* attribution reflects written textuality. I also believe that the *Mahābhārata* plays with this constitution of sources, connecting its didactic and narrative portions by leaving it implied that Bhīṣma can cite such celestial sources from the time during his youth that he has spent with his mother, the celestial Gaṅgā (Hiltebeitel 2001b).

14. *Character*

As already indicated, the epic poets take interest in character, not least in the characters of their authors. In some cases it is not difficult to

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[55] *Kaunteyas tvaṃ na rādheyo vidito nāradān mama/kṛṣṇadvaipāyanāc caiva keśavāc ca na saṃśayah//*(MBh 6.117.9).
[56] A term in Veyne's title (1988).

trace character development: notably, as I do in my most recent book,
with the character of Yudhiṣṭhira, around his education. But as Aditya
Adarkar and Patricia Meredith Greer have recognized, probably the
best character in the *Mahābhārata* is Karṇa, who is in many ways
Yudhiṣṭhira's point-counterpoint antithesis. Before turning to Karṇa
in closing, I note that one of the ways that the character develop-
ment of Yudhiṣṭhira and Karṇa is sustained antithetically is by a kind
of pacing.

15. *Pacing*

In cumulatively entangling Karṇa in the scenes that make his death
inevitable, his multiple fatalities reveal ever deeper levels of the con-
flicted traits that make him such an endearing, troubling, and com-
pelling hero. Unlike Yudhiṣṭhira and Arjuna, who as winning heroes
are the subject of consecutive narrative, Karṇa is the subject of a frag-
mented countertext, a loser's epic of resistance[57] that the poets leave
readers to piece together from segments where he is part of the main
story and patches where he is the subject of selective memories, includ-
ing his own.

C. *The Book on Karṇa*

It is the portrayal of Karṇa that has provided various authors with
what has seemed to them some of the most congenial evidence for
archaic oral features in the *Mahābhārata*. For Mary Carroll Smith, the
Karṇaparvan gives evidence of archaic orality by its relative statistical
prominence of metrically irregular pre-classical *triṣṭubh* verses, which
for her have oral Vedic parallels.[58] McGrath (2001), as cited earlier,
finds Karṇa—less polished than his Pāṇḍava adversaries—to be the
archaic 'Sanskrit Hero'. In an article exploring Indo-European themes
and written for a Georges Dumézil Festschrift, I myself favored archaic
probabilities in connection with what I still take to be remarkable and

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[57] See Hiltebeitel 2007b, drawing on Quint 1993: 11: 'episodic dismemberment of
narrative' in stories with no place to go; 'deliberately disconnected and aimless' stories,
over and against the 'master narratives' (p. 15) of 'epic triumphalism' (p. 41).

[58] See M. C. Smith 1972; 1992. Most of the epic (about ninety per cent) is in *śloka*
verses of two sixteen-syllable lines, while most of the rest is in *triṣṭubh* verses, regularly
of four eleven-syllable lines. Smith (1972: 65) has argued that *triṣṭubh*s form the epic's
'core' and irregular *triṣṭubh*s its 'nucleus'.

unexplained parallels between the chief chariot duel narratives of the Indian and Irish epics: Arjuna with Kṛṣṇa versus Karṇa with Śalya; Cúchulainn with Laeg versus Fer Diad with *his* charioteer (Hiltebeitel 1982a). And Vassilkov argues that the close of the *Karṇaparvan* recalls a 'basic myth'—the Indra-Vṛtra myth—behind its use of similes[59] and that, with the help of a distinction between 'evocative' and 'identifying' similes that resonate with this 'basic myth', and 'idealizing' and 'artistic' similes that reflect 'later' developments,[60] one can hark back to the archaic oral character of this segment of the epic.

Elsewhere, I have translated the close of the *Karṇaparvan* for a book of sources on Kṛṣṇa (Hiltebeitel 2007b), stressing its literary features: its careful construction; its framing devices; its play of tropes, especially irony; its juxtaposition of Vedic and purāṇic allusions; the swirl of affinities between heroes and deities;[61] its orchestration of epithets; its pacing in relation to Karṇa's portrayal in the larger text and the epic's wider representations of authorship, audience, and character. Indeed,

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[59] Vassilkov, having noted (2002: 15) that his earliest *Mahābhārata* similes cannot be compared with those in Homer, admits, 'It is very difficult to find any formal analogies to the *MBh*'s "identifying" ("evocative") similes in other epics' (p. 27). Yet he tries to reconstruct 'the line of historical development which might have led to this specific type of hero-god relationship' (p. 25) in order to show parallels between archaic similes in the *Karṇaparvan* and examples from what he calls 'pre-epic' and 'proto-epic genres': a Siberian tale about a man who is like the moon god and a examples from the Todas (see footnote 6 above) and Polynesia (pp. 24–27). I would ask whether the Indra/Vṛtra myth is 'basic' in the *Karṇaparvan* as an archaic oral survival to which all other mythical combats are 'merely' (this word occurs repeatedly) reducible, or as the Vedic focal point of an erudite literary construal familiar with such Vedic complexities of the Indra cycle as Indra's combats with other demons, notably Namuci, and his friendship with Viṣṇu (see now Hiltebeitel 2004b; 2007b). The 'basic myth' notion is too readily explanatory when we read that the 'Nara-Nārāyaṇa myth is merely a Vaiṣṇava version of the "basic" myth' (Vassilkov 2002: 21; cf. similarly p. 29, on Garuḍa versus the Snakes).

[60] Among 'idealizing' and 'artistic' similes are those that refer to the *pralaya*, which, Vassilkov argues, are from a later (although still bardic) stage that 'gave a particularly sinister colouring to the [earlier, archaic] picture, which was in perfect harmony with the fatalistic worldview typical of the "heroic age" (Vassilkov 2002: 28). For a critique of the 'heroic age' as an historical concept, see Hiltebeitel 1976: 48–59, and, in the same vein, 2001a: 10 and n. 43, and position 1 above, on the concept of 'epic period'. For me, such an argument is a case of the theory driving the results. cf. Ruth Katz's similar selective treatment of *pralaya* imagery as 'late' (Katz 1989; 1991), as discussed in Hiltebeitel 2003a: 120.

[61] Karṇa is like Rudra (MBh 8,65.36), but so is Arjuna, who must be reminded of the ways he is like Rudra, Kṛṣṇa, and Indra (65.18–20). Arjuna is like Indra (65.37), but then so is Karṇa, fallen and beheaded, 'one whose acts equalled those of the god of a thousand eyes' (i.e., Indra; 67.37).

as Yudhiṣṭhira tells Kṛṣṇa in bringing the scene to closure, all Kṛṣṇa
had to do to make things turn out right was to act *in* character:

> Then the thrilled Yudhiṣṭhira paid homage to Dāśārha;[62] he said, 'Luckily
> luckily', O Indra among kings, and he gladly said this: 'It is not strange
> in you, great-armed son of Devakī, that, with you as his charioteer,
> Pārtha would now do what is manly.' And the law-supporting Pārtha,
> best of Kurus, having grasped his braceleted right arm, spoke to both
> Keśava and Arjuna, 'Nārada has told that you are the two gods Nara
> and Nārāyaṇa, the two ancient best of men, joined in the establishment
> of dharma. The wise great-armed lord Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana has also told
> me this divine story repeatedly. By your power, Kṛṣṇa, Dhanaṃjaya with
> Gāṇḍiva conquered the foes who faced him and never faced away. Our
> victory was firm. Defeat was not to be ours when you undertook Pārtha's
> charioteering in battle.'
>
> Having thus spoken, that great chariot-warrior, having mounted that
> gold-decked chariot then came to see the battlefield of many tidings.
> Conversing with the two heroes Mādhava and Phālguna, he saw the bull
> among men Karṇa lying on the battlefield broken in pieces everywhere
> by arrows sped from Gāṇḍiva. Having seen Karṇa and his sons slain, king
> Yudhiṣṭhira praised both Mādhava and the Pāṇḍava, those tigers among
> men, saying, 'Today, Govinda, with my brothers I am king of the earth,
> protected on every side by you, our lord, hero, and sage. Having seen the
> death of the proud tiger among men Rādheya,[63] that wicked-souled son
> of Dhṛtarāṣtra will be hopeless about life and kingdom now that the great
> chariot-warrior Karṇa is slain. By your grace, bull among men, our goals
> are met. Delighter of the Yadus, you and the wielder of the Gāṇḍiva bow
> are victorious. Luckily you triumph, Govinda. Luckily Karṇa is fallen.'
> So, O Indra among kings, the much delighted Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira
> praised Janārdana and Arjuna. (MBh 8,69.19–34.)

By this time in the war, Yudhiṣṭhira knows *almost* (see footnote 63) as
much about Kṛṣṇa's doings as the reader.

In weighting orality and writing, *bhakti*-laced passages like these
are simply set aside as late by orality advocates.[64] Indeed, in this case
they could point out that the whole *adhyāya* of which this passage is

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[62] Kṛṣṇa as 'worthy of respect' (see Biardeau 2002, I: 105, n. 23).

[63] Note the recurring irony of the naming of Karṇa 'Rādheya', Yudhiṣṭhira being
yet to know that Karṇa is a son of Kuntī.

[64] E.g., Vassilkov (2002: 24 and n. 24) comments that, once Karṇa's *tejas* enters the
disc of the sun (8,67.27), 'As if that were not enough', there follows what 'is surely a
late *bhakti* reinterpretation': Sūrya's show of compassion toward Karṇa as one of his
*bhakta*s by touching his body with his solar rays (68.38). But Karṇa's *bhakti* to Sūrya
is a finely developed theme; see § 4.b.i and footnote 79 below, and, for fuller discus-
sion, Hiltebeitel 2007b.

a part has a variant text in its entirety (8,1224*), mostly in the South-
ern Recension. But not so fast. The mainly Southern variant is much
thicker in Yudhiṣṭhira's paean to Kṛṣṇa.-'Govinda's' grace. It lacks the
ironies of the Northern passage. And most interestingly, it leaves out
a key opening that Vassilkov (2002: 19–21) cites as evidence of his
'basic archaic myth':

> Saṃjaya said, After Karṇa had thus fallen and your army had fled, joy-
> fully embracing Pārtha, Dāśārha said this word, 'Vṛtra was slain by the
> destroyer of Bala; Karṇa by you, Dhanaṃjaya. People will tell the death of
> Vṛtra and Karṇa as a doublet (*vadham vai karṇavṛtrābhyāṃ kathayiṣyanti
> mānavāḥ*).[65] Vṛtra was slain in battle by the many-splendored possessor of
> the thunderbolt. Karṇa was slain by you with the bow and sharp arrows.
> Let the two of us, Kaunteya, report this prowess spread in the world and
> bearing your fame to the intelligent Dharmarāja.' (MBh 8,69.1–5.)

Kṛṣṇa's mysterious evocation of an identity between these combats—
and thus between Karṇa and not only Vṛtra but, before this, with
Namuci (8,65.19)—provides an allusive Vedic 'deepening' of Karṇa's
demonic rapport with the Asura Naraka by possession (MBh 3,240.19,
32). The Vedic Indra conquers Vṛtra and Namuci thanks to his 'friend'
Viṣṇu, and in Namuci's case, by a violation of friendship. In the epic, in
a story told by Śalya to Yudhiṣṭhira that stands behind Śalya's eventual
betrayal of Karṇa as his charioteer, the theme is extended to Indra's
conquest of Vṛtra, too, by a violation of friendship (5,10.19, 23). The
epic seems to reemplot this thematic set into the web of true and false
friendships surrounding Karṇa.[66] Yet Vassilkov disagrees with this
interpretation via friendship: 'However, I am inclined to think that
the "mystical and secret" "divine" knowledge revealed in these words
is the mystical identity of Arjuna with Indra, the identity of his heroic
feat with the primaeval deed of the Asura-slayer' (Vassilkov 2002;
20–21): If so, Kṛṣṇa takes this occasion just to state the obvious, rely-
ing on Arjuna and the reader to forget the references[67] to Namuci and

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[65] Or, as I translated it in 1976: 253: 'Men shall talk of just one death for Karṇa and
Vṛtra.' cf. Vassilkov 2002: 20: '[From now on] people will relate, indeed, the [story of
just one] Karṇa-Vṛtra murder!'

[66] See Hiltebeitel 1976: 255–266; 1982a: 93–107.

[67] There are four references to Namuci in the Northern recension 'Vulgate' of the
Karṇaparvan (Hiltebeitel 1976: 262).

to ignore the complex narrative context—indeed, the multiple friend-ship contexts[68]—in which Kṛṣṇa is speaking.

I would thus continue to maintain that when it comes to close read-ing, the *Karṇaparvan's* evidence for writing tips the scale over that for prior orality, above all because we need the wider text to interpret the supposed evidence for orality. Indeed, not unlike the evidence for the U.S. invasion of Iraq, evidence for orality seems to be constantly shifting and, as regards its most staple criterion, receding. Thus John Brockington points to a 'fairly general agreement that the study of oral epics has moved on from the emphasis on formulaic diction' (Brock-ington 1999a: 121). After exploring formulaic expressions through the five stages that he ascribes to the two Sanskrit epics' development, he acknowledges, 'This material raises the question of how far we should treat the presence of formulaic material as an index of orality' (1999a: 129). Holding 'that the two epics were originally independent of each other, though sharing a common background' (p. 127; a 'common tra-ditional stock' of formulae [p. 126]), he admits that 'for me the most problematic' cases are a few *Mahābhārata* formulae that occur rarely in the *Rāmāyaṇa* yet even in its first stage (p. 127). Surprisingly, he concludes that 'the greater frequency of formulaic *pāda*s in the later parts of both epics does not seem to be an index of orality but rather a sign of the decay of the genuine oral tradition' (p. 129)—this, after showing that among late-strata formula, 'the majority have a broadly religious significance', of which 'a number are specifically Vaiṣṇava but there are several which reflect general religious, ethical or cosmologi-cal concerns, while links with the Purāṇas are becoming more obvious' (p. 128; cf. Brockington 1999b: 135, 137). As regards this assessment of the generally religious, most of which I would bring under the head-ing of *bhakti*, I see it as another case of the theory driving the results.[69] With such a relativization of formulae, the most staple of Lord's three main indicators of orality—formula, theme, and enjambment (Lord 1960: 131)—becomes increasingly unreliable, leaving only the impos-sibly general indicator of theme and the technically daunting quest for

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[68] Karṇa is of course pivotal here. Indeed, he is eventually revealed to be a friend of Kṛṣṇa. See Hiltebeitel 2004b.

[69] Cf. footnote 60: not surprisingly, the results are similar, except that Vassilkov thinks the 'late' *bhakti* similes are still 'bardic'.

oral-specific types of enjambment.[70] More reliable indicators of orality are now said to include framing,[71] simile,[72] and especially—assessed 'as likely to be better indicators of oral composition and transmission' than formulae (Brockington 1999b: 137)—ring composition and repetition (p. 133). Not only is repetition 'of a phrase or passage…within a short space of its first occurrence on the whole a mark of the epic's oral character' (Brockington 1999a: 122); so are thematic repetitions by fore-shadowing and recapturing, as explored by Ramanujan (Brockington 1999b: 133).[73] Like theme, however, this kind of repetition, at least, is too general to serve as a differential from writing,[74] and ring composition, like framing, is susceptible to literary uses.[75]

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[70] On enjambment, see Brockington 1999b: 131, discussing Vassilkov's contribution to the DICSEP I workshop on orality; on theme, still viable for Brockington, see p. 135—'theme of the horse-sacrifice'.

[71] See Brockington 1999b: 136. I do not find Brockington applying this to the *Mahābhārata's* frame stories, which most people, including Vassilkov (2004: 4, and above, footnote 1), regard as not only 'late' but very late (see Hiltebeitel 2001a: 25, n. 2007b.

[72] See Brockington 1999a: 125; Vassilkov 2002, as discussed above.

[73] Cf. Brockington: HdO [1998], p. 115, taking all this, and Ramanujan's further examples, to suggest a 'unity of structure [that] would presumably belong to the original oral epic'. But when Ramanujan writes, 'Not only are there repetitive phrases, similes, and formulaic descriptions that the students of oral poetics (Parry, Lord, et al.) have taught us to recognize, but incidents, scenes, settings, and especially relationships are repeated' (cited by Brockington), it is not so clear that he attributes orality to what follows the 'but'. Where Ramanujan adds: 'Such repetitive elements foreshadow later events and recapture earlier ones' (p. 424), I would now recommend 'backshadow' and 'sideshadow' as preferable. to 'recapture' (see Morson 1994; Hiltebeitel 2001a: 37–38).

[74] See Vanstiphout 2003: 11.

[75] The remainder of the original essay, comprising Hiltebeitel 2005c, 103–7, is omitted, since that segment summarizes material presented in chapter 15 below.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PRIMARY PROCESS OF THE HINDU EPICS

A.K. Ramanujan once said, 'No Hindu ever reads the *Mahābhārata* for the first time' (1991a: 419). He also said, 'In India,…no one ever reads the *Rāmāyaṇa* or the *Mahābhārata* for the first time' (1991b: 46). Continuing the first statement, which opens an essay on 'Repetition in the *Mahābhārata*' that dates back to a 1968 paper presented to Victor Turner's Seminar on Comparative Epic at the University of Chicago, Ramanujan provides a sense of why he says 'reads for the first time' rather than 'hears for the first time' (which is the way I misremembered these passages, and their oral tellings at conferences, until I relocated them). Recounting his own youthful 'native' experiences of the epic, Ramanujan begins with a hearing, but one from a text-conversant *paṇḍita* who recounted *Mahābhārata* stories in a tailor shop. So the hearing implies a prior reading, even though the reading is not Ramanujan's. Moreover, the reading and hearing are multilingual and intertextual. The *paṇḍita* alternated between the *Mahābhārata* and 'large sections of a sixteenth-century Kannada text.' Last recalled are

> the professional bards who 'did the Harikathā Kālakṣepam,' redeeming time the with holy tales (and not always holy ones). They were invited into a neighborhood by a group or a wealthy man, and they would recite, sing and tell the *Mahābhārata* in sections night after night, usually under a temporary canopy (*pandal*) lit by petromax lanterns, with a floating audience.…They sang songs in several languages, told folktales, sometimes danced, quoted Sanskrit tags as well as the daily newspaper, and made the *Mahābhārata* entertaining, didactic and relevant to the listener's present (1991a: 419).

Here we have something akin, although at a different social level, to what goes on at South Indian Tamil Draupadī festivals.[1] In between, Ramanujan mentions his family's Brahmin cook, an older boy who told

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[1] On *kathākalakṣepam* (Sanskrit 'passing time through story') and Draupadī cult *pārata piracaṅkam*, '*Mahābhārata* recitation,' as a 'little tradition' counterpart, see Frasca (1990: 53–54); Hiltebeitel (1988: 136–37).

Mahābhārata stories after cricket under a margoga tree, and the 'somewhat bored algebra teacher who switched from the binomial theorem to the problems of Draupadī and her five husbands' (1991a: 419).

Ramanujan goes on to observe that 'the main, complex, many-storied plot of this enormous epic is remembered and recalled in great detail.' He argues that

> such recall is possible because it is a *structured* work. In a largely oral tradition, one learns one's major literary works as one learns a language—in bits and pieces that fit together and make a whole in the learner's mind, because they are parts that reflect an underlying structure (Ramanujan 1991a: 420–21; emphasis in original).

Here we have further clarification that he is considering how one can absorb a literary work that cannot be 'read for the first time.' Remarking that Western interpolation theories 'belie and deny the native's sense' of the *Mahābhārata's* 'unity, its well-plotted network of relations,' he attempts 'to explicate a "native intuition"' of the 'intricate sense of structure and unity in this ten-mile monster of a work,' an intuition in the linguist's sense 'that every native speaker has of the grammar of his mother tongue' (Ramanujan 1991a: 421).

Ramanujan goes on to 'suggest that the central structuring principle of the epic is a certain kind of repetition' (1991a: 421): one that includes textual circularities and concentricities, from nested relations among episodes and among episodes and 'inset' stories like 'Nala' to 'the local texture of significant passages'; thematic narrative and symbolic weaves; foreshadowings and recursivities; 'autonomous complexes' of action that recur in different personages; recurrent ethical reflection on the nature and outcome of such action complexes, including both mental and physical acts; and multiply interlinked relationship patterns (422–41), most notably the 'double espousal and the double parentage of the major characters,' doublings that do not call forth a theory of development from death to divinization,[2] even though they are mostly human-divine ones (422–23). Ramanujan sees similar patterns of 'rhythmic recurrence' in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (1991b: 40).

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[2] As argued by Blackburn (1985, 1988, 1989). I critique this relentlessly euhemerizing 'developmental model' in Hiltebeitel 1995 and 1999a (29–37) with attention to numerous Indian oral epic examples (see below).

Right and Bad Metaphors

To be sure, not every Hindu had Ramanujan's childhood. But Ramanujan is saying something that he continued to say over the years and continued to try to puzzle out whenever he said it. Clearly, to evoke an experience that no Hindu or Indian misses is to speak figuratively, paradoxically. One of the key tasks that he sets himself is to find the right metaphors for this native intuition, both as it works receptively, interiorizing the grammar, and generatively, producing new 'tellings' (Ramanujan 1991b: 24–25). He has found two such metaphors, both superb: the crystal and the pool of signifiers. The crystal metaphor came to mind when he was 'contemplating the form of the *Mahābhārata*' and 'happened to browse in the section on crystallography in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*' (Ramanujan 1991a: 441). Crystals replicate their order; they dissolve in ways that are consistent with the symmetry of their solvents, like the *Mahābhārata* in vernacular languages; they grow from their imperfections (Ramanujan 1991a: 441–42). The 'pool of signifiers' metaphor, on the other hand, draws together his reflections on multiple *Rāmāyaṇa*s. Yet it also extends the linguistic analogies he poses in discussing the *Mahābhārata.* In his 'thoughts on translation' of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Ramanujan 1991b: 44–46), he breaks the signifiers down into a Peircean triad of the iconic ('faithful' translation retaining formal structural relations), the indexical (referring within the translation to local or vernacular detail), and the symbolic (saying new things through oppositions and subversions). All three occur to varying degrees in any translation, but wherever the symbolic is possible culturally such as where 'the Rāma story has become almost a second language of the whole culture area' (Ramanujan 1991b: 45), one may say that such an area

> has a pool of signifiers (like a gene pool), signifiers that include plots, characters, names, geography, incidents, and relationships. Oral, written, and performance traditions, phrases, proverbs, and even sneers carry allusions to the Rāma story.... And to these must be added marriage songs, narrative poems, place legends, temple myths, paintings, sculpture, and the many performing arts. (46)

It is here that Ramanujan joins his metaphors:

> These various texts not only relate to prior texts directly, to borrow or refute, but they relate to each other through this common code or common pool. Every author, if one may hazard a metaphor, dips into and brings out a unique crystallization. (1991b: 46)

It is also here that the fused metaphors unite his discussions of the two epics: 'In India…, no one ever reads the *Rāmāyaṇa* or the *Mahābhārata* for the first time. The stories are there, "always already"' (Ramanujan 1991b: 46).

Metaphoric Lenses

I would like to make a small jump from Ramanujan's concern to one of my own in writing *The Cult of Draupadī* (1988, 1991a) and two books (1999a, 2001a) concerned with 'rethinking' India's Sanskrit epics and regional oral epics. Regional oral epics linked with the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* are no less crystallizations from such pools of signifiers than proverbs and sneers, not to mention narrative poems, place legends, and so on. As oral literature, they have no doubt been composed and transmitted by Hindus who had never read the *Mahābhārata* or the *Rāmāyaṇa* for the first time but had 'native intuitions' about them. More specifically, they are translations from regions saturated with *Mahābhārata* and/or *Rāmāyaṇa* traditions, no matter whether such traditions are folk or classical.[3] Abounding in local 'indexical' references, they clearly also tend more to the 'symbolic' end of the spectrum than the 'iconic,' being full of inversions and probably even subversions.

Yet although Ramanujan's metaphors can be 'translated' into regional epic terms, that is not their purpose. They are designed to address the intricacies of the relationship among varied tellings of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. He has addressed his thoughts on language and translation to the Draupadī cult *Mahābhārata* (Ramanujan 1991a: 420) but not, for example, to such regional oral folk epics as the Tamil *Aṇṇaṉmār Katai* or the Telugu *Palnāḍu*. Those who have considered the relationship between classical and such regional epics have come up with other metaphors. The 'celestial garbage' metaphor can be duly noted (J. D. Smith 1989: 176); like Rudyard Kipling's (1986) descrip-

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3 Ramanujan's remarks on 'symbolic' oppositions and areas where knowledge of one of the epics is like a 'second language' help to clarify the inference that a folk version of the *Mahābhārata* that differs markedly from the classical epic is evidence for discounting classical-folk epic connections and local ignorance of the classical tradition (Blackburn and Flueckiger 1989: 8–9n22, citing John Smith's personal communication 1982). We need to know more about the time and place of epic saturation in which such opposition is generated.

tion of the K.M. Ganguli translation of the *Mahābhārata* as a 'whale stranded by an ebbing tide,' it calls attention to a 'dumping' process. For Kipling, the Sanskrit epics are waste products of the tides of history, surviving at best as 'local ditties.' For John Smith, the ideological detritus of Sanskritization is dumped onto the poor, unsuspecting folk. These are simply bad metaphors.[4] Several authors also speak of the inevitable 'cores' and 'kernels,' leaving room for such favored 'extras' as 'growth,' 'accretion,' 'grafting,' and 'exaggeration.' These terms are rhetorically equivalent to the text-historical strategies of interpolation and 'corruption' that one finds in Protestant scholarship on early Christianity.[5] Even the term 'metaphor' has been used to support a 'loose ends' explanation. According to J. Smith (1991: 83–84, 91–94), what he calls 'doubtful' aspects of the Rajasthani *Pābūjī's* connections with the *Rāmāyaṇa* are dismissed as 'metaphoric' or non-'literal' formulae, as accretative interpolations that do not help in finding the historical Pābūjī, who is sought to exemplify Blackburn's model of 'death and divinization.' More usefully, Stuart Blackburn and Joyce Flueckiger (1989: 11) speak of 'pathways' from regional to pan-Indian epics, and Kamal Kothari (1989: 102) of a concern for the untimely dead that 'feeds' the regional epics of Rajasthan.

In my initial attempt to say something on these matters, I first ventured the adjectival metaphor of 'an underground folk *Mahābhārata*':

> But it cannot be monolithic. It has no prototype outside the Sanskrit text (which can never be assumed to have fallen out of the 'folk epic' frame of reference). If such a folk *Mahābhārata* exists, however, it would seem to be centered on images of the goddess and the control of land. Its lines of transmission and adaptation are too vast to ever trace fully. But those lines that do emerge suggest the crossing of many geographical and linguistic boundaries, and symbols and motifs that recur in a wide spectrum of 'reflexive' and interpenetrating genres: from *Mahābhārata*

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[4] Poole provides good guidelines here:

We can evaluate theories as metaphors or theory-constitutive metaphors—and their entailed or implied analogical mappings—in terms of their formal structure, their clarity and precision in focusing and delimiting comparison, their possibilities of extension and generalization, their imaginative formulation of interesting and important puzzles and problems, and their implications for charting future directions of analytic inquiry (1986: 438, cf. 421n24).

[5] Compare J. Z. Smith (1990: 14, 18, 43, 114) on the overlapping cluster of terms in such scholarship that includes 'corruptions' which must be removed by the application of the 'historian's method,' 'impostures,' 'diabolical intervention,' and the 'horrible invention' of the trinity.

vernaculars to folk dramas, from folk dramas to ritual idioms, from ritual idioms to temple tales, from temple tales to sisters' tales, from sisters' tales to regional folk epics, from regional folk epics to *Mahābhārata* vernacularizations (Hiltebeitel 1991b: 421).

This metaphor ties regional epics into a circular linkage of 'surfaced' evidence, but it does not single out specific issues that are forefronted by their relation to the classical epics. It is also somewhat inchoate and romantically subaltern.

Starting Points

These metaphors pose the challenge of finding terms by which to engage and interpret texts within fluid cultural processes that already brim with their own play of tropes, in which metaphor itself must not be privileged. Cumulatively, they also begin to evoke some commonalities in talking about something subtle and rich but necessarily only dimly grasped. Four points about what they target can, I think, be clarified by trying another 'metaphoric lens.'[6] One is the question of where we start. Second is the nature of what feeds these oral traditions, of what is in the pool. Third, something more is needed to envision the complexity of developmental patterns. Fourth is the question of the general and the particular: Can we find a metaphor that allows us to move between the two? These four considerations, I will argue, lead to some new clarity if we sound out the metaphor of primary process, which, of course, comes from Sigmund Freud but through intermediary readings of Victor Turner, Paul Ricoeur, and Gananath Obeyesekere. It is also my point of engagement with Ramanujan's aphorism: 'there, "always already"' and 'never read for the first time,' the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* are primary process for the cultural work that produces regional martial oral epics.[7]

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[6] See especially Poole (1986), advocating a type of comparative analysis in which a constructed metaphor or analogy may supply a 'theoretical lens' that 'affords "epistemic access"' to the 'shared or analogous features' that are posited 'between entities that otherwise may differ from one another in all or most respects' (420). Poole proposes 'a genre of metaphoric construction that posits some critical "fiber" of resemblance and constitutes the preliminary grounds for an analogic mapping' of the 'shared metaphorical entailments,' which may also be done with several metaphoric lenses to allow for 'partially overlapping foci' and 'increasingly refined illumination' (431, 432).

[7] The closest any oral epic scholar comes to such a notion is Roghair (1982), who writes of an 'integrative process' that entails 'an underlying mythos' (118); the 'many

Lest I be misunderstood, I should insist that I do not import into this discussion many of the full Freudian implications that this metaphor normally carries: a homeostatic principle of constancy; discharge of tension; correlation with the pleasure principle; reference to a 'primitive state' of the 'psychical apparatus' that traverses the link between wishing and hallucinating; a 'store of infantile memories' or 'id' where the repressed wishes of infancy, and in particular the primitive infantile scene of seduction, struggle to find expression in dream images, are *'modified by being transferred on to a recent experience,'* and leave vestiges in cultural myths; the one-sided implications of fantasy, regression, and distortion (Freud 1961: 566, 604, 546; emphasis in original).[8]

Truer Freudians than I have shown that certain classical epic episodes and relations can be illuminated from such a perspective (Goldman 1978, 1993; Masson 1975). Yet although one could dilate upon several analogies here, the metaphor of primary process would itself be a distortion were it applied as a Freudian whole to the classical epic/ regional epic relation, since it would involve prioritizing 'primitive' and psychosexual overtones.

Why then is it useful at all? What is interesting is not so much what Freud posits about the content and 'energies' of primary process but the relation of this process to the 'formation of dreams' through the dream-work (Freud 1961: 597). Indeed, Freud seems to characterize the 'bewildering and irrational' primary process 'as being the dream-work proper' (1961: 597). This formation is accounted for by the 'transposition or distortion' (*Entstellung*) of primary process material (repressed infantile dream-thoughts) into the manifest content of the dream. The dream-work is formal in that it 'restricts itself to giving things a new form' through the 'mechanisms' of condensation, displacement, and representability[9]—which, along with the fourth

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world-views' of a 'given local society's mythos…will all conform in one way or another to the mythos of the society as a whole' (119). Yet Roghair's stress on conforming, superimposition, syncretism, overlap, and divergence (124–25, 136–37) does not admit the possibility that the process is interior to the primary formation of oral epics. See Kripal (1995), who, in my opinion, would have done better in this Freudianized book to use 'primary process' for what he calls 'the social process of interpretation and debate' in which 'psyche and culture formed one another' (219–20, 227, 236, 257, 314, 344–46) in the experience of Rāmakṛṣṇa and his followers.

[8] See discussion in Ricoeur (1970: 75, 90–114, 263–70).

[9] 'The dream-work…does not think, calculate or judge in any way at all; *it restricts itself to giving things a new form.* It is exhaustively described by an enumeration of

mechanism of secondary revision, provide, as Hayden White (1978) and others have demonstrated, an analog at the unconscious level of the dream-work to the workings of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony, the fourfold classification of rhetorical tropes, on the conscious level of culture.[10] I rather think it more helpful in studying epics to think of the analogy as one in which the dream-work itself, like the work of culture, would be no 'deeper' than its telling, its performance, its production (cf. Lacan 1977: 147–49). It is with the model of the dream-work that one can take up the metaphor of primary process in relation to what Obeyesekere has called the work of culture.

As Freud says, primary process has 'chronological priority': it is what is there 'from the first' (*von Anfang an*), 'indestructible' and 'immortal' (1961: 603, 577, 533), the 'indestructability of one's earliest desires' (Ricoeur 1970: 268, cf. 104–5, 112–14). To some extent, this metaphor thus applies to our first consideration. The *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, 'there, "always already,"' have their primacy and first time unreadability precisely in two literary works of culture that exist in Sanskrit. Having virtually said all of this himself and that a 'native intuition' takes in a complex grammar that devolves from these very texts, I do not think that we need to follow Paula Richman (1991: 5) in moving from Ramanujan's discussion to an argument against 'privileging' Vālmīki. Ramanujan is tempted by such a relativized (or egalitarian) view but draws back from it as 'too extreme' (1991b: 44). Ultimately he speaks of 'a series of translations,' some of which 'cluster around Vālmīki, another set around the Jaina Vimalasūri, and so on' (Ramanujan 1991b: 44), all crystallizing from the 'pool of signifiers.' To be sure, Ramanujan traces the circulation of themes (especially oral

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the conditions which it has to satisfy in producing its result': as product, the dream must 'evade the censorship,' to which end the dream-work makes use of displacement, condensation, and representability (Freud 1961: 507, emphasis added; cf. Ricoeur 1970: 90–91). 'Dream-displacement and dream-condensation are the two governing factors to whose activity we may in essence ascribe the form [*Gestaltung*] assumed by dreams' (Freud 1961: 308; Ricoeur 1970: 94). On *Entstellung*; see Ricoeur (1970: 90–91).

[10] White (1978: 13–14): these correspondences are understood to be only approximate. White sees secondary revision, 'that ironic trope,' as introducing the 'suggestion of a…diachronic dimension in the dreamwork,' since it requires the 'matter' provided by the other mechanisms on which to work (1978: 13). His important point is that Freud works out 'on the level of the Unconscious' a counterpart to what others, since the nineteenth century, have done through similar variations on 'the fourfold schema of tropes as a model of the modes of mental association characteristic of human consciousness' (White 1978: 13; cf. Bloom 1973).

and Southeast Asian ones) that are 'unknown to Vālmīki' (1991b: 37). Yet Vālmīki's telling is 'the earliest and most prestigious of them all' (Ramanujan 1991b: 25).[11] Richman rightly sees Ramanujan as urging us to avoid seeing 'different tellings...as "divergences" from the "real" version by Vālmīki' and rather as 'the expression of an extraordinarily rich set of resources existing, throughout history' (1991: 7–8). Yet this history has a beginning with two monumental written texts that launch a distinctive cultural *reading* process by their 'central structuring principle' of 'a certain kind of repetition' (Ramanujan 1991a: 421) or 'rhythmic recurrence' (1991b: 40).[12] It is this cultural reading process or 'manner of reading,' rather than any specific epic content, that we may treat as analogous to Freud's principles of transposition (which requires a kind of repetition) and distortion (which occurs within rhythmic recurrence).

The Pool of Signifiers

Our second consideration addresses the nature of what feeds from this primary epic process into other South Asian epic traditions. What is the nature of the signifiers in the pool? Even sustaining the linguistic metaphor, they cannot all be arbitrary. Obeyesekere, arguing that comparative and 'thick description' etnographies should 'play' with Freud's first topography (unconscious, preconscious, conscious) but reject the Westernized personology of his second (id, ego, superego), holds a similar reservation about Freud's imputation of 'impersonality' to the primary process.

> Id is the neuter of the personology, for it must be remembered that Freud believed that primary processes possess this 'impersonal' character. The id is, I believe, once again an inadequate metaphor to characterize the region of primary process that is often peopled with *beings*—distorted representations of significant others, archaic objects of fantasy, and in

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[11] Similarly, 'to some extent all later *Rāmāyaṇa*s play on the knowledge of previous tellings' (Ramanujan 1991b: 33); Kampaṉ 'makes full use of his predecessor Vālmīki' (31); the above-mentioned Jaina telling by Vimalasūri 'obviously...knows its Vālmīki and proceeds to correct its errors and Hindu extravagances' (34).

[12] On the written, not oral, production of the Sanskrit epics, about which there is of course some disagreement, see Hiltebeitel (1993: 28, 1999a, 1999b: 155–57, 2001). Application of oral theory to these epics has, I would argue, produced only misreadings.

many cultures, at another level of symbolic remove, ghosts and demons. (Obeyesekere 1990: 253–54; emphasis in original)

As Obeyesekere suggests, the primary process metaphor *is* adequate, within the first topography and without the second, to account for a 'peopling' of dreams through pictorial representation in images.[13] In conjunction with the dream-work and the royal two-way road it opens to interpretation, it is also adequate to the work of culture:

> The dream text is the descriptive account of the dream; insofar as this is the case it can be 'thickly described.'…The description is followed by an interpretation that renders the text intelligible in terms of the dreamer's deep motivation. Now this model can easily be applied to ethnography (and not just psycho-ethnography). One could have a thick description of let us say, a festival, a ritual, a myth, or whatever (Obeyesekere 1990: 266).

If we move to the significant others 'peopled' in Hindu epics, we not only have certain specifically heightened close familial relationships, plus ghosts and demons, but, at other levels of symbolic remove, personalized talking animals, *guru*s, and gods. There can really be no doubt that Hindus see 'transposed and distorted' condensations, displacements, represent-ations, and secondary revisions of them-selves in epic figures, their interrelationships, and their worlds (see Kakar 1978).[14]

These peopled signifiers and their interrelationships are also among the important constellations that are 'transposed and distorted' when primary process epic material swerves into regional epics, Thus in typical South Indian fashion, Tamil *Mahābhārata* reenplotments in both the *Aṇṇaṉmar Katai* and the Draupadī cult *Mahābhārata* intro-duce brother-sister relations that are absent from the classical epic and intensify cross-cousin and mother-son relationships (see Beck 1982:

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[13] Freud posits images in the primary process but without discrimination between images as hallucinatory and perceptions inhibited by reality, which occurs in the sec-ondary process. The wish-fulfilling 'dream-thoughts' thus pictorially represented are 'the same as the thoughts of waking life,' their strangeness consisting not in their being thoughts or desires represented in images but in their 'transposition or distortion' that results from the dream-work (see Ricoeur 1970: 78, 91–92). On Freud's important distinction between pictorial representation and symbolization and its limitations, especially regarding myths and rituals, see Ricoeur (1970: 99–102,498–502).

[14] Compare also Kothari (1989: 114), who curiously argues that whereas the Sanskrit epics provide 'models' for people in society, the folk epic heroes and heroines supply only proverbs. It is hard to imagine that this position would survive closer exploration of regional traditions. On talking animals in the *Mahābhārata*, see Hiltebeitel (2001a).

174).[15] Similarly, in typical North Indian fashion, the tensions of the daughter/father relationship find expression in the Hindi *Ālhā*, building on the *Mahābhārata*, and the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship in *Pābūjī*, building on the *Rāmāyaṇa*.[16] To be sure, there are other kinds of signifiers in the pool, and these all have a surplus of other (including theological) meanings that may be no less primary than the more psychodynamic ones. The point, however, is that the pool of signifiers needs a little churning to account for its dynamic properties.

Developmental Patterns

Our third consideration is the theme of development. Something is needed to envision the complexity of developmental patterns beyond the bottom up linearity of death, divinization, and pan-Indian legitimization postulated by Blackburn for the origin and development of South Asian epics. Even if we start from a pool of signifiers with a bottom of a different kind, the problems posed by regional epics cannot be resolved by Ramanujan's notion of retelling as translation. Each regional epic has selected its own limited set of iconic continuities and, far more extensively, has worked out both its patterns of indexical relocation and vernacularization and its themes of symbolic inversion or subversion. Rather than being translations of the classical epics, regional epics are ruptures from them. It is their discontinuities and dislocations that stand out, and their subversions and inversions are no longer versions but 'aversions.' The transformation can no longer be sufficiently imaged as a crystallization. Primary process images are reworked into them but at a culturally decisive 'symbolic remove.'[17]

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[15] Compare the Draupadī cult *Mahābhārata* figures of Caṅkuvati (the Pāṇḍavas 'new' younger sister: Hiltebeitel 1988: 344–49, 1991a: 29n26, 405–6, 418–23), the multiple 'mothers' who weep for Aravāṉ (1991a: 328), and the importance of the *maittuṉaṉ* relationships of the sister's husband and wife's brother that deepen the significance of Jayadratha-Cayintavaṉ and Pōrmaṉṉaṉ-Pōttu Rāja (1988: 348–49, 349n20, 397–98, 404–6). Compare Obeyesekere (1990: 146, 160–63) on the prominence of these same three themes in the 'family' of Sri Lankan 'Oedipal' myths.

[16] See Hiltebeitel 2001a on both, 1999c on father/daughter tensions, especially in myths of *sāti* (widow immolation).

[17] On this notion that Obeyesekere regards, along with what he considers to be the lack of a censor, to be the main complexity that the work of culture adds to the 'mechanisms' of the dream-work, see his *The Work of Culture* (1990: 19–20, 49–51, 56–58, 201, 212, 271, 282). I resist only the insistence that the 'core' of a myth, from

The rupture that is achieved by this remove makes for something analogous to secondary process 'reality testing' (Freud 1961: 566–67). After all, it is here that the primary process epic material runs up against local realities of 'cultural ideas about death' (Kothari 1989: 112), regionally embedded obduracies of caste, the hard realities and dislocations of medieval history, sectarian rivalries, ancestral landscapes, regional custom, pride, and so on.[18] To be sure, regional epics are also fed from these secondary process directions. Discontinuity also enhances a revolutionary potential, emphasized in different contexts by both Obeyesekere (1990: 187–88, 213–14) and V. Turner (1974: 72, 110–12,122–23), that can be found when classical epic primary process material is reshaped toward new political ends. In terms developed by Deborah Dunham and James Fernandez (1991) and T. Turner (1991) and sounded out from different perspectives by Homi Bhabha (1994), the politics of discontinuity can find its most expressive figuration in a poeisis of creative metonymy that buries metaphors and darkens the transparency and complicity of metaphoric continuities of resemblance.

In trying to write of something on the margins of nationalism having to do with locality, Bhabha's topic has at least that much in common with what is called for in writing about regional folk epics. Allowing that good comparison 'is a disciplined exaggeration in the service of knowledge' (J.Z. Smith 1990: 52), it is thus useful to draw an analogy between regional oral epics and what Bhabha calls 'counter-narratives' in colonial and postcolonial discourse, especially in terms of his dis-

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which symbolic remove occurs, will always be sexually psychodynamic (Obeyesekere 1990: 33, 210–11).

[18] Schomer works out the implications of such reality-testing and symbolic remove in showing how the Hindi *Ālhā*, as '*Mahābhārata* of the Kali Yuga,' 'has built into it a tension between the Dvāpara Yuga paradigms and its own historical realities' (1989: 149–50). She highlights four 'marked contrast[s]': (*i*) a different sociopolitical order (the *Mahābhārata's* 'independent territorial kingdoms' versus 'congeries of small principalities ruled by rival clans and bound together by a complex network of feudal relationships'); (*ii*) different social status among the heroes ('Instead of being the scions of an ancient dynasty,' the *Ālhā* heroes, with their 'egalitarian' army, are the mixed origin and reputedly 'vile' Banāphars); (*iii*) different 'dominant concern[s]' (vindication of position as rightful heirs versus Rājpūt honor); and (*iv*) different motivations for the final conflict (royal succession versus the 'interrelated issues' of individual status [ascribed or achieved], strict hypergamy, and a woman's shifting of loyalty from natal house to husband's house).

cussion of their 'metonymic strategies.'[19] Like 'counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries,' regional oral epics 'disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which "imagined communities" are given essentialist identities' (Bhabha 1994: 149). In its own way, each of the Sanskrit epics is a totalizing (and, one might add, 'colonizing') text, and each reinforces the same totality from different angles with similar metaphoric transparencies.[20] The *Mahābhārata* totalizes outspokenly in its famous 'whatever is here is elsewhere' dictum and in its boast of containing 'the entire thought' of Veda Vyāsa (perhaps a metaphor for its own primary process in the depths of Veda"),[21] in its instruction about all four 'goals of human life,' and through its narrative frames and textual boundaries that keep turning in on themselves as text while opening out to embrace infinity and exclude only that which 'is not found elsewhere.'[22] The *Rāmāyaṇa* totalizes through its image of the perfect man, the perfect kingdom, the perfect *dharma*, and the perfect world for Brahmins. In contrast, regional folk epics test the transparencies and 'reality-effects' of these prior harmonizations of eternal Veda, fifth Veda, and dharmic subtlety and perfection.[23] They are partializing discourses, in which metaphors can be buried, or generatively entrenched in new metonymic domains,

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[19] Compare Spivak: 'We might consider the *Mahābhārata* itself in its colonialist function in the interest of the so-called Aryan invaders of India' (1988: 183). Spivak, however, situates this function not in an ideological tension between total and regional visions or in an intertextual relation between the substance and tenor of texts but in the dubious areas of textual development ('an accretive epic') and historicity ('the "sacred" geography of an ancient battle is slowly expanded by succeeding generations of poets so that the secular geography of the expanding Aryan colony can present itself as identical with it and thus justify itself'). The analogy, in any case, ceases at the point where colonial and postcolonial counternarratives entail supraregional 'identities' that confront transcultural and transnational 'others.'

[20] One can churn Ramanujan's pool metaphor with this point in mind, since both epics foreground the myth of the churning of the ocean. Ramanujan may also have self-consciously invoked India's 'ocean of the streams of story' (*Kathāsaritsāgara*) and the 'fathomless lake' of the *Rāmcaritmānas* (Lutgendorf 1991: 16–22) here as well.

[21] I pursue the undertheorized matter of Veda-epic relations in Hiltebeitel 2001a with this analogy in mind: that Veda is to the Sanskrit epics as the Sanskrit epics are to regional oral martial epics.

[22] On frame stories in the *Mahābhārata*, see Hiltebeitel (2001a); Minkowski (1989).

[23] See Bhabha (1991: 90, 1994: 48, 108–11) on the 'reality-effects' produced and secured. through the 'invention of historicity' and the 'transparency of realist metanarratives' (and other such transparencies) in colonial and nationalist discourses. Compare Barthes (1972) and J.Z. Smith (1990: 52–53) on the need to face the 'political implications' of 'the quest for the "real" historical connections' in comparisons. Equally interesting, at least for Hindu epics, is their imagined historical connections.

or, in Bhabha's (1994: 74) terms, 'disavowed' in a 'metonymy of pres-
ence' that in its accent on fragments and contiguities, rather than
transparent resemblances, can register the perception not only of hid-
denness but of absence or lack.[24] They afford a 'metonymic strategy,'
a 'partializing process of hybridity,' 'at once a mode of appropria-
tion and resistance' that employs mimicry, irony, and camouflage in
'an agonistic space' (Bhabha 1994: 120–21). It is thus not an issue,
as with Ramanujan, of translation and representation of a transpar-
ent and crystalline whole but of displacement, condensation, and
re-presentation in parts. Yet from their inception, India's regional folk
epics have coexisted with the classical epics in a double articulation
that resembles the

> two disproportionate sites of colonial discourse and power: the colonial
> scene as the invention of historicity, mastery, mimesis, [and] the 'other
> scene' of *Enstellung*, displacement, fantasy, psychic defense, and an 'open'
> textuality (Bhabha 1994: 108).

Metonymies of presence 'cross the boundaries of the culture of enun-
ciation through a strategic confusion of the metaphoric and met-
onymic axes of the cultural production of meaning' (Bhabha 1994:
90, 1984: 130) and 'disturb the systematic (and systemic) construc-
tion of discriminatory knowledges' (1994: 115). In this light, and in
terms parallel to Bhabha's discussion of metonymic disavowals of ver-
tical transparencies, regional folk epics are 'a complex cryptic figure
of enunciation,…an uncanny performance of substitutability and in
that very act an impossibility of simultaneity,…always less than one
and double' (1991: 92), 'an obscure and ubiquitous form of living the
locality of culture' (1994: 140; emphasis in original). Bhabha's guid-
ance through the 'gaps' of this 'doubling' that is 'not depth' and 'not
resemblance' (1994: 50–53) opens pathways into the ruptures and dis-
locations of space, time, and character that one finds in regional oral
martial epics. Yet one must recognize that the revolutionary potential
of such epics is not so richly imagined (except by some scholars) or

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[24] The Sanskrit epics could be said to have a 'colonizing' function analogous to that
of the English Bible as 'the Word in the wilds,' as discussed in Bhabha's 'Signs Taken
for Wonders': 'the idea of the English book is presented as universally adequate'; 'the
sign of appropriate representation [read: metaphor]: the word of God, truth, art creates
the conditions for a beginning, a practice of history and narrative'; but its institution is
'also an *Enstellung*, a process of displacement, distortion, dislocation, repetition [read:
metonymy]' (1994: 105).

avowedly oppositional as Bhabha's own metonymic strategies;[25] one must remember that metonyms can double back as metaphors, create echoes and resonances, and sustain domains of reference and thus interreferential domains.

It is, in any case, such strategies as these that allow regional epics to appear to be countercultural or non-Brāhmanical at the same time that they draw from primary storehouses of mainstream Brāhmanical culture. On a dream-work/work of culture analogy, the discontinuities of reality-testing, revolutionary potential, and creative metonymy entail a kind of 'reenplotment' of a primary plot (cf. Obeyesekere 1990: 267). For both the dream-work and the work of culture, what one needs to conceptualize are the 'rules of engagement' that characterize such reenplotment and make 'thick description' of it possible' (cf. Obeyesekere 1990: 282).[26] To continue one of Obeyesekere's points, the description of a festival, ritual or myth

> can be followed by an interpretation based on a set of metatheoretical rules, if one also recognizes that the description itself is influenced by these rules. In fact much of ethnographic work is of this order, except that the rules of interpretation are rarely clearly formulated. Instead there is ad hoc theory or interpretation through megaconcepts.
>
> The preceding view of the dream work as 'rules of interpretation' does not mean that I accept them. Quite the contrary: the rules must be validated in a 'variety of ways and then revised or extended (1990: 266).

Instead of applying 'megaconcepts' like development, divinization, and history,[27] we must 'tack' back and forth from the text as work of culture to the interests (political, sociological, familial, sexual, religious, and so on) that enliven it and, in working back and forth, discern the rules by which to identify the shifts and turns that characterize specific texts

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[25] Note that Bhabha wisely omits from 1994: 90 a sentence found in 1984: 130 (immediately following the passage from those pages just cited) that includes a one-sided reference to 'the metaphoric as the process of repression.'

[26] See Poole (1986: 414–15), noting that using metaphoric lenses for analogic mapping 'inevitably involves some mode of classification and categorization' to enable comparison 'through some set of correspondence rules.'

[27] On the distinction, between metatheory (for example, Freud and Weber) and megaconcept (Jung), see Obeyesekere (1990: 256–61, especially 261):

> The special part of the metatheory that helps us understand the manner in which unconscious thoughts are transformed into images is the 'dream work.' Once dreams are interpreted through the theory it is possible for Freud to discuss 'the logic of unconscious thought,'...a kind of syntax or a 'philosophical' grammar of the unconscious.

in relation to others, recognizing that the description is influenced by
the rules thus disengaged.[28] Among the rules of transformation at the
point of tacking between classical Sanskrit and regional oral martial
epics are two drawn from the classical epics themselves but uniquely
applied in regional oral martial epics: 'transposition and distortion' of
classical heroic ages into regional times and spaces; and reincarnation
of classical epic heroes into regional heroes who complete their 'unfin-
ished business.' Unlike the local hero traditions from which Blackburn
(1989: 22) starts, where the 'generative point' is a hero's death, it is
possible to say of these epics that they begin with webs of linkages that
are already there. Indeed, the classical epics are treated as their frame
stories (Hiltebeitel 1999a: 43–47).

General versus Particular

Finally, our fourth consideration raises the question of the general and
the particular: Does the metaphor of primary process allow us to move
back and forth between the two? Ramanujan has dealt with this ques-
tion by noting the varied iconic, indexical, and symbolic possibilities
of translation. These are quite workable not only in comparing differ-
ent tellings but also in considering regional oral epic reenplotments at
a more distant metonymically entailed symbolic remove. The meta-
phor of primary process does, however, invite one more extension
at this point. As Obeyesekere observes, 'the strength of the Freudian
approach lies in its case history method' (1990: 270). The analogue
in studying the work of culture would be the '"case history" of the
group' (Obeyesekere 1990: 270). In effect, it is a move from Freud to
Max Weber. Obeyesekere undertakes such a project in studying the
parricide kings of Buddhist (and especially Sri Lankan) myth and his-
tory (1990: 143–214) and the Sri Lankan cultic adaptations of the epic
myth of Pattini (1984). He retains his 'core' questions 'about the *values*
held by the group, about maternal and family relations, sexuality, and

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[28] Compare Ricoeur (1970: 88): Freudian dream interpretation is thematized within
construction of the system; Poole on Clifford Geertz's process of '"dialectical tacking"
back and forth between the particular and the general, the experience-near and the
experience-distant, the emic and the etic' (1986: 419). This is the one problem I have
with Handelman's (1982) otherwise stimulating book: that in its oppositional treat-
ment of other hermeneutics, it does not envision a dialectical tacking of Rabbinic
hermeneutics back and forth with anything but itself.

so forth' (1990: 270; emphasis in original). He tries to 'show that these values, if implemented in the consciousness of the ideal typical person, might well result in the kind of anxieties that are externalized in the collective representations' (Obeyesekere 1990: 270). He also seeks to validate them by the principle of 'enough frequency' (Obeyesekere 1990: 271). For Obeyesekere, 'case histories of the group' are possible where one finds 'psychic structures of the long run.'[29] With some additional core questions, a move to the relation between India's classical and folk martial epics is a simple one. Regional folk epics provide material for similar case studies of primary processes long at work.

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[29] Obeseyekere 1990: 187 (parricides), 201–2, 209–10 (Sinhabāhu as the paradigmatic Sri Lankan Oedipus), 147–48, 154, 160 (Aśoka), 180, 183–84 (Kāśyapa I), 209–10. Fascinating for Hindu studies is his contrast of two models of conscience, Arjuna and Aśoka (189), although the comparison should be extended further to one between Aśoka and Yudhiṣṭhira.

CHAPTER THREE

MORE RETHINKING THE *MAHĀBHĀRATA*:
TOWARD A POLITICS OF *BHAKTI*

Appreciative of the attention my 2001 book *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*[1] (henceforth *Rethinking*) has received from the learned scrutiny of colleagues in recent reviews,[2] and mindful of my long and fruitful exchange with most of the colleagues in question, I would like, while attentive to helpful criticisms, to respond to them in the context of my ongoing and especially most recent work for which *Rethinking* will, I hope, serve in the not too distant future as a precursor to a book that I am planning under the provisional title of *Mapping the Sanskrit Epics: Poetry, Dharma, and Devotion* (henceforth *Mapping*).[3] This projected book[4] will draw together work done since the completion of *Rethinking.* It has begun taking form in conference presentations, several referenced in this essay, at venues where I have been able to continue to work out my views in dialogue with colleagues—most notably James

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[1] Alf Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). I thank my friends and colleagues Jonathan Chaves and Randy Kloetzli for helpful first readings of this essay, and also Wendy Doniger, James Fitzgerald, and Luis Gonzáles-Reimann for helpful critiques offered in presentations and discussions at a panel on *Rethinking* at the 32nd Annual South Asia Conference, Madison WI, October 2003 where a second draft was presented with only the first part of the title. It is this panel that put the idea for the subtitle in motion.

[2] I will respond to the following: Mary Brockington, review of *Rethinking, Indo-Iranian Journal* 45 (2002); John Brockington, review of *Rethinking, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65, 3 (2002), 601; Peter Schreiner, review of *Rethinking, Journal of Religion* 83, 2 (2003), 323; and James L. Fitzgerald, "The Many Voices of the *Mahābhārata*: An Article Reviewing *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King* by Alf Hiltebeitel," to appear in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, henceforth "Many Voices," citations of which are made of a pre-print draft of March 2003a. Fitzgerald's article is now to be found in Journal of the American Oriental Society 123, 4: 803–18, See also Naina Dayal, "The 'Cooking' Time" (review of *Rethinking*), *The Book Review* (Delhi), January 2004: 8–9.

[3] I note with appreciation Schreiner's comment, in his review of *Rethinking*, 332, that "in a guidebook one expects more maps and clearer sign posts."

[4] I soon abandoned the plan for a book of that title. The studies announced for it in this chapter are for the most part now included in this book.

L. Fitzgerald, who has been co-empanelled with me at all these venues, and whose review of *Rethinking* will be foregrounded in this essay.

Near the beginning of his discussion of *Rethinking*, Fitzgerald mentions two matters that he takes to characterize my work from 1976 to 2001.[5] I am said to be "[a] consistent advocate of the intentional unity of the MBh (more or less the Pune text) and, especially, a fierce defender of the importance of the divine Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti* in that text."[6] On *bhakti*, briefly (for the moment): yes. But on "intentional unity" I would like to set matters in the context of my developing ideas.

It is only since 1992 that I would own up to being "an advocate of the intentional unity of the *Mbh*.,"[7] and thus I am not a "consistent advocate" of that position." My 1976 book, *The Ritual of Battle*, carried arguments that archaic elements of the *Mbh* were drawn from Indo-European myth, ritual, *and epic*, and that growths and interpolations occurred around such an "archaic epic" core. Indeed, it was my burden in that book to argue that Kṛṣṇa's affinities with Viṣṇu (in the epic's incarnational "*avatāra*"[8] scheme) had Brahmanical, Vedic, para-Vedic, and Indo-European roots that implied *pre-epic* growths, and were thus not among the things requiring interpolation theory or the alleged lateness of Kṛṣṇa-bhakti to explain them. I would no longer make such a developmental argument to account for these associations. I would approach them from the standpoint of what dawned on me in 1992—that the *Mahābhārata* is a work of literature involving writing.

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[5] That is, from my *The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990) to *Rethinking*.

[6] Fitzgerald, "Many Voices" ms., 1.

[7] These words are taken from an e-mail exchange with Fitzgerald of March 5, 2003, the first of several over his review. I was deliberately misquoting his abbreviation *MBh.* As I point out in *Rethinking*; 108, the abbreviation *Mbh* is preferable to *MBh* since there is no evidence for a prior *"Bh"* outside the secondary literature.

[8] As has been long and widely recognized, and will be discussed further below, the avatāra concept is under formation in the *Mbh* without yet being used as a substantive: See Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking*, 109 n. 56—a note overlooked even though it is back-referenced in a note on page 236 n. 36, a page that John Brockington cites to criticize one of my approaches to this topic as "implausible" on the sole stated grounds that I "show no recognition of the fact that the term [*avatāra*] is later than the epics"; see J. Brockington's review of *Rethinking* [2002], 601.

My epiphany as to the written literary character of the *Mbh* owed a good deal to prior points made by Fitzgerald,[9] who has since clarified how he regards the text to have undergone two written recensions: one, the redaction of a "main *Mahābhārata*"[10] that would have been "completed through a deliberate authorial and redactorial effort sometime during or shortly after the times of the Brahman dynasties of the Śuṅgas and the Kāṇvas; that is, after the middle of the second century B.C. and before the end of the first century B.C., though perhaps even as late as the first century A.D."; and second, a "'Gupta text'" destined to become the "normative redaction" that would have been "created and promulgated" "at some point around the time of the Gupta Empire" (320–497 A.D.).[11] I find the notion of a second redaction gratuitous and ungainly and the notion of royal support for the epic's production and dissemination unnecessary. In my current work on the *Nārāyaṇīya*, I attempt to show that the Guptas do not help us to account for anything in the Critical Edition of the *Mbh* that cannot be accounted for well before their time; and I maintain this point especially with regard to bhakti segments, elements, and themes, for which pre-Gupta (not to mention pre-Common Era) iconographical and para-epic textual evidence is surprisingly ample. Moreover, I draw on the inspired work of T.P. Mahadevan[12] to argue that, based on the correspondence between Kaśmīrī-Śāradā and Malayālam manuscripts of the *Mbh* and the likelihood that the latter were brought south by Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans before the Gupta Dynasty, the Guptas cannot

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[9] See James L. Fitzgerald, "The *Mokṣa* Anthology of the *Great Bhārata*: An Initial Survey of Structural Issues, Themes, and Rhetorical Strategies," PhD dissertation (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980), 56–57, 62, 190; *idem*, "India's Fifth Veda: The *Mahābhārata's* Presentation of Itself," in Arvind Sharma, ed., *Essays on the Mahābhārata* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 152–58, especially 153 n. 5—both as cited in Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking*, 24 n. 97.

[10] "Many Voices" ms., 10. Fitzgerald grants in a footnote (*idem*, 10 n. 34) that "main *Mahābhārata*" is a "vague expression." He would seem to have coined it, in preference to the often-used "main story," as one that admits to a text and is thus quite different from the "main story." Schreiner, review of *Rethinking*; 332, notes my usage of "main story" as "integrated...with whatever is other than 'main' (Hiltebeitel speaks of 'inner' and 'outer')." It could be clearer in his point that the latter usages refer to "frame stories."

[11] James L. Fitzgerald, "Making Yudhiṣṭhira the King: The Dialectics and the Politics of Violence in the *Mahābhārata*," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 54, 1 (2001), 68.

[12] T. P. Mahadevan, "Brahmans and the Sanskrit Epics: Their Migrations to the South," paper presented to the University Seminar on South Asia, The George Washington University, January 16, 2003, which derived from his work in progress, *The Arrival of Vedism in South India: The Aparaśikhā and Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans* (tentative title).

be responsible for the dissemination of any "normative redaction" of the epic.

Nonetheless, what remains of interest is that Fitzgerald argues for the writtenness not only of the "normative" Gupta redaction but of the "main *Mahābhārata*" that supposedly preceded it. Calling his arguments "impressionistic rather than demonstrable," he offers "two basic reasons" in favor of the writtenness of this Ur-text: "I think the intricacy of the narrative would have been easier to develop with writing, and some of the highly refined elements of the text, such as the perfectly regular classical meters, suggest the likelihood of writing being used in their development."[13] Tentative as they are, I welcome these additional arguments for the written character of what Fitzgerald considers the earliest *Mbh* text. But the clearest evidence for writing would come not from this " main *Mahābhārata*," on which more in a moment, but from the enlarged "'Gupta text,'" where a definite reference to writing and likely allusions to books can be found in didactic material and in connection with the *Mahābhārata's* three interwoven frame stories: the "outermost" authorial frame in which Vyāsa recites the *Mbh* to his five disciples, including his son Śuka; the "inner" generational frame in which the Pāṇḍavas' great grandson Janamejaya performs the snake sacrifice at which he (along with Vyāsa and Śuka) hears the *Mbh* from Vaiśampāyana, one of the four initial disciples to have learned it from Vyāsa in the first place; and the "outer" cosmological frame in which the Ṛṣis of the Naimiṣa Forest hear the *Mbh* from the bard Ugraśravas who had also heard it at Janamejaya's snake sacrifice. It is thus likely that *Mbh* 1.1.208, from the "outer" frame (the last of the three in the epic's sequencing of their delivery), alludes to written "volumes" when Ugraśravas says that the *Mahābhārata* weighs more on a scale than the four Vedas.[14] Likewise at 12.335.21–66, in the *Nārāyaṇīya*, it would seem that something bookishly hefty is at hand when the asuras Madhu and Kaiṭabha steal the Vedas from Brahmā and try to throw them into hell (12.335.21–66). And writing itself is explicitly mentioned at 13.24.70 where Bhīṣma tells Yudhiṣṭhira, "Sellers of the Vedas, corrupters of the Vedas, and those who write the Vedas, these surely go to hell."[15] Is this distribution simply an indication that the

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[13] Fitzgerald, "Many Voices" ms., p. 14.

[14] See further 1.1.16–19 as translated and discussed in Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking*, 100.

[15] I discuss these passages in Hiltebeitel, "Weighting Orality and Writing in the Sanskrit Epics," presented August 2002 and to appear in Petteri Koskikallio, ed.,

Mahābhārata, by Fitzgerald's account (as well as mine) a written work from the start, is more prone to refer to books and writing outside of its first writing (that is, outside the "main *Mahābhārata*") than in it? Does it tactically avoid reference to writing in the main story because it is a story of older times, or "Vedic times"? Or does it become more explicit about books and writing with time? And if so, over what kind of time?

Yet reference to writing and books cannot be all there is to the "intentional *literary* unity" of such a text—one that, with its literary experiments such as frame stories, long didactic interludes, and many subtales, might, let us note, intend more unity than it achieves, at least by any conventional standard. In my study of the *Nārāyaṇīya*,[16] I argue that this proverbially late devotional text maps movements between the *Mahābhārata's* three frames, and that this feature of the *Nārāyaṇīya* allows one to discern how the three frames work throughout the *Mbh* as a whole. For Fitzgerald, however, the "main Mahābhārata" is composed before this entanglement of frames: it includes *only* "the basic Vaiśampāyana frame with its *aṃśāvatāraṇa* listing," that is, only *part* of the "inner" Vaiśampāyana frame itself, and the other two frames not at all. This "main *Mahābhārata*;" says Fitzgerald, is "concerned to provide ideological and narrative grounding for a Brahminical conception of kingly rule and hierarchical society in the wake of the Mauryan Empire and that government's cosmopolitanism and its insufficient recognition of the uniqueness of Brahminic authority."[17] More revealing than what Fitzgerald includes in this "main *Mahābhārata*" is his list of what "probably came later": "[m]ost of the material in Bhīṣma's instructions to Yudhiṣṭhira," the *Bhagavad Gītā*, "all episodes that elaborate some theme of devotion to Viṣṇu, Śiva, or Kṛṣṇa" (three "such as" examples are given from the "main story," including the killing of Śiśupāla), and "several highly polished expressions of Kṛṣṇa

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Proceedings of the Third Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas (DICSEP). Zagreb: Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts; and further in Hiltebeitel, "Buddhism and the Mahābhārata," prepared for Professor Frits Staal's class on Buddhism at the University of Leiden, November 2003, and now for Federico Squarcini, ed., *Boundaries, Dynamics and Construction of Traditions in South Asia* (Florence, forthcoming).

[16] Alf Hiltebeitel. "The *Nārāyaṇīya*: Ongoing Problems in Dating the Sanskrit Epics." See now chapter Joydeep: Is this chapter included in this book?

[17] "Many Voices" ms., 10.

bhakti" between 12.40 and 12.56.[18] Can such selective reading be suc-
cessful? In defense of the practice of what I mostly call "excavation,"
Fitzgerald upholds the practice in the name of three "metaphor[s] of
disconnection": "'excavation,' 'analysis,' [and] 'surgical excision.'"[19]
While "analysis" recalls the terms used a century ago by Edward Wash-
burn Hopkins to distinguish his own approach from the "synthetic"
approach he ascribed principally to Joseph Dahlmann, Fitzgerald sup-
plies the third term himself, thereby giving us a hint that he is less the
excavator than the textual surgeon: excavators dig beneath a text for
what would be old; surgeons remove later growths, especially in this
case bhakti appendages. *Bhakti* appendectomies on the Indian epics
are an old and continuing practice and people have performed them
for over a century of different reasons. But Fitzgerald's are distinc-
tive and challenging. His "main *Mahābhārata*" centers on Dharmarāja
Yudhiṣṭhira as a grim and somber extension of his father Dharmarāja
Yama, the god of death. This "dark" Yudhiṣṭhira must preside over
a divine raiding party of the gods that descends to earth to restore
Brahmans to privileges denied them by the pro-Buddhist Mauryan
emperor Aśoka—these being the Brahmans who, according to Fitzger-
ald, would have composed the first written "main *Mahābhārata*" out
of "rage" at their treatment under Aśoka—"a deep and bitter politi-
cal rage at the center of the *Mahābhārata*"[20] Be it noted that Fitzger-
ald and I agree both on the approximate dates of the earliest *Mbh*
and on its having been written, but we disagree over whether it was
again overwritten with new material of two main types: instructional
material on dharma and related matters that Yudhiṣṭhira hears about
from Bhīṣma, and *bhakti* material; and of the latter, not only didactic
bhakti material like the *Gītā* and the *Nārāyaṇīya*, but narrative mate-
rial within the main story. That it has been possible for the "original
versus late" status of *bhakti* in the *Mbh* to remain so long unresolved
is testimony to the insufficiency of the arguments that have been raised

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[18] See James L. Fitzgerald, "The Position of Brahmins in the *Mahābhārata*: New
Perspectives on the Development and Growth of the Epic Between the Empires," 3,
Between the Empires Conference, University of Texas at Austin, April 2003.

[19] "Many Voices" ms., 11 n. 36.

[20] See Fitzgerald, "Making Yudhiṣṭhira the King," 85, thus attributing this "rage"
to his first group of epic-writing Brahmans as the motive behind their portrayal of
his darker Yudhiṣṭhira (85–90), a dark underside that I would certainly agree is there
(see Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking*, 119–20, 135–39), but not prior to his larger portrayal as a
thoughtful, virtuous man and endearing source of occasional light.

on *both* sides of the question, my own in *The Ritual of Battle* included. And perhaps we are destined to remain stuck at this impasse forever. But Fitzgerald freshens the challenge and raises the stakes. Although I cannot address this topic as fully here as I hope to do in *Mapping*, above all because the exposition involves not only the *Mbh* but the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Fitzgerald's views point up the need to clarify the nature and importance of *bhakti* in these texts. For the *Mbh*, I would thus begin by going a few steps further than I do in *Rethinking*.

Fitzgerald observes that in *Rethinking* I "[o]nly occasionally…make observations (usually incidentally, often only in the notes) regarding the central importance for the MBh of such themes as Kṛṣṇa being the supreme God incarnate, *bhakti*, the four-*yuga* theme, the *avatāra* theme, the soteriological worldview of *yoga*, and so on; but these asides serve to remind readers of those arguments of Hiltebeitel and Madeleine Biardeau that do depend on a rigorously synchronous reading of the text"—a characterization that, for reasons I will bring out later in this essay, I must reject. Nor for that matter is Biardeau rigorously synchronic, since for her the *Nārāyaṇīya* is late.[21] On my episodic treatment of *bhakti* in *Rethinking*, Fitzgerald adds in a footnote: "For the most part these observations do not contribute anything new to those arguments."[22] The point about footnotes, "asides," and little new is engaging, and correctly calls attention to the fact that *bhakti* is not a direct subject of this book but rather a matter of my continuing emphasis. But considering that the only exception Fitzgerald cites to the charge of little new is my argument about a particular textual passage (Draupadī's call to "Govinda" during her disrobing), it looks also to be a way of reassuring readers that the listed themes do not disturb any settled opinion that numerous if not most bhakti elements should be brought under the surgical knife.[23] Yet Fitzgerald does not number

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[21] See Madeleine Biardeau, *Le Mahābhārata: Un récit fondateur du brahmanisme et son interprétation*, 2 vols, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), vol. 2, 566.

[22] Fitzgerald, "Many Voices" ms., 10–11 and n. 9.

[23] John Brockington, who makes *bhakti* excisions in the practice of oral epic theory, says my treatment of this saree-restoration scene "includes rather specious arguments against Edgerton's text," referring to a page on which I say that "Edgerton's 'choice could merely typify the eagerness of the Critical Edition's editors to excise *bhakti* by stripping the text" (*Rethinking*, 251). But Brockington does not mention my arguments, much less show how they are specious; see his review of *Rethinking*, 602. Similarly, Mary Brockington fails to indicate why she attributes to me "unfairness to Julius Lipner (p. 257 n. 49)" in my summary of some of his arguments on this episode: see M. Brockington, review of *Rethinking, Indo-Iranian Journal* 45 (2002). The references

among the *bhakti* matter that he peripheralizes an argument that *is* new, central to the book, and one that he finds to be "[o]ne of [the book's] interesting generalizations": "A clear epic-long pattern is that while the deity and author [Kṛṣṇa and Vyāsa] work together, the god deals primarily with Arjuna and the author with Yudhiṣṭhira."[24] For me, the point has some value against arguments for the alleged lateness of the *Bhagavad Gītā*; as I maintain in my study of the *Nārāyaṇīya*. But more centrally, *Rethinking* does not focus on bhakti because it is concerned primarily with the relationship of Vyāsa and Yudhiṣṭhira, not with that between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, which is where *bhakti* in the *Mbh* certainly gets its deepest articulations. With this in mind, let me say a bit about where I believe the argument for bhakti in the epics must go. To requote Fitzgerald, I believe that both epics' Brahman poets "provide [their] ideological and narrative grounding for a Brahminical conception of kingly rule and hierarchical society" *in* bhakti, in *bhakti itself*, but that it is mapped differently in the two epics. Whereas the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which I regard to be the slightly later of the two,[25] grounds its politics of *bhakti* in a politics of kingship,[26] the *Mbh*, to borrow a phrase, grounds its politics of bhakti in a politics of friendship[27]—or, more exactly, since it concerns not only Arjuna but

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are to Franklin Edgerton, ed., *Sabhāparvan.* Introduction and Apparatus (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1944), from the Pune Critical Edition of the *Mbh*, and Julius Lipner, *Hindus: Their Religious, Beliefs and Practices* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

[24] Fitzgerald, "Many Voices" ms., 16, citing Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking*, 90; cf. "Many Voices" ms., 16 n. 51.

[25] I am persuaded by Madeleine Biardeau here as regards the sequence of the two epics, though I believe the distance in time between them is less than she proposes; see Biardeau, *Le Rāmāyaṇa de Vālmīki* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), xxxv, li–lii; *Le Mahābhārata*, vol. 1, 70I.

[26] This was appreciated by Sheldon Pollock, who I believe nonetheless made the mistake of chronologically prioritizing the politics over the bhakti even though he admitted that no evidence supported it; see Pollock, trans., *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient India*, vol. 3: *Araṇyakāṇḍa*, Robert P. Goldman, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 46, 52; Hiltebeitel, "Epic Studies: Classical Hinduism in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 74 (1994), 36–54; and *idem*, "India's Epics: Writing, Orality, and Divinity," in Arvind Sharma, ed., *The Study of Hinduism* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 123–24.

[27] See Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, George Collins trans. (London: Verso, 1997), repeatedly and provocatively applicable to the consideration of friendship not only in the *Mbh* but in early Buddhism.

Karṇa, a politics of friendship and the enemy.[28] I believe one cannot have much of a "main *Mahābhārata*"—or even, for that matter, much of a "dark" Yudhiṣṭhira, whom Karṇa dogs at every step—without it.

It is thus here, over the relation between politics and *bhakti*, that Fitzgerald and I have our most central divergence, but also, I would like to believe, the chance for our most productive conversation. Finding me remiss in attending to the politics of the *Mbh*, Fitzgerald thinks I may have "divert[ed] my gaze" from Yudhiṣṭhira the king to his relations to Draupadī, his father Dharma, and my "sense that the MBh truly is about the incarnation of the Supreme God Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva at a juncture of *yuga*s," leaving "these politically important themes [to] remain the concealed dark matter of this book."[29] Here, I should like to bring their dark matter into greater political light. First, however, it is striking that Fitzgerald emphasizes the participation of the "three Kṛṣṇas"—Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva, Draupadī Kṛṣṇā, and Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa—in the "main *Mahābhārata*." It is this triad that presents the most explicit "dark matter" (*kṛṣṇa* means "dark" or "black") of the *Mbh*, and it would seem that Fitzgerald would be obliged to explain their intervention without reference to bhakti, since such a color coding also applies to Arjuna, to Rāma and Bharata in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and to other (albeit later) *avatāra* iconographies.[30] Let it suffice to suggest that, at least in the *Mbh*, these three or more Kṛṣṇas motivate the narratives through areas of darkness in which divine and political power converge. Fitzgerald, however, treats these explicitly "dark" figures as

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[28] This was a leading subject in my "Mapping Bhakti in the Sanskrit Epics," presented at the 214th meeting of the American Oriental Society at San Diego, March 2004. Here I draw on an old interest: see Hiltebeitel, *Ritual of Battle*, 254–66; "Brothers, Friends, and Charioteers: Parallel Episodes in the Irish and Indian Epics," ed. Edgar C. Polomé, *Homage to Georges Dumézil: Journal of Indo-European Studies* Monograph, No. 3 (1982): 85–112; "The Two Kṛṣṇas on One Chariot: Upaniṣadic Imagery and Epic Mythology," *History of Religions* 24 (1984): 1–26. As I hope to show in *Mapping*, friendship relates to a whole cluster of themes that can be tied together in and around Karṇa, while friendship in relation to enmity is the epic ground of *dveṣa bhakti*, "devotion by hatred," for which the above-mentioned Śiśupāla—whom Fitzgerald would like to excise from the *Mbh*—is the most prominent *Mbh* example and, like Karṇa and Arjuna, a son of one of Kṛṣṇa's paternal aunts; see Georges Dumézil, *Mythe et épopée*, 2: *Types épiques indo-européens: un héros, un sorcier, un roi* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1971), 63, 65–66.
[29] "Many Voices" ms., 7.
[30] See Hiltebeitel, *Ritual of Battle*, 60–76.

"holy agents" of Brahmanism[31] and, from what I can gather, as more or less metaphoric supports for the first composing Brahmans' more basic portrayal of the dark Yudhiṣṭhira, whom Fitzgerald finds, as noted, to be darker than the more "idealistic" Yudhiṣṭhira I supposedly present (for I do also darken Yudhiṣṭhira in a new way)[32]. Apparently Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*, once it overwrites the text, would not only be a later but a lighter political theology overlaid upon this originally darker vision. For me, however, there is already in *The Ritual of Battle*, as there is in *Rethinking*, an argument that the epic manages to hold a darker and more idealist Yudhiṣṭhira and its arguments with and about God together in a dark and richly satisfying tension.

In any case, Fitzgerald finds that I do not say enough about the politics of the Brahmans who lie behind what I call the epic's composing committee and its portrayal of Vyāsa as author.[33] Yet as I have noted, he tends to define the epic poets' Brahman politics only in relation to contemporary kings,[34] whereas I hold that they were capable of composing and disseminating the *Mbh* without major (i.e., Gupta, or any earlier) royal patronage. What I intend to argue further is that, if I am right, it makes the politics of these Brahmans all the more interesting. In brief, given that we agree that the *Mbh* is a post-Aśokan text and thus colored by experiences of Buddhism *and* the other heterodoxies,[35] and assuming that we are dealing with arguments over ideas, is there a "main *Mahābhārata*" that is the projection of "a deep and bitter political rage" in which faith is mostly a matter of afterthoughts, or are the *Mbh* and *Rāmāyaṇa both* designed to sustain a sly and patient political theology that unfolds a new *bhakti* cosmology in which royal

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[31] See James L. Fitzgerald, 1999 ms. of the article "*Mahābhārata*," to appear in Gene Thursby and Sushil Mittal, eds., *The Hindu World* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 7: the Pāṇḍavas are "aided by three 'dark,' 'obscure,' or 'secret' (*kṛṣṇa*) holy agents whose true identities or interests are not publicly known…[who are] representative of the world's Vedic brahmins"; *idem*, 17: while in hiding after the lacquer house episode, "the Pāṇḍavas are aided by the mysterious (*kṛṣṇa*) agent of Brahmanism Vyāsa."

[32] In proposing that what Fitzgerald now calls the "divine raiding party" theme is actually launched in the myth of the five former Indras through the Vrātya associations that link Yudhiṣṭhira to Yama, and the Pāṇḍavas altogether, to Indra (*Rethinking*, 135–38 and especially 237, n. 20).

[33] "Many Voices" ms., 7: Hiltebeitel says "more about these Brahmins—if not their politics."

[34] Fitzgerald, "Making Yudhiṣṭhira the King," 66, n. 10; 67; 79, n. 51; 85.

[35] *Rethinking*, 163 and *passim*. Fitzgerald and I are closer here than this review would imply; see his "Making Yudhiṣṭhira the King," 78–83.

patronage and Brahman prestige find new justifications and meanings that are still nonetheless saturated with overtones of Veda?

In *Mapping*, I hope to work further on the ways the *two* epic texts construct their Brahman authors in relation to Veda, comparing the ways that Vyāsa and Vālmīki figure in their own texts, particularly in relation to other prominent Brahman sages or Ṛṣis, most of them with Vedic associations, and to the heroines.[36] Noticeable among the differences, however, is this: whereas in the *Rāmāyaṇa's* single frame story, Vālmīki is virtually the sole Ṛṣi other than in his brief exchange with Nārada, in the *Mbh*, the three frame stories relate Vyāsa to a number of Ṛṣis in whom I sought, in *Rethinking*, to detect allusions to a composing committee. On this subject, Fitzgerald has his reservations.[37] Yet it is one of the values of a challenging and learned discussion that criticism on such a point can inspire a new idea. Fitzgerald finds it difficult to imagine "*a committee of poets jointly inventing* such a complex and ingenious connected narrative [as the *Mbh*] and at the same time allowing itself such 'loose joins.' Everything we know about Brahminic and old Indian textual traditions tells us that editors and compilers amalgamate texts and do not at all mind 'loose joins' or having no 'join' other than physical contiguity; but individual authors in the Sanskrit tradition—when we have them: Pāṇini, Patañjali, Aśvaghoṣa, Kālidāsa—enforce exceptionally tight connections in the texts they fashion."[38] I find, however, that this contrast between editors and compilers on the one hand and individual authors on the other opens another way to think about how the epic poets worked within these very parameters. As in so many things, their model would have

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[36] See Hiltebeitel, "Authorial Paths Through the Two Sanskrit Epics, Via the *Rāmopākhyāna*," paper delivered at the 14th World Sanskrit Conference, Helsinki Finland, July 2003. See now chapter 7 below.

[37] I wonder at Fitzgerald's statement that I apply "a hermeneutic lever that is too powerful and easy to use" ("Many Voices" ms., 18)—as if interpolation and redaction theory were made of sterner stuff, Fitzgerald makes an allied point that excavationist and surgical approaches are economical, and believes that I argue for joint authorship as an argument of convenience. There would, however, have to be a correlation between convenience and economy, and I disagree that "imagining the authorial agents responsible for the 'epic' to be separated in time and interest and location" ("Many Voices" ms., 10) is the less convenient or more economical of the options. A lot hangs on that point, but so be it. Indeed, even while defending "excavation theories," Fitzgerald grants that one of the reasons to suspect them is that "it is intellectually easier…to take something apart than it is to find the often subtle connections that hold it together" ("Many Voices" ms., 11).

[38] "Many Voices" ms., 11 (my italics).

been their image of Veda—Veda as a multi-genre, multi-style, multi-authored and loosely-joined totality, from the *Ṛg Veda* through the Vedic corpus—which they imagine their own Fifth Veda to extend and rejuvenate. But as to individual authors and a "jointly inventing" committee, these comments are based on an incomplete reading of my indications of how the committee would have worked. Individual authors would have written much as Fitzgerald says others have done, often "enforc[ing] tight connections in the texts they fashion," such as "Nala," "Śuka," and many other subtales. But the invention of the "complex and ingenious connected narrative" and provision for "loose joins" would have come from the person the *Mahābhārata* and I call "the author." Since Fitzgerald gives some plausibility to the idea of a committee, our differences thus lie mainly in how we imagine such a committee could most likely have worked, especially in relation to "the author."

   With regard to Vyāsa, Fitzgerald makes it clear I could have been more straightforward about some things, and have thought further about others. Fitzgerald takes issue with my "construction of the 'ever-receding' author Vyāsa as a deeply knowing fiction of authorship";[39] likewise, with my reading of "the MBh through the keyhole of the Śuka story,"[40] ascribing such a reading to my alleged "a priori conviction that! [the Śuka] story must be synchronous with the rest of the MBh."[41] But in my *Nārāyaṇīya* study, composed before seeing Fitzgerald's essay on my book, I argue that certain units in the *Mbh* suggest the wrapping up of the project: the 'Śuka' story being one of them. I thus have· no such 'a priori conviction' about it or any other segment being "synchronous" with the rest. Like the *Nārāyaṇīya*, I think, the Śuka story is 'late'—in the short sense I advocate for that term. Moreover, if my "keyhole" reading of the Śuka story is emblematic of my approach, Fitzgerald does something much the same with his insightful reading of the "artificial, didactic parable" of Tanu ("Skinny") as what he calls "an important key to the epic" and "a stroke of symbol-making genius" in his article "Making Yudhiṣṭhira the King."[42] As the

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[39] "Many Voices" ms., 15.
[40] *Ibid.* ms., 18.
[41] *Ibid.* ms., 17.
[42] Fitzgerald, "Making Yudhiṣṭhira the King," 75–76. I do not, however, follow Fitzgerald's assessment of how old and new senses of *dharma* found in the Tanu story reflect the history of the *Mbh*.

Mbh indicates right after the Śuka story and the *Nārāyaṇīya*, there are many doors to heaven;[43] just so, there would be many keys and keyholes to this text.

Since there is no point in my leaving matters obscure, let me, despite some inevitable regrets, go beyond the hints offered in *Rethinking* and underscore how I believe the composing committee, emblemized in the relations between the three frames, could have worked in relation to "the author."

Most straightforward is an indication in *Rethinking* that Fitzgerald overlooks: "Somewhere in back of all this the author spent 3 years on this work—perhaps, as Vaidya saw it, doing such 'splendid plot-laying' as to rival Shakespeare."[44] Regarding C.V. Vaidya, I highlight his fine evaluation[45] of the "splendid plot-laying of Vyāsa, of which he says, 'It has often occurred to me that if the story of the Mahābhārata is not a historical one, it must indeed be the production of an imagination which is higher than that of Shakespeare.'"[46] Meanwhile, the reference to Vyāsa's "three years" is a hint from the *Mbh* itself, where it says, "For 3 years the Muni Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana always got up making this superb *Mahābhārata* story."[47] Surely obscure, but just as surely it also means something. In *Rethinking* I was not willing to speculate beyond bringing it into relation to the "splendid plot-laying" lines laid out by C.V. Vaidya. But for me it is also a hint that, diachronically speaking, the text probably took somewhere between this 3 years and the couple of generations I propose for its production, and that the 3 years may be commemorated here as all that the person pseudonymized as Vyāsa had to give to the plot-laying project. If so, I think the passage may also hint that the spirit of this person would have lived on among the members of the working committee. And I would relate this to another of the epic's possible indications: the hint that by making Vyāsa a *sadasya*—seated attendee—at Janamejaya's snake sacrifice five generations after he has fathered the fathers of the epic's heroes,

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[43] 12.342.9; 16; see Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking*, 20.

[44] Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking*, 169; cf. 17.

[45] My purpose in discussing Vaidya's work at some length was to look past his impossible chronologies to the truly generative insights of a largely forgotten scholar. I do not just "criticize" him (see J. Brockington 2002, 601).

[46] Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking*, 17, citing Chintaman Vinayak Vaidya, *The Mahābhārata: A Criticism* (Bombay: Bombay Book Depot and Delhi: Mehar Chand Lachhman Das, [1905] 1966), 49.

[47] *Mbh* 1.56.32; see Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking*, 169, n. 134.

the poets give presence to the author at his work's debut. For there, as a silent listener[48] to the *Mbh* which he is said to have created and imparted as his "entire thought" to Vaiśampāyana and the four other disciples, including Śuka, Vyāsa's authorial presence is "felt" behind all three frames.[49] But more than this, it is not just Vyāsa who is there listening at the snake sacrifice. So is Śuka.[50] What to make of this one obscurity couched within another? It would have to be a problem for Fitzgerald, who limits his "main *Mahābhārata*" to material selected from the Vaiśampāyana frame. It seems that he wants not to have to reckon with this double father and son felt presence *at* this very narration *and behind it.* Fitzgerald is willing to grant that "[p]arts of the story of Vyāsa and Śuka certainly do form a masterful fiction of intergenerational anxiety,"[51] but surely there is more to it than that. It is a masterful fiction that relates a specifically father-son story to the composition and dissemination of the *Mbh*. And it does this by challenging the very limits of narrative and temporal logic, for not only must Vyāsa survive six generations to be present at Vaiśampāyana's recital; the best explanation for Śuka's being there is that he would have to have returned from mokṣa!

Keeping these hints together, it was in the back of my mind when I wrote *Rethinking* that the composing committee, in presencing the author and his son so strikingly at the epic's first "public" telling, might have lingered not only on the memory of "the author's" 3-year contribution, but on this poignant tale about how his lost son was once among these disciples as a *co*-disciple. No doubt one can appreciate my hesitancy in spelling this out.[52] But it was among my considerations in suggesting a limit of two generations: that such a span could include time either for a son to carry on the work of his father, or time for the work to have been carried on by, among others, the son's

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[48] Silent but for one revealing exception discussed in Hiltebeitel, "The *Nārāyaṇīya*: Ongoing Problems in Dating the Sanskrit Epics."

[49] Cf. Christopher Z. Minkowski, "Janamejaya's *sattra* and Ritual Structure," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, 3 (1989), 405, as cited in Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking*, 94. Indeed, there are differences in the way these two presences are felt throughout the inner frame. The outer Ugraśravas-Ṛṣis of the Naimiṣa Forest frame is felt as an overhearing of the inner frame as retold from afar, whereas the outermost Vyāsa and disciples frame is felt literally and with immediacy by Śuka and Vyāsa's listening and bodily presence at Janamejaya's snake sacrifice itself.

[50] *Mbh* 1.48.7; see Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking*, 115 and n. 71; 284 and n. 16.

[51] "Many Voices" ms., 18.

[52] See what I set as my limits for such discussion in *Rethinking*, 317 and n. 131.

co-disciples who might have survived him and/or the father. Thus, in suggesting that the Śuka story is probably, like the *Nārāyaṇīya*, late "in the short sense I advocate for that term," let me call attention to my suggestion[53] that the Śuka story should be considered along with its sequel, the *Nārāyaṇīya*, and the latter's sequel—the story that is informative about the many doors to heaven, and also about "gleaners" and the Naimiṣa Forest (*Mbh* 12.240–53)—as a three-part sequence that concludes the *Mokṣadharma* section of the *Sāntiparvan*. Indeed, I would now mention a principle that guided me in this view of epic diachrony: that the manner in which portions of the text are wound up is a better indicator of relative lateness than the joint premise of interpolation and centuries-later redaction. Indeed, another sequence to which such winding up, or leaving for the end, applies, in my view, is the *Mbh*'s last two short parvans, which come just after Vyāsa makes the last of his epic appearances to tell Arjuna what he should convey to Yudhiṣṭhira as to how the great story must end.[54] In any case, I suggest that the interesting problems lie in the dynamic between the epic's three frames, for it is there that the "real Brahman authors…must have enjoyed creating…some complex image of themselves."[55] In this dynamic, "the author" is not to be set aside and there is no "periphery" or "perimeter" of the text to allow for what Fitzgerald calls "eventual authorship." This thoroughly imbricated author, who is cleverly presenced everywhere, even in his characters' thoughts, is, like Kṛṣṇa, an authority one cannot go beyond in matters of *dharma* and *bhakti*, and the relation of *dharma* and *bhakti* to each other. It is thus only half the story to say that I impute "transcendent-author themes" to Vyāsa.[56] Similarly, although I appreciate Fitzgerald's insight that I "read…Vyāsa as an analog of the absent Buddha,"[57] it misses the same point: that Vyāsa is as much presenced as absenced.

    In other words, the author is part of the design of the text. But what is design? Fitzgerald writes, even while sounding dubious, that it "could be fruitful to approach every aspect of the text as being, possibly, a contingent invention *designed* for some specific artistic

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[53] *Ibid.*, 19–20, 28–29.
[54] Mbh 16.9; *Rethinking*, 87–90.
[55] Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking*, 101.
[56] Fitzgerald, "Many Voices" ms., 3.
[57] "Many Voices" ms., 16, recalling his earlier citation (9) of Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking*, 158.

purpose."[58] Here, when Fitzgerald writes of design it is as an inter-
polationist, arguing that not all passages are "designed with the same
degree of artistic purpose and freedom"[59] for inclusion in the text. That
is, he is assuming that both early and late redactors, and especially the
latter, would design passages for an expanding *Mbh* that lies somewhat
inchoate before them waiting for their improvements. For this he gives
his analogy of "a great cathedral" with multiple architects contributing
over time.[60] As I indicate in my piece on "Weighting Orality and Writ-
ing," I prefer a different image: that of the atelier, where one master
artist inspires the contributory work of a school.[61] The textual arche-
type unveiled by the Pune Critical Edition reveals a design behind
the *Mbh* that *could be* and, I think it best to think, *would be* coeval
with its first imagining, which are indeed what I think the epic calls
"the entire thought" of Vyāsa, and what I have in mind in quoting
C. V. Vaidya's attribution to Vyāsa of "such 'splendid plot-laying' as
to rival Shakespeare." Individual passages would have been created for
and within that design, which would have been blueprinted to accom-
modate material of the great variety we find. One reason for regarding
the archetypal design as this early is that it is gratuitous to go before
or after the Critical Edition to account for individual passages in it.
Another is that this design is understood, at least in its broad out-
lines, by Vālmīki (or if one prefers, by the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*), which
cannot be much later than the *Mbh*—a point that needs of course
to be developed beyond what can be said here.[62] But if I am on the

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[58] "Many Voices" ms., 5 (my italics).

[59] *Ibid.*

[60] "I myself am inclined to imagine the development of the *Mahābhārata* more
along the lines of the gradual building, modification, and occasional refurbishment
of a great cathedral, under the direction of different architects and master-builders at
different points of time. I think the 'gradualist' models of the epic's development that
have prevailed in Western scholarship are obviously more plausible than Hiltebeitel's
one-time symposium" ("Many Voices," 15). "Obviously,' however, is a word that merely
appeals to a "prevailing" view.

[61] See n. 15 above. Note that for such a text, there would be no clear line between
authors and redactors; cf. Fitzgerald, "Making Yudhiṣṭhira the King," 73, 86.

[62] See Alf Hiltebeitel, "Authorial Paths through the Two Sanskrit, Epics, Via the
Rāmopākhyāna," 14th World Sanskrit Conference, Helsinki, Finland, July 2003. But
some of the groundwork for the claim is indicated in *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*, 6,
n. 27, citing Sheldon I. Pollock, trans., *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient
India*, vol. 2: *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 38–42, and
Madeleine Biardeau, "Some Remarks on the Links between the Epics, the Purāṇas
and their Vedic Sources," in Gerhard Oberhammer, ed., *Studies in Hinduism: Vedism*

right track in bringing the *Rāmāyaṇa* into this argument from design, another reason to favor it would be the logical priority of a *bhakti* politics of friendship over a *bhakti* politics of kingship. And another is the likelihood, mentioned earlier, that the correspondences between the Śāradā-Kaśmīrī and Malayālam recensions, which include this design and with it the *Nārāyaṇīya*, are significantly pre-Gupta.[63]

Finally, Fitzgerald's critique has led me recognize the need to be clearer regarding the stress I place on the use of poetic conventions that give life and body to the *Mbh*'s design. In looking back at *Rethinking*, I was surprised to find that one point I meant to be important was made only in a footnote: that literary conventions "do not last forever."[64] The point is now worth exploring further, and above the line. In discussing the epic poets' use of conventions, I make four points that bear on their not lasting forever. I maintain, with regard to the conventions I concentrate on, that a primary source for these particular conventions was the poets' Vedic background and their sense of Vedic images as enigmas.[65] I argue that these conventions have to do with nuances of

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and Hinduism (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997), 77–119.

[63] Indeed, another is that rather than growing on trees, such designs are trees. I have in mind here Frits Staal's discussion of "trees" as designs within Vedic ritual; see his *Ritual and Mantras: Rules without Meaning* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, [1990] 1996, 105–8), and wish to imply that the epic's design has these ritual designs as a familiar model. Although the discussion is of "embeddedness" (Staal, *ibid.*) rather than specifically of "trees," the point is anticipated by Christopher Z. Minkowski, "Janamejaya's *sattra* and Ritual Structure," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, 3 (1989): 401–20 and his "Snakes, *sattras* and the *Mahābhārata*," in Arvind Sharma, ed., *Essays on the Mahābhārata* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 384–400; by Michael Witzel, "JB Paulpūlanī: The Structure of a Brāhmana Tale," in M. D. Balasubrahmaniam, ed., *Dr. B. R. Sharma Felicitation Volume* (Tirupati: Kendriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha, 1986), 189–216; and, with acknowledgment to both them and Staal, in Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking*, 93–94 and nn. 9 and 10.

[64] *Rethinking*, 29, n. 120. I use the phrase in debating the views of Tamar Chana Reich, "A Battlefield of a Text: Inner Textual Interpretation in the Sanskrit Mahābhārata," Ph.D. dissertation, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998: "Granted we 'know' the *Mbh* as a text that '*grew*, and became what it is by *expansion*' (with italics), but not that it took eight 'centuries of textual production.'...Reich [thinks the *Mbh* develops through] eight-hundred year[s]...of 'contestatory discourse' governed by an 'aesthetic of expansion' (citing Reich 51, 32, and 31 successively). This aesthetic better befits a short period of controlled, consensual 'contestation,' and also shared conventions, which do not last forever"—indeed, my note goes on to show that "Reich sometimes points in this direction." It is in any case the first thing I say in the book about conventions (353 [Index]).

[65] *Rethinking*, 40 and n. 28.

cosmology.[66] And, I contend that while their "'empire of conventions' would 'grow in proportion to the representative ambition' of authors from the epics through the purāṇas,"[67] once outside the web of meanings sustained within the *Mbh*, these specific conventions either no longer retained the same range or precision when used by Vālmīki[68] or in the puraṇas,[69] or else took on new precisions. One could infer that the politics of these conventions would lie in their "Vedic" ambitions, and their *bhakti* in the cosmological nuances.

While *Rethinking* takes preliminary note of a variety of conventional usages that roughly fit the four traits of Vedic background, cosmological nuance, literary novelty, and textual specificity, the four points bear most directly on three particular conventions: usages of, *antara* or "interval"; of *nimiṣa/nimeṣa* or "moment"; and of *pṛṣṭha* as "back" in the context of the "backs of mountains" and the phrase *nākapṛṣṭha*, "back of the firmament." Fitzgerald seems to have no difficulty with the first,[70] which, as others have noted, relates to well-attested parallels between ritual and narrative embeddedness that have helped us unpack the epic's frame stories, including the Vaiśampāyana frame that Fitzgerald is willing to keep in a truncated way. As to the second, he puzzles over it and pulls together many passages, mainly in a footnote,[71] outlining what I have said, and placing it among things he finds not central to his argument, perhaps because to discuss a convention that ties in with the Naimiṣa Forest—the site of the epic's outer frame—takes him outside the Vaiśampāyana inner frame that he partially accepts.

Fitzgerald does, however, take issue with my translation of *pṛṣṭha* by "back." He makes several points: with regard to mountains, that "their prominent topsides, upper ridges, or peaks…is the usual usage in the *MBh*"; that this so-called "usual usage seems to work fine in the Śuka

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[66] A matter of major importance too often disregarded.

[67] *Ibid.*, citing Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1985), Vol. 2, 13.

[68] See *ibid.*, 124 and 285, on Valmīki's likely but very limited adoption of the *naimiṣa* convention (Rām 7.82.13, with *vana* rather than *araṇya*: see Fitzgerald, "Many Voices" ms., 8 n. 30) in connection with his minimal but probably knowing placement of Rāma's Aśvamedha at Naimiṣa Forest, making it the place where Rāma hears his sons recite the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

[69] See *ibid.*, 156 on an extended meaning of the Naimiṣa Forest in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*; 282–86 on epic and purāṇic treatments of Śuka.

[70] See "Many Voices" ms., 8.

[71] "Many Voices" ms., 8 and n. 30.

episode"; and that while "[s]tandalone adverbial uses" of *pṛṣṭha* refer to "the rear or backside of a person or thing," uses of *pṛṣṭha* "as the final member of a *tatpuruṣa* compound . . . seem consistently to refer to the upper sides of animals (elephants, horses, tortoises) or the upper side of the firmament (the *nākapṛṣṭha*) or the upper ridges and peaks of mountains."[72] But here is an example from *Rethinking* itself that disproves the argument for consistency of the "usual usage."[73] Once Yudhiṣṭhira agrees to perform a horse sacrifice as purification after the great war, Vyāsa tells him where to find the riches on Mount Muñjavat, a big golden "base" or "foothill" (*pāda*) that one approaches on the way to Mount Meru from the north side of Mount Himavat and *"on the back of Mount Himavat"* (*girer himavataḥ pṛṣṭhe*) where Śiva, performs *tapas* in the company of Umā and their hosts (Mbh 14.8.1–3). No ordinary mountain, Muñjavat glows like gold on all sides with the same radiance as the morning sun, and cannot be seen by the living with their "natural fleshy eyes" (*prākṛtair māṃsa-locanaiḥ*; 7–10).[74] It would be hard to imagine Mount Muñjavat on the top of Mount Himavat, and I believe it is safe to say that even Indian cosmology is yet to do so. Moreover, the passage is explicit that it is to the north of Himavat, and thus *in back* of it from Yudhiṣṭhira and Vyāsa's current location. Indeed, Muñjavat is distinct here from both Himavat and Meru as a "base" or "foothill" and cannot be regarded as an "upper ridge" of either the grand range or the cosmic mountain.[75] Another pertinent usage of *pṛṣṭha* as "back" describes where the Sarasvatī River "disappears into the back of the desert (*marupṛṣṭhe*)" (3.80.118)—that is, certainly not the desert's top or upper ridges. Other examples could be cited in favor of the translation "back," or in some cases, as Fitzgerald allows, "upper ridges," so long as one recognizes the implication

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[72] "Many Voices" ms., 17 n. 57.

[73] The usage is with a genitive rather than in a tatpuruṣa, but that only shows that the meaning would be pertinent, too, to a tatpuruṣa.

[74] *Rethinking*, 74, with a correction from *himavatḥ* to *himavataḥ*; cf. 77, where the point about the· back of the mountain is restated.

[75] Proposing that Mt. Mūjavat, the earlier spelling of this mountain as one of great Vedic import as the source of soma, be identified as "Muztagh Ata, (Uighur) 'Father of Muz Mountain(s),' a giant mountain towering over a mountain complex on the border of Tajikistan and Xinjiang, close to the source of the Oxus and Yarkand-Tarim rivers," see Frits Staal, "Three Mountains and Seven Rivers," forthcoming in Shoun Hino and Toshihiro Wada, eds., *Indian Culture and Buddhism: Felicitation Volume for Professor Musashi Tachikawa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass), manuscript courtesy of the author, p. 2.

of a certain other-sidedness, out-of-sightness, and hiddenness, often associated: with caves.[76] The meaning "back" is a literal bodily meaning susceptible—I would say, irresistibly—to metaphoric uses,[77] and hardly reducible to such a bland meaning as top of the mountain, for which Sanskrit has so many other words. In fact, Michael Witzel translates a Vedic usage of *nākasyapṛṣṭhāt* as "du dos du firmament."[78] "Back" is a meaning that is consistent and powerful for mountains, the firmament, and the desert, and repeatedly pertinent to the Śuka story. Indeed, the, cosmological significance of "the back of the mountain" makes for a certain equivalence, when the mountain is Himavat, to the "back of the firmament," since what is in back of Himavat is the cosmic mountain Meru, around which the heavens move.[79]

Indeed, as the poets show us in the case of Muñjavat, "the back of the mountain" is a metaphoric goldmine. But I am hardly arguing that this mother loded convention supplies the only meaning. I am arguing for *śleṣa*: double and indeed multiple meaning: that is, polysemy.[80] I believe that Fitzgerald's concern as a translator makes him justly cautious. He wants to bring out baseline readings for ordinary English-speaking readers. This is usually (I regard the present case to be an exception) a good guideline for a translation that does not want to

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[76] Other passages pertinent to this sense are 3.155.16cd and 157, in which the "back of Himavat" is wooded and a place for hunting; 5.11.8, 9.47.41, and 12.160.31, each as a setting for narratives related to celestial movements (Seven Ṛsis, Nahuṣa) on, the back of Himavat; and 3.266.1–2 and 21, where the *Rāmopākhyāna* describes Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa's residence on Mount Mālyavat during the rainy season away from Kiṣkindhā; cf. Rām 4.27.1 and 46.10 using *pṛṣṭha* for their "mountain cave" (*giriguha*) rainy season residence (4.25.24) near lakes and cranes, while *āsinaḥ parvatāsyāgre* at 4.29.5 should probably be "seated on that foremost mountain" rather than "seated on the mountaintop," as per Rosalind Lefeber, trans., *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient India*, vol. 4: *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 118.

[77] On body metaphors, see George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

[78] Michael Witzel, "Sur le chemin du ciel," *Bulletin des études indiennes* 2 (1984): 219, citing *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 9.2.3.26; see Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*, 147. n. 61.

[79] See Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking*, 150, 309.

[80] On *śleṣa* in "Śuka," see Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*, 306, where these comments apply also to Fitzgerald's advocacy ("Many Voices," 17, n. 58) of a "straightforward" translation of the marvel of the mountains in the Śuka story as a sufficient reading. See similarly J. Brockington 2002, 601–2, on the phrase *arthaṃ vicintayan* in this story which suggests both "pondering the meaning" and (as I was certainly aware) "keeping in mind his purpose," but not "no more than" the latter.

encumber itself with any more footnotes or introductory caveats than it has to. But it is not a sufficient guideline for *Mbh* interpretation.

Beyond treating these three particular conventions in *Rethinking*, I flagged some others in passing.[81] For this essay, one of these has been worth exploring further, for as a case of textual specificity that takes on new precisions after the *Mbh*, it shows the epic poets displaying literary novelty and cosmological nuance in beginning to give play to what will become *the* signature concept of the politics of bhakti: "*avatāra*." The text that most prominently links the two epics, the *Rāmopākhyāna* (the *Mbh*'s chief account of the Rāma story), provides the most striking single piece of evidence. There, at the decisive moment of Rāma's conception, Brahmā tells the gods and Ṛṣis how Rāvaṇa will be killed: "For that purpose the four-armed Viṣṇu has descended (*avatirṇo . . . viṣṇuḥ*) at my command"[82]—upon which Brahmā goes on to command the hosts of gods to take birth on earth as "Viṣṇu's companions (*viṣṇoḥ sahāyān*)" (260.6–7).[83] Another intriguing usage of *ava-tṛ;* occurs in descriptions of divinely incarnated heroes "descending to Kurukṣetra," which is, after all, not only the battlefield where they resolve the political action of the *Mahābhārata* but the "high altar (*uttaravedi*) of

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[81] E.g., telling a story before it happens (Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking*; 285–86), and usages of *muhūrtam*, "hour" as a kind of indeterminate time-passer, an "awhile" or "meanwhile" (72, 74, 300). One could also speak of a "doors convention" (see, to begin with, the citation at n. 43 above) and a "path convention" in connection with the way each epic traces a path linking the author and the heroine through the narratives, and most centrally through the forest books; see Hiltebeitel, "Authorial Paths through the Two Sanskrit Epics, Via the *Rāmopākhyāna*," cited above. The "path" idea is mentioned in *Rethinking*; 112, n. 64.

[82] 3.260.5: *tad artham avatirṇo 'sau mat niyogāc caturbhujaḥ/viṣṇuḥ'*.

[83] The same term used by Vaiśampāyana in the *Rāmopākhyāna's* "frame story" to describe the monkeys, bears, Pāṇḍavas, and allies of Indra (276.5–10—four times). On these passages, see Hiltebeitel, "Authorial Paths." Not surprisingly (see n. 23 above), J. Brockington sees these verses as an interpolation; see J. Brockington 1998, 476. Considering the *Rāmopākhyāna* as subsequent to the *Rāmāyaṇa* (a matter I cannot take up here, but on which I do not agree), Brockington takes these *Rāmopākyāna*/Mbh verses as indicative of growth subsequent to the *Rāmāyaṇa's* "second stage," arguing that they are "[t]he sole exception" to Rāma being mainly a human and exemplary figure, "the position reached in the middle of the second stage of growth of the *Rāmāyaṇa*." He finds it "the more significant that the *Rāmopākhyāna* does not allude to Rāma's divinity in its closing chapter." But it is hard not to read Brahmā's closing words there as just such an allusion: "Like an immortal, you have accomplished a great feat of the gods (*kṛtaṃ tvayā mahatkāryam devānām amaraprabha*)" (3.275.34cd). In any case, it is in the same *adhyāya* that Rāma is soon consecrated "the vaiṣṇava hero" (65). For similar comments ("the only exception"), see also J. Brockington, *Epic Threads John Brockington on the Sanskrit Epics*, Greg Bailey and Mary Brockington, eds. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 300.

Prajāpati" (Mbh 9.52,.20) to which descend the Vedic gods in sacrifice.
I cited two such instances in *Rethinking*—one describing the Pāṇḍavas
and Kṛṣṇa (12.48.3) and the other Balarāma (9.53.33) "descending to
Kurukṣetra."[84] I now find four additional instances of "descending
to Kurukṣetra": one describing the Pāṇḍavas and Somakas (*avatīrya
kurukṣetram*; 6.1.3); one for Vāsudeva, his horses, and charioteer
(*kurukṣetram*; *avātaran*; 12.53.23); one for Yudhiṣṭhira, having first
crossed over—*uttīrya*—the purifying Yamunā (*kurukṣetram avātarat*;
15.30.16); and one for Arjuna, accompanying the remaining Vṛṣṇi
women after the death of Kṛṣṇa (*kurukṣetram avātarat*; 16.8.65). To be
sure, such uses might be cautiously translated by "reached" or "crossed,"
but their frequency and the particular descending subjects—all linked
with the Pāṇḍava side and/or the entourage of Kṛṣṇa; none linked with
the Kaurava side—suggest something more: that they are describing,
in Fitzgerald's terms, the "divine raiding party of the gods." Against
this emerging background, I also drew in the instance of Vārṣṇeya, the
charioteer of Nala with this name of Kṛṣṇa (Kṛṣṇa is called Vārṣṇeya as
a member of the Vṛṣṇi clan) who, in "superfluously" descending from
Nala's chariot (*avatīrya vārṣṇeyo*), doubles for Kṛṣṇa himself[85]—the
charioteer Kṛṣṇa who will daily ascend and descend from his friend
Arjuna's chariot while crafting the *bhakti* politics of the *Mbh* war. I
would now submit that this is cumulative evidence for what I would
tall a "descent convention" that uses derivatives of the verb *ava-tṛ*
before the noun *avatāra* becomes the favored purāṇic term for cosmic
divine descent.

Because it comes from a *Mahābhārata* connoisseur, Fitzgerald's
carefully considered challenge to continue rethinking the *Mbh* toward
clarification of its politics of *bhakti* is a stimulating one to attempt to
carry forward. Yet even if we are not reaching agreement on these
matters, it is important to underscore a hardly surprising but still grat-

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[84] *Rethinking*; 70 n. 35, 146, 232 n. 36: the first with the simple phrase *avatīrya
kurukṣetram*; the second using *avatīrya* in the context of making that "descent." I also
noted a verse describing Vyāsa's disciples descending to earth (12.315.8); *Rethinking*,
295.

[85] The superfluity arises from the fact that this "double of Kṛṣṇa" never has to take
the reins, since Nala is driving; see Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking*: 232–33. As mentioned in
n. 7 above, J. Brockington finds this "implausible." For valuable discussion of the
"avatāra" theme in both epics, and especially in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, see also Robert P. Gold-
man and Sally J. Sutherland, trans. *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki*, Vol. 5: *Sundarakāṇḍa*
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 29–33, 69, 73.

ifying point on which we do agree, which Fitzgerald often remarks on: that he and I mostly disagree over points about which either of us could be right. Another is that the *Mbh* is a work of many voices. Fitzgerald and I are each *Mbh* pluralists, and are each challenged by what that would best mean in engaging this text. A photo taken at the 2003 "Between the Empires" Conference at Austin, Texas, catches the two of us scratching our heads together over the *Mbh*. That is something we have done for years, as have many others. The appreciation of many voices thus applies as well to the international and interdisciplinary project of ongoing *Mbh* rethinking, which to my mind does its work best when it starts from *Mbh* appreciation.

WHY *ITIHĀSA*? NEW POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITS IN CONSIDERING THE *MAHĀBHĀRATA* AS HISTORY

There are two basic, and optimally interrelated, approaches to the question of interpreting the *Mahābhārata* as a coherent "whole"[1]— by which I mean the text of the Pune Critical Edition, the question of whose pros and cons I will be raising in chapter 5. One of these approaches is to try to demonstrate coherence as operative within the *Mahābhārata* text itself. As everyone knows, there is a long and to many thankless tradition of scholarship in this vein, to which the names of Joseph Dahlmann (1895), Madeleine Biardeau (especially 2002), and a late-career book by V.S. Sukthankar (1957) can be cited as leading entries, and to which, since about 1992, I myself have tried to make varied supportive contributions. I am, however, the only one of these scholars to view the Critical Edition as having a more success- ful outcome in uncovering an archetype than even its editors, includ- ing Sukthankar, could perceive. The other approach, which Biardeau began to take up mainly in her later works, but which did not so much preoccupy Dahlmann or Sukthankar, is to try to determine—wherever possible by historical information, and otherwise, more precariously, of course, by intertextual considerations—the *ante quem* and *post quem* parameters by which it would be possible to hypothesize the time span during which the composition of this archetype would have been achieved, and with that, for it to have started to find readers and be disseminated.

Let me mention a few promising results of such inquiries, limiting myself for the moment to ones in which I have participated. Backed

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[1] A short presentation of this chapter was included in a special panel on the benefits of interpreting the *Mahābhārata* "whole" at the September, 2009 14th World Sanskrit Conference in Kyoto, along with contributions by Vishwa Adluri, Joydeep Bagchee, Simon Brodbeck, and T. P. Mahadevan—each of whom I thank for our many spirited and profitable exchanges around this project. See now the essays by these authors, plus one by Fernando Wulff Alonso, in Adluri in press. An earlier short version was presented at the March, 2009 Annual Meeting of the American Oriental Society in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I thank Jason Neelis and Luis González-Reimann for their helpful comments on that version.

by a number of scholars, including Biardeau (2002), James Fitzgerald (2001), Nick Sutton (1997), and myself (1989, 2005b), there has emerged something of a consensus that the epic "as we have it" is post-Aśokan. Taking us further down in time, I have argued that the epic's references to Cīnas probably make it younger than the reputation of the Chin Dynasty for unifying China, and that in combination with references to Hūṇas, Yavanas (Ionians or Greeks), Antioch, and Rome, we must posit that the epic poets were familiar with some of these people less by proximity or invasion than by familiarity with their "geographical and historical reputation[s]" and even their "foreign histories" (Hiltebeitel 2001a, 30–31). I am pleased that Michael Witzel regards this "lead" as worth following. Witzel proposes that we should "take a much closer look at the time frame around 150 B.C.E. as that of the first assembly of the text...probably carried out by a group of Brahmans who worked on earlier bardic materials" (2005, 67; cf. 53–56). On the other hand, at the *ante quem* end I have argued (2006c) that the *Mahābhārata* would have preexisted the first or second century dates ascribed to the *kāvya* poet Aśvaghoṣa, since he refers to Vyāsa and Vālmīki as precedent-setting poets for his *Buddhacarita*; he knows a *Mahābhārata* story with substories well enough to selectively allude to both; and he is especially attentive to usages of the terms *svadharma, rājadharma*, and *mokṣadharma* in ways that quite clearly allude to the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Śāntiparvan*. I also believe, with Biardeau (1999), that major insights emerge once we recognize that the *Mahābhārata*, and with it the *Rāmopākhyāna*, is earlier than the *Rāmāyaṇa* (see Hiltebeitel 2009). Since Aśvaghoṣa knew both epics and actually has enough poetic distance—which need not mean great temporal distance—to consider them bifocally, this would mean that we have some suggestive evidence for a position that a *Mahābhārata* archetype may be dated to some relatively short span from the period between circa 150 B.C.E. to the turn of the millennium—the dates I proposed in my book *Rethinking the Mahābhārata* (2001a, 18–21).

In this chapter, I will be working *primarily* within this second parameter-setting approach, with the goal not only of continuing to refine our intertextual parameters, but of taking us into historical considerations bearing on the very period I continue to propose. In so doing, I believe two questions—one, of the text's historical setting; the other, of its claim to being *itihāsa* or "history"—gain new clarity once we lift the clouds of what may be called a perfect scholarly storm that has just brewed up and passed before our eyes.

A. *Two* Mahābhārata *Usages of* Itihāsa

I begin, however, briefly from the intratextual side, which requires some preliminary tracking of where the *Mahābhārata u*ses the term *itihāsa*, and what it *intends* (a more purposeful question than what it *means*) by *itihāsa*. The *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* each use a variety of generic terms to identify themselves, although the *Mahābhārata* uses many more. A few of them—*ākhyāna, carita,* and *kathā*—are used by both epics. But each work also has a distinctive term for itself: for the *Mahābhārata, itihāsa* (etymologically, "so indeed it was"—or as we tend to say, "history"), by which it characterizes itself eight times; and for the *Rāmāyaṇa, kāvya* ("poetry"), used thirteen times (Hiltebeitel 2005a, 465, 477). In fact, as I will be maintaining in chapter 6,[2] *itihāsa* "is not only *un*used to describe the *Rāmāyaṇa* but, excepting two interpolations,[3] is 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 early agreement to yield one of these terms to the other" (*idem*, 476–77). Moreover, just as the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s thirteen usages of *kāvya* all occur at points where the text is framing itself—that is, either in its *Upodghāta* ("Preamble") or at the Aśvamedha scene where Rāma's sons arrive to recite Vālmīki's creation (*idem*, 477), so it can be shown that all of the *Mahābhārata*'s eight usages of *itihāsa* to characterize the text as a whole occur only at well-threaded framing points: either in its opening or closing *adhyāya*s, or where Vaiśampāyana launches his recitation at Vyāsa's bidding. It is not my aim to inventory these eight framing usages of *itihāsa* here.[4] Suffice it to say that every occurrence comes along with some memorable statement of what the *Mahābhārata* is all about,[5] and that among these iterations about the text being *itihāsa* are some that anchor what the *Mahābhārata* frame sequences have to say about time: from cosmogony to genealogy (1.1.27–38); that "time

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[2] Just cited as Hiltebeitel 2005a.

[3] 1, Appendix 1 line 4; 6.3709*. I thank Shubha Pathak (2005, 50) for these references.

[4] Shulman raises a seeming problem here, saying the *Mahābhārata* "is '*itihāsa*' or, as it calls itself, '*itihāsapurāṇa*' (see 1.1.16–20)" (2001, 22). Presumably he is citing the Southern Recension, as he does elsewhere in the study in question.

[5] Other such framing references to *itihāsa* refer to its ties with the Veda and other "books" (1.1.17; cf. 1.1.52; 18.5.43); its importance to the past and future (1.1.24) and the inspiration it offers to all other poets (1.2.237); that it is called Jaya, "Triumph" (1.56.19; 18.5.39); and that whereas what occurs in it occurs elsewhere, what does not occur in it occurs nowhere else (1.56.16–33; 18.5.38).

cooks" (1.1.188); that Rāma Jāmadagnya's slaughter of all the Kṣatriyas occurred at the juncture between the Tretā and Dvāpara Yugas and the *Mahābhārata* war at the juncture between the Dvāpara and Kali Yugas (1.2.3, 9); and, in the closing wraparound, what the fruits are that come from hearing "this meritorious 'so indeed it was'" (*itihāsam imam puṇyam*; 18.5.43–54).

   Now it might strike textual stratifiers as good news that, as such a vigorous genre-marker of the *Mahābhārata, itihāsa* occurs mainly in the frames, on which there has been a tailor-made solution to cut them off as "late." But let us not move so fast. There is a pivotal usage of *itihāsa* where the *Mahābhārata* finishes its account of the birth of Bhīṣma (see chapter 13). Once Gaṅgā tells her husband Śantanu she has married him "for the sake of success in accomplishing a purpose in the work of the gods (*devakāryārthasiddhyartham*)" (1.92.49), which was to fulfill her "agreement" (*samaya*) with the Vasus to return them to heaven by drowning them as her children so as to "release them from human birth" (53–54), Śantanu asks her to tell him more about why the Ṛṣi Vasiṣṭha cursed the Vasus, and how this contretemps affected the one remaining son he must think he and he alone has just rescued from oblivion (93.1–3). What Gaṅgā tells him is this: his son—who is of course yet to be called Bhīṣma—is the incarnation of the god Dyaus (Sky), who was cursed by Vasiṣṭha to take birth in a womb because, as the Vasus' ringleader, he led them, at his wife's request, to abduct Vasiṣṭha's divine cow (26). Although Vasiṣṭha shortened the terms for the other Vasus, Dyaus was cursed to "dwell in the human world for a long time by his own *karma* (*svakarmaṇā*)" (36cd; cf. 42). This would imply that Dyaus's *karma* will carry over into this human life. Gaṅgā then tells Śantanu some things he can expect about his surviving son, some of which sounds good: "…He will be a soul of *dharma*, conversant with all the scriptures"[6] (39ab); while some is bound to be unsettling: "The high-minded one will not reproduce among humans…" (38cd). Even more troubling, "Devoted to his father's pleasure, he will forsake the enjoyment of women" (39cd). Gaṅgā then offers a brief self-exoneration for throwing the other boys into the river for the sake of their release (*mokṣārtham*) from the curse, and upon that, "the Goddess disappeared right there" (43) taking the boy with her. For Gaṅgā to vanish (*antar-adhīyata*)—literally, "to put herself within"—

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   [6] The Critical Edition follows the S recension with *śāstra*s (scriptures) rather than *śastra*s (weapons).

is to return to her own element, whether it be water or space (*ākāśa*), since she is of course the Ākāśa-Gaṅgā. In going with her, Bhīṣma's disappearance is almost like the drowning of his brothers. But Śantanu knows Gaṅgā has taken him away with the promise of a long life ahead of him. Śantanu goes "back to his capital afflicted with grief" (44). Having finally spoken out to keep his eighth son even though he knew it would mean losing his wife, he has suddenly lost them both.

The *Mahābhārata*'s "history" now *begins* with Gaṅgā's departure, yet also with her ongoing blessing: thanks to her "devotion" to Śantanu's father Pratīpa, Gaṅgā will "love the famous Bhārata lineage" whose *guṇa*s she is unable to recount "even in a hundred years" In effect, from a heavenly story moved down to earth, the *Mahābhārata* will stay largely on earth. After Śantanu's "lost time" with Gaṅgā, time gets condensed into charted time along the epic's flow, beginning soon with the return of Bhīṣma and the entry into the lineage of Satyavatī, mother of the author.[7] How better to begin "history" than by the withdrawal of the celestial Gaṅgā, whose very intervention has resolved a crisis in the genealogy that will eventually bring forth—indeed, make possible the births of—the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas?[8]

With this most telling usage in mind, we are entitled to ask how else the term *itihāsa* is used in the *Mahābhārata* outside (or better along side of) its main narrative? Most prominently, it is used in the phrase *itihāsam purātanam* along with the quotative formula *atrāpy udāharanti*, or the like, in the sense, "Now they also quote this ancient history."[9] This *Mahābhārata* usage to characterize smaller units—especially dialogues (*saṃvāda*s)—will justify a little intertextual archeology.

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[7] The verse on "*itihāsa*" ends an *adhyāya*. In effect, "history" begins directly after this in the next *adhyāya* with the story of Śantanu's second marriage to Satyavatī, who is already the mother of Vyāsa, the author. With typical recursivity, the *Mahābhārata* has begun that "prehistory" earlier with the story of Vasu Uparicara (1.57), which, at *Mbh* 1.1.50–51, is introduced as one of the three starting points from which some Brahmins learn the epic—the other two being "from Manu onward" and "from Āstīka onward" (1.1.50–51).

[8] Cf. Brodbeck 2009, 158 n. 18, resisting such an "astronomical cosmological interpretation" while attending to genealogical matters, which the *Mahābhārata* actually subordinates to its divine plan and its cosmologically worked out sense of "history." Indeed, Gaṅgā's intervention in the Bhārata genealogy is similar to the "descent of the Gaṅgā" (*gaṅgāvataraṇa*) in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, where she solves a genealogical crisis of the Ikṣvāku lineage posed by the disappearance of the sons of Sāgara; see Adluri's introduction to this chapter.

[9] See Tokunaga 2009, 28: "*atrāpy udāharanti* comes from *athāpy udāharanti* in the Dharmasūtras. The particle *atha*, which matches the style of the treatise, was changed to *atra* ('as to this [point in your question]') in the dialogue in the *MBh*."

Long ago, the young E. W. Hopkins observed that the *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* cites the person "Manu" and the text of *Manu* in two different ways. Says Hopkins in 1882, "…there is an interesting difference in the way in which his quotations are made. I notice that" when a passage begins with "Manu said (*abravīt*)," one finds nothing in *Manu* "exactly corresponding to it"; but "whenever *Vāsiṣṭha* gives a quotation which answers exactly[10] to some verse in our present M-treatise [i.e., *Manu*], he always introduces it with the words 'now they relate on this point a Manavan verse' (*mānava cā'tra çlokam udāharanti*)" (1882, 241). Whereas there is some minimal *dharmasūtra* precedent for quoting Manu by the first formula ("he said"), there is none for quoting him using this second formula involving citation by *śloka* along with the base formula *athāpy udāharanti*. Without mentioning Manu, however, this formula is used frequently in the *dharmasūtra*s by both *Āpastamba* and *Baudhāyana* (but not by *Gautama*). *Āpastamba*, who is most interesting for being probably the earliest of the four surviving *dharmasūtrakāra*s, and also, as we shall see, for his familiarity with something he calls th*e Bhaviṣya Purāṇa*, begins with ten usages. Two of these refer to what Olivelle (1999, 30) translates as "two verses from a Purāṇa" (*purāṇe ślokau*), one involving a godly quote from Prajāpati and the other a mythological anecdote (*Āp* 1.19.13; 2.23.3–5). Others recount illustrative stories (notably 1.22.3–8, an allegory of the eternal being residing in the cave in the heart; 1.32.23, quoting Mṛtyu [Death]; and 2.13.6, pertaining to paternity once one is in the abode of Yama). Most of the rest are just proverbial sayings (e.g., 1.19.15; 25.9–10; 35.23–31.1; 2.9.13; 2.17.7–8). *Baudhāyana* then generalizes the practice, using the *athāpy udāharanti* phrasing forty-nine times virtually anywhere he turns from prose to a quoted verse, one of which is his version of why a woman must be non-independent through the three phases of her life (*B* 2.3.45).[11] He is proportionally less inclined to relate the phrase to mythical anecdotes, of which I note only three instances (2.3.31–35, similar in part to *Āp* 2.13.6; *B* 2.4.26, recalling a dialogue between the two wives of the epic's Yayāti; and 2.11.28 on the origin of the *āśrama*s). And unlike *Āpastamba*, he never conjoins

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[10] Hopkins exaggerates the degree to which all such matches are "exact," but not to the point that it undermines his contrastive observation. I discuss details in Hiltebeitel forthcoming, chapter 5.
[11] A view made famous by its version at *Manu* 5.147–48.

the quotative phrase with the term *purāṇa*. *Gautama* then clears the quotative phrase out entirely from his entirely prose *dharmasūtra*.

Now the revealing point is this: while reference to *purāṇa* as authoritative seems to be stripped away after its first usages by *Āpastamba*, none of these authors link quotations about *dharma* with the term *itihāsa*, even though all but *Āpastamba* use the term *itihāsapurāṇa*, albeit in each case only once (*G* 1.8.6; *B* 2.9.14; *V* 27.6). [12] Moreover, while *Vasiṣṭha* is thus the first and only *dharmasūtra* to use the quotative phrase with the source as Manu, or more exactly, a "Mānavan *śloka*," the *Mahābhārata* is the first and indeed only one of these texts to use it with the phrase *itihāsam purātanam* and thus, moreover, to use it in conjunction not only with the phrase but with the term *itihāsa*! It uses the formula liberally, especially in the *dharma* instructions of its twelfth and thirteenth Books, while *Manu* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, like *Gautama*, do not use it at all. It would make a highly interesting study to look into the ways that four of these classical *dharma* texts (*Āpastamba, Baudhāyana, Vasiṣṭha*, and the *Mahābhārata*) use the *athāpy/atrāpy udāharanti* formula while three (*Gautama, Manu*, and the *Rāmāyaṇa*) do not, but one of the reasons why seems fairly clear. As I believe can be generalized from what I have tried to show in the case of the *Mahābhārata*'s use of this formula in my "Bhīṣma's Sources" (Hiltebeitel 2001b; see chapter 13), the intertextual citational interest of the first group bears a certain resemblance to a scholarly apparatus of footnotes that would be pertinent to texts that reflect the debates of a scholarly tradition on *dharma* as legal precedent, and take some delight in absorbing themselves in a world of varied and often conflicting views about it. If this is the case, it would suggest that the second group would be one of texts that claim authority independent of and above that nexus, no doubt each for its own reasons but in each case in the name of some kind of streamlining and moral rearmament. [13]

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[12] I avoid discussing the *Arthaśāstra*, which subordinates *dharma* to *artha*. It does cite others' views (e.g., 1.4.6), but not by this formula. It introduces *itihāsa* as a cover-term for the textual genres a prince should study in the latter part of his day: "(he should engage) in listening to Itihāsa. The Purāṇas, Itivṛtta, Akhyānikā, Udāharaṇa, Dharmaśāstra and Arthaśāstra,—these constitute Itihāsa" (AS 1.5.13–14; Kangle [1972] 2003, 11). Kangle cites a commentary that *Itivṛttam* would include the epics. The *Mbh* would probably be comfortable with this definition, but of course it has a more ambitious project in constituting and being history.

[13] Cf. Tokunaga 2009, 28–29, observing the same distribution and tracing "the stock phrase *athāpyudāharanti* further back to the Gṛhyasūtras," his explanation for its absence from the *Rāmāyaṇa* being that it "stands free from the influence of Vedic

This point may now be enriched by a brilliant point made by Muneo
Tokunaga, that the *Mahābhārata*'s use of this formula treats the infor-
mative narrative told as exemplum as the third member of the classi-
cal syllogism to provide illustration or corroboration of the speaker's
thesis.[14] Not only are the epic's leading characters "living history,"
they are interested in hearing it and citing it in support of their varied
views. And of course this would help to create other readerships and
audiences interested in sharing this sense of history. [15]

B. *A Perfect Storm*

But now to my main purpose in this chapter, which is to try to get us
closer to the historical conditions under which such a work of Brah-
manical "history" could have been composed.[16] If we ask the question
"Why *itihāsa*?" it may lead us to a realization that a perfect turbulence
of scholarly brainstorms has recently placed us at a point where we can
form a useful hypothesis on the conditions that lie behind this epic's
production. Among those who have stirred the pot, Hans van Buit-
enen suggestively wrote, "At an early enough date *The Mahābhārata*
was conceived as standing close to the beginning of national history"

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exegesis…at the beginning of a new era of Sanskrit literature culminating in classical
Kāvya literature."

    [14] Tokunaga shows that in such usages, "*itihāsa*s correspond to the third member of
the *pañcāvayava* syllogism of *parārthānumāna* in the classical Indian logic. That means,
itihāsa plays the role of illustration or corroboration of the instruction or thesis.… It
is therefore quite appropriate that an *itihāsa* is quoted by the word *udāharanti*, the
noun form of which is *udāharaṇa*, one of the terms for the third member of the syl-
logism" (2009, 24–25). Cf. MW [1899] 1964, 185 on *udāharaṇam*, and n. 12 above
on the *Arthaśāstra*. Tokunaga thinks it "is highly probable that *itihāsa* was originally
the designation of a text not according to its substance or form, but according to its
use in a didactic discussion" (26–27), and shows that *Mbh* usages typically occur with
instruction either before or after the formula, with the instruction being about factual,
moral, political, philosophical, or religious matters.
    [15] Since I see the two *Mbh* usages going hand in hand, I do not follow Tokunaga's
idea that the "moral (or dharmic) instructions" in the *Rājadharma* mark the point
from which the quotative usage "spread" to later parts of the epic (2009, 27), or that
usages of *itihāsa* to characterize the epic in its frames result from "the long history of
[its] textual development" as it "gradually changed its nature under the influence of
Vedic exegesis" (29). See Mbh 1.93.46cd, cited above, where the *Mahābhārata* begins
its *itihāsa* in launching its main story
    [16] For me it is important that it was composed by poets (see Hiltebeitel forthcoming,
chapter 5) as written poetry (see chapter 1), and not just "arranged," "assembled," or
"collected" by "redactors" (cf. Witzel 2005, 59, 63–64).

(1973, 6). Laurie Patton has shown how an "aitihāsika school" can be seen at work in the *Bṛhaddevatā* and Yāska's *Nirukta* organizing legendary information about Ṛṣis and deities that is paralleled in the epics (1996, 195–214). And scholars like Romila Thapar (1979, 1989, 1991, 1994, 1996, 1997)[17] and James Hegarty (2006) have engaged the idea that the *Mahābhārata* works out various intersecting ways to construct a significant historical past: among them notions about yugas and kalpas, on which Luis González-Reimann is making important contributions (2002, 2008); and genealogical constructions, on which Simon Brodbeck is writing (2009). But I must single out five recent interventions more specifically before getting on to the main text I wish to discuss, the *Yuga Purāṇa*. These five brainstorms have come from Michael Witzel, Fernando Wulff Alonso, T.P. Mahadevan, Johannes Bronkhorst, and Heinrich von Stietencron. Briefly on the first three, Witzel's 2005 article "The Vedas and the Epics: Some Comparative Notes on Persons, Lineages, Geography, and Grammar" has demonstrated that the *Mahābhārata* poets extracted plausible historical data from all parts of the Vedic canon to construct their own narrative[18] (and substories). Wulff has reinforced the likelihood that the skein of four declining *yuga*s would be among the "connection points" that the same poets reworked from "el repertorio griego del *Mahābhārata*" (the Greek repertory of the *Mahābhārata*) that likely introduced to India the Greek scheme of the decline of Justice through five races or ages.[19]

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[17] From the beginning, however, always with some insistence that Brahmanical interpolators must have concealed what was once "bardic" and historical in the main stories of both epics—a view I do not share.

[18] This is my own formulation *from* Witzel's article, not necessarily his own formulation of the significance of the epic's relation to Vedic evidence, which he locates in a "development" of the epic story through "multiple re-statements" of "Vedic reminiscences" of the Battle of the Ten Kings (2005, 22–50) 50)—something on which I remain skeptical (see Hiltebeitel 2001a, 2 n.12), although Witzel makes his most plausible case for it in this article.

[19] Wulff 2008, 153–56. The more specific parallels to the Hesiodic scheme include a divine plan to kill off a generation of fighters as the previous age ends, and then, in this age, deterioration in the performers and practices of sacrifices; ruptures in the human age cycle and getting old prematurely; degradation of parental relationships especially between fathers and sons; and, with temporal and dietary inversions: whereas in the Kali age people from India "will migrate to countries where they eat wheat and earth-smoke" (*godhūma* is another term for wheat) (3.188.43), the Bronze age generation of cruel warriors did not eat wheat—as Wulff says, this "calls attention to the use of this alimentary component to signal an optimal humanity in one case and its negation in the other (156). Like the *Mahābhārata*, Hesiod also probably held that another Golden or Perfect age would follow after the gods bring this one to an end

And Mahadevan has shown that Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins were positioned
to have written the *Mahābhārata* archetype in the Kuru-Pañcāla area
sometime between 300–100 B.C.E., and that they probably brought
a *Mahābhārata* close to the Pune Critical Edition archetype to south
India soon thereafter as a contribution to Tamil Saṅgam culture (2008,
7–9, 11–15, 18–19, 84–92, 101–2 nn. 9 and 10; 2010).

For me, however, or at least for this chapter, what brought this tur-
bulence to the point where things started falling into place is Bronk-
horst's 2007 book *Greater Magadha: Studies in the Culture of Early
India.* Bronkhorst challenges orthogenetic theories that project mod-
ern visions of a unified "India"—grounded in the unfolding of the
Veda—back on India's post-Vedic classical past. If Bronkhorst is right
to introduce "Greater Magadha" as a "separate culture" area in north-
eastern India (2007, 1–9), we would do well to think about the ways
other cultural regions of the period responded to Greater Magadha's
rise to dominance and fall into decline, including—if the sources allow
it—the ways writers reflecting the cultures of other regions envisioned,
indeed, constructed, their own alternate histories and different theo-
ries of time through which to frame their historiography.

My touchstone in Bronkhorst's study comes after his opening dis-
cussion of the "fundamental spiritual ideology" that distinguished
Greater Magadha's non-Vedic heterodoxies and, he thinks, affected
the *Bhagavad Gītā.* He seeks to distinguish four "features" of "what
must have been the culture of Greater Magadha" (55): funerary prac-
tices, medicine, the godlike status of the sage Kapila, and what he calls
"cyclical time." This last section is brief (69–71) and, I believe, hasty
on three matters. First, Bronkhorst speaks generally about "a cyclical
notion of time, in which *kalpas, yuga*s and other time units" impact
later Hinduism. Leaving one to think that *kalpas* and *yuga*s would

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once its degradation has peaked (154–56). On this matter of longstanding discussion,
see also Beall 2005/06, 165–68, pointing out in n. 23 that already in the 11th century
the Persian scholar al-Bīrūnī compared the Indian account of four *yuga*s with the
Greek narrative (citing Sachau 1964, I:378–85), and that in fact, the Indian account
as we have it (*Mahābhārata* 3.148, 3.186) dates from after the Alexandrian conquest
since 'foreign rulers,' including Greeks, are presupposed; in n. 33, he cites Hiltebeitel
[1976] 1990, 48–59 for a summary treatment in which I note that in the Indian case the
Bhārata war is an episode between the third and fourth ages (contra Clay's (2003) 81
belief that the oriental parallels lack heroes). Clay starts out accepting the vague view
that Hesiod's account…may ultimately derive from Near Eastern or Indo-European
traditions, and is more interested to point out that there appear no Oriental parallels
to the *insertion* of a race of heroes (my emphasis).

have a common background in Greater Magadha, he does not take note that *kalpa*s and *yuga*s seem to be concepts with separate early histories. As González-Reimann observed at the 2008 meeting of the American Oriental Society, the *kalpa* appears to begin as a distinctly Buddhist concept with its first documentable usage possibly being by Aśoka on a couple of his edicts: to be precise, on two mid-career rock edicts [RE], numbers 4 and 5.[20] In RE 4, Aśoka hopes that the changes in *dhaṃma* that he has initiated will continue to increase, thanks to his "sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons,…until the end of the world (*āva sa(ṃ)vaṭṭakappā*)." Moreover, he positions his reign not only to have effected a dynastic turnabout in the progress of *dhaṃma* into a kalpic future that will be secured by his children and descendants, but with reference to past "centuries." He begins RE 4, "In the past, over many centuries, killing, violence done to creatures, discourtesy to relatives, and disrespect for Brahmins and Samaṇas have only increased. But now,…promulgation of *dhaṃma* has increased that which did not exist over many centuries: abstention from killing, kindness to creatures, respect to relatives, respect for Brahmins and Samaṇas, and obedience to mother, father, and elders" (Bloch 1950, 100, my translation). Yet all this has fallen flat, a year later, in RE 5. Using the same terms, Aśoka now makes the possibility of *dhaṃma* progressing to "the end of the *kalpa*" contingent upon the dubious virtue of his children, and turns everything over—even watching over the royal harems—to his newly appointed *dhaṃma* superintendants (*dhaṃmamahāmattās*). What is striking is that if we set aside RE 4's mention of disrespect for Samaṇas (Buddhist and other non-Brahmanical ascetics), it recalls the past of recent centuries in terms of the same types of failures in *dharma* that Brahmanical texts will soon ascribe to the Kali Yuga (see above, n. 19). By RE 5, it is clear that the attempt to imagine the progress of *dhaṃma* over the long haul of the *kalpa* was a bad fit, and that if Aśoka had been able to conjure with a theory of yugas, he probably

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[20] See González-Reimann 2008, citing Bloch 1950, 100, 102. For fuller discussion of these two rock edicts and the Buddhist overtones of their usages of "*kalpa*," see Hiltebeitel forthcoming, chapters 2 and 6. See González-Reimann 2002, 129, 198 n. 98; cf. 64, 70, 167 and n. 19, 169–72 and nn. 36–37; 2008. Cf. Pingree 1963, 238; 1990, 275 on the Buddhist *kappa* being "much earlier" than the *yuga*, whose appearances in the *Mbh* and *Manu* he dates to "about the second century A.D."; Biardeau 2002, 1: 94. I differentiate *yuga* chronometry from usages of the terms *yuga* and even *yugānta*, which do occur in the Pāli canon; see González-Reimann 2002, 62–64; 70.

would have used it. Not surprisingly, RE 5 is the last we hear from Aśoka about "the end of the *kalpa*."

As to chronometry by *yuga*s, as González-Reimann demonstrates in his 2002 book, *The Mahābhārata and the Yugas, yuga* calculations are *not* mentioned by Buddhists until quite late—nor does the *yuga* appear to be a feature of the time-reckoning of the other heterodoxies. Second, whereas the *kalpa* can rather reasonably be identified with calculations of cyclical time, and indeed moreso than the competing Jain and Ājīvika concepts current in Greater Magadha that have more to do with downswings and upswings of time, cyclicity is less clear in the *yuga*, which lends itself more readily to accounts of linear and indeed historical time. Third, Bronkhorst endorses, if a little tentatively, González-Reimann's "conclusion 'that the yuga theory is a relatively late addition'" to the *Mahābhārata* (72, citing González-Reimann 2002, 202). We need to think further about the provenance of the *yuga* theory, by which I mean the chronometry of four ages, and whether it could be a "late addition" to the *Mahābhārata*. But the important point to begin with is the one of regionality: Bronkhorst allows us to identify the *kalpa* as one of the competing notions of the vastness of time that were advanced in Greater Magadha, and perhaps the only one that could properly be called cyclical.

As to von Stietencron's contribution, titled "Purāṇic Genealogies and the Date of the Buddha" and appearing in English in 2005, I must address his geographical considerations about the provenance of the *yuga* theory because they will help to contextualize what we will find in the *Yuga Purāṇa*.

According to von Stietencron, the *Vaṃśānucarita* section of the Purāṇas "comprises lists which, in essence, pertain to the issue of regal succession in various kingdoms and were important for establishing the legitimacy of descent. The text consists of a list of kings and sages from early times up to the fifth or seventh generation after the *Mahābhārata* war, written in the past tense; and a second [list] in the form of future prophesies (the so-called *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa*) which continues the line of kings into the Kali age in various redactions until it is completed in the early Gupta era."[21]

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[21] von Stietencron 2005, 65; cf. 73: "The fact that the basic text of the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* originated before the Gupta period is proven beyond doubt by the evidence of the *Matsya Purāṇa* and its several supplements. It is also suggested by the quotations in the *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra*." Cf. *idem* n. 12: as discussed above, *Āpastamba*

Von Stietencron's main interest lies in the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* portion, which tells how royal lines will continue into the Kali age, among them the Paurava line, beginning from a Pāṇḍava descendant named Adhisīmakṛṣṇa,[22] at whose ten-year sacrifice in Naimiṣa Forest this textual unit was recited. Von Stietencron posits that the *Vaṃśānucarita* is a heterogeneous text, and asks "in which stages of redaction did it originate?" (2005, 70). He attempts to relate the text's two main chronological sequences—its pre- and post-Adhisīmakṛṣṇa sections— to geographical considerations: "What is certain…is that the redactors belonged to different regions. The focus of the earlier genealogies is the present-day Uttar Pradesh and the adjacent areas to the south and west. In contrast, in the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* portion the focus of the first and second redactions is Magadha (Bihar); it is the Dekkhan when it comes to the third and fourth and, with the last redaction, it is once again Magadha" (2005, 78–79). What he calls the "literary framework" (70) that sets the recitation of the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* at the sacrifice of King Adhisīmakṛṣṇa is "indicative of the area of the *Kurupañcāla*s, as seen in the mention of the place of the prophecy as the Naimiṣa Forest" (73).

Von Stietencron asks whether the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* is a homogeneous or heterogeneous text, and if, as he posits, it is the latter, then when and "in which stages of redaction did it originate?" (70). While crediting Pargiter's work in clarifying four stages of revision or supplementation from the late Śātavāhanas to early Guptas,[23] he offers

mentions a *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* at 2,24,3–6 (Olivelle 1999, 67 has it as *Bhaviṣyat*), which von Stietencron indicates is what he probably refers to when citing a "Purāṇa" at 1,19,13; 1,29,7; and 2,23,3–5.

[22] Enumeration of "members of these ruling houses ends with the fifth-seventh generation after the *Bhārata* war. The last king of each dynasty is mentioned as currently reigning." The number of rulers varies. "All that matters is the succession to power. The Purāṇa states that the reigning ruler in the dynasty of the Pauravas is Adhisīmakṛṣṇa" (73); "the continuation of the lists of the rulers, and certain crucial events, such as the relocation or founding of capital cities, are projected as future events into the Kali Age" (71). The chief contemporaries of Adhisīmakṛṣṇa in Hāstinapura are Kings Divākara in Ayodhyā (Kosala) and Senajit in Girivraja (Magadha) (78).

[23] Pargiter found four major caesuras: 1. the ninth year in the reign of Śātavāhana king Yajñaśrī (ca. A.D. 206); 2. "The period shortly before the end of the Śātavāhanas after the middle of the third century A.D.," where all *Matsya Purāṇa* manuscripts stop; 3. 320/330 C.E., "when Candragupta I had consolidated the core kingdom of the Guptas (a *Vāyu Purāṇa* manuscript that includes the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* "stems from this period"); and 4. 330/35 C.E. when, during Candragupta I's reign, the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* was revised, to become a final source for *Viṣṇu*, *Vāyu*, and *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*s. Samudragupta and his conquests are no longer included. Several indigenous ruling families

new considerations on the question of its origins.[24] Ruling out the possibility that it could have been continually updated for well over a thousand years since the supposed time of Adhisīmakṛṣṇa,[25] von Stietencron states that "the only plausible framework for such a text, compiled from several ancient sources coming from different parts of India, is the assumption of a period of Brahmin restoration" (2005, 72). After considering four possibilities for such a milieu, [26] he favors the earliest— "the first half of the reign of Candragupta Maurya before he turned toward Jainism" (2005, 72)—and along with this, a Magadha location for the text's composition.[27] In assigning the composition of the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* proper to the early reign of Candragupta Maurya, von Stietencron brings in several interesting considerations, among them what he considers to be "irrefutable evidence" that this account already existed in Candragupta's time. This evidence comes from Megasthenes, via Arrian, and is—as von Stietencron admits— "anything but obvious." According to Megasthenes, Indians listed 153 kings from the first ones to Sandracottus/Candragupta. There are 50 or 49 kings if one counts back from Candragupta to the son of Jarāsaṃdha, Sahadeva, who fell in the *Mahābhārata* war, and by various calculations enough kings from Sahadeva back to Manu to total either 150 or 154, which is, according to von Stietencron, too close to Megasthenes' number, 153, "to be a mere coincidence" (2005, 82–83).

Von Stietencron strongly emphasizes his sense that the author of the earliest *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* redaction was "a declared enemy of the Nandas" who would not have sponsored such a text during their rule.[28]

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of north and central India are mentioned, as well as foreigners like the Gardabhin, Śaka, Yavana, Tuṣāra (Kuṣāṇa), Muruṇḍa, and Mauna (Huna), of which the "last mentioned are probably still in the remote north-west" (von Stietencron 2005, 71–72).

[24] "It was not clear, until now, when the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* originated" (2005, 71).

[25] This "reconstruction of regnal succession…comprises a period of more than 1600 years before Aśoka's coronation.…[and] continues for 600 yrs thereafter" (2005, 76).

[26] The other three periods considered are those of the early Śuṅgas (approximately mid 2nd century B.C.E.); of the Kaṇvāyanas, mid-first century B.C.E.; and "the time of the Śatavāhanas, the ninth year of the reign of Yajñaśrī around C.E. 206 being the latest possible date" (2005, 72–73).

[27] "We can thus safely conclude that the compilation of the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* took place in Magadha and, further, in one of the first three periods listed above when Magadha, at least nominally, retained its imperial status. If it had been compiled under the Mauryas or the Śuṅgas it must have, nevertheless, been supplemented under the Kaṇvas" (von Stietencron 2005, 73).

[28] Yet von Stietencron posits that the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa*'s composers would have transformed information that was first gathered in Magadha (2005, 73) under the

He thus regards the Nandas as providing a *terminus post quem* for the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* (2005, 82–83), since the unit regards them with strong disfavor, and Mahāpadma Nanda particularly so for having "vanquished the old dynasties of North India—not as was customary, to extract tribute from them and to be recognized as the most powerful, the *saṃrāṭ* or *cakravartin*, but in order to dethrone them and set himself up as the *ekarāṭ* and *ekacchattra*, the sole ruler of North India. He exterminated the vanquished princely families and centralized the governmental power in Magadha through appointing governors in the formerly independent kingdoms" (79–80). The *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇā* section would, however, be narrativizing the past-to- "future" of such defeated royal lines "not for the purpose of reinstating them as independent regents—since the vast centralized empire had already proven its advantage—but in order to base the power wrested from the deposed Nandas on the co-operation of those very people who had suffered due to the former and hated them" (2005, 81).

This narrativization comes to be tied in with the concept of the *yuga*: "The collapse of the old Kṣatriya dynasties under the vigorous policies of Mahāpadmananda, who is explicitly denigrated as the son of a Śūdra (*śūdra-yoni*), the support extended by the rulers to non-Vedic religions and the invasions of barbarians—all this is seen negatively as a sign of *Kaliyuga*" (2005, 72). Yet as von Stietencron is quick to point out, "*The yuga* doctrine appears to be a relatively late insertion in the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* and certainly postdates Mahāpadma Nanda due to whom the Kaliyuga grows in vigour (*vṛddhiṃ gamiṣyati*). If at all conceived by the first compiler of the Purāṇa at the time of this supposed Brahmanical restoration, its *yuga* calculations must have been based upon short time cycles which were not yet in conformity with the later teachings." He speaks here of "the later *yuga* concept" that starts the Kali Yuga "with the death of Kṛṣṇa"—which, as González-Reimann demonstrates (2002, 51–52, 60, 73, 94–97, 105, 115–16), is not formulated around that precise turning point until the Purāṇas.[29] Von Stietencron seems

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Nandas (2005, 73). These initial Nanda compilers would have had "no precise, first-hand knowledge of all the dynasties. Rather, their compilation was the outcome of research, based on different regional sources" (2005, 76) that probably made use of pre-Mauryan writing to archive the record at Pāṭaliputra (81) before the data was worked up under the first Maurya as the dry futuristic *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* (74–75).

[29] As von Stietencron remarks, "If this concept existed when the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* was compiled, one would expect that kings from Parikṣit onwards would have all been listed as the future rulers of the Kali Age. This is not the case. Therefore, there almost

to be aware that there are, as González-Reimann documents, usages of the term *yuga* in the *Ṛg Veda*, the *Brāhmaṇas*, and the *Jyotiṣa Vedāṅga* (which González-Reimann dates circa "the fifth century B.C.E.") for time-spans (a generation, a five-year cycle, "an age in general" [2002, 6–7, 16 n. 10]) that are shorter than those that come to be associated with the *yuga* in classical, including epic, usages.[30]

Now, what is interesting for present purposes is that von Stietencron attempts to relate these chronological considerations about the two portions of the *Vaṃśānucarita* to geographical ones, calling attention to their handling of two different groups of kingdoms:

> 1. Those from Kosala to Avanti, "well documented in the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa*,…which were conquered by the Śiśunāgas and the Nandas, primarily under Mahānandin and Mahāpadma Nanda, and subsumed under the first great North Indian empire with its centre at Magadha," whose expansion would have begun with Udāyin (on whom see below).
> 2. A list of "perfunctorily mentioned" dynasties originating "in another context," including Kurus, Aikṣvākus, Pāñcālas, Kāśeyas, Kaliṅgas, and Śūrasenas, all belonging "to families found in the list of early dynasties, and whose absence in the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* was bound to be conspicuous when a complete redaction of the *vaṃśānucarita* section was made. At the same time they are families which, in a favourable or unfavourable sense, are connected to the later Kali Yuga doctrine—a fact which distinguishes them from the other old princely houses of the Punjāb and Saurāṣṭra which are not appended here. They perish in the Kaliyuga, are known opponents of Kṛṣṇa, or are supporters of the Bauddhas and Jains" (2005, 79–80).
> For von Stietencron, "What is certain…is that the redactors belonged to different regions. The focus of the earlier genealogies is the present-day Uttar Pradesh and the adjacent areas to the south and west. In contrast, in the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* the focus of the first and second redactions is Magadha (Bihar); it is the Dekkhan when it comes to the third and fourth and, with the last redaction, it is once again Magadha" (2005, 78–79). On the other hand, the "literary framework" is "indicative of the area of the Kurupañcālas, as seen in the mention of the place of the prophecy as the Naimiṣa Forest" (73).
> Yet I do not think we should posit separate regions behind the redaction of the *vaṃśānucarita*'s two sections. As the Naimiṣa Forest setting

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certainly existed a *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* prior to this doctrine, a text which started six-eight generations after Parikṣit in the future tense and which remained unmodified in its kernel while being supplemented at its end. The later *yuga* doctrine is definitely in existence by the time of the final redaction in the early Gupta period" (2005, 73).

[30] See González-Reimann 2002, 223–25 on *parvan* rather than *yuga* being used for throws of the dice in the *Ṣaḍviṃśa Brāhmaṇa*.

suggests, the *Mahābhārata*, which could not have been a model for the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* section, could be a likely model for the setting of this "literary" framing of the prior segment on past kings, and thus a belated framing of the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* as well.[31] It would be sufficient to posit that at some point after the early part of the reign of Candragupta Maurya, familiarity with the *Mahābhārata* had simply intervened. It is now time to introduce some considerations raised by the *Yuga Purāṇa*.

C. *The* Yuga Purāṇa

John E. Mitchiner introduces the *Yuga Purāṇa*, a short unit of only one hundred and fifteen verses, as "the only Indian text" that "refers in any detail to the presence of Indo-Greeks in India," and as "important for its account of the four Yugas," being, he thinks, "probably the earliest account of the Yugas in Indian literature" (1986, vii). He argues that it was composed in Ujjain—"itself well-famed as a centre of *jyotiṣa*-studies" or astronomy and astrological sciences (79–80), probably in Brāhmī (31, cf. 36), around 60–25 B.C.E., with the later date the most likely (81; cf. 5, 11, 16). Mitchiner's main evidence is that the *Yuga Purāṇa* mentions Yavana and Śaka invasions, which continued down to 60 B.C.E., but not the Pahlava incursions into northwest India that probably did not occur until early in the first century C.E.[32] But this is a rather loose terminus. As we shall see, there could be other reasons why the *Yuga Purāṇa* stops its north Indian history without getting to the Pahlavas or Kuṣāṇas. Yet it would be difficult to argue that its

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[31] Cf. von Stietencron 2005, 76–78 with map, holding that the epics could not have served as a model for this material, since they are largely confined to the Solar, Lunar, Yādava, and Bhārgava lineages. Von Stietencron seems to consider it most likely that the material preceding the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* "*might* well have been prefixed to [it] at a later date" (78).

[32] See Mitchiner 1986, 81, mentioning Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian settlements of ca A.D. 25 (I quote Mitchiner 1986 throughout; the 2002 revised edition only reformats Mitchiner's main discussion and translation). Cf. Nattier 1991, ascribing the origin of the account of the end of the of the Buddhist *dharma* at Kauśāmbī to a period no earlier than the occurrence of actual invasions by Greeks, Śakas, and Parthians, whose three kings bear these peoples' names as ethnonyms: "the best current estimate is that the Parthians—the last of the three groups to arrive on the scene—invaded northwest India sometime during the first half of the first century C.E." (225, citing Frye 1983, 197–204). Cf. Nattier 1991, 152, n. 17: "Recent research into the chronology of the Saka, Parthian, and Kushan invasions has demonstrated that the earliest Kushan incursions into northwest India and adjacent territories were contemporary with those of the Parthians, and presumably took place during the first century C.E."—citing Frye 1983, 177–204.

composer ignored the Pahlavas or Kuṣāṇas, since the selected history he describes all precedes them.[33] I believe the *Yuga Purāṇa* may be a little bit later than 25 B.C.E., perhaps by half a century, and that it was probably composed during the period of Śaka consolidation between circa 25 B.C.E. and the rise of the Kuṣāṇas. Around 25 B.C.E.,[34] the Śakas established themselves as Kṣatrapas (Satraps), forming trade networks and points of power from the northwest to the central north India, and supporting mainly Buddhism.[35]

This so-called "*Purāṇa*" is found in an astronomical/astrological treatise called the *Gārgya-jyotiṣa*, and Mitchiner argues, I believe convincingly, that it is composed as part of this treatise, although one might consider the possibility that it was an added component. Its author, Garga or Gārgya, is a sage known in the *Mahābhārata*. In *Mahābhārata* Book 12, Garga is said to have become the "keeper of the year, the almanac maker (*sāṃvatsara*)" of the primal—and first favored—king [Pṛthu] Vainya.[36] In Book 9, Old (Vṛddha) Garga, after doing severe *tapas* at an auspicious *tīrtha* on the Sarasvatī River, is said to have obtained the "knowledge of time and of the passing-away (or, evil effects) of heavenly bodies (*jyotiṣāṃ ca vyatikramaḥ*)," and of favourable and unfavourable omens (*utpātā dāruṇāś caiva śubhāś ca*; 9.36.14–17). The association of the Sarasvatī with calendrical calculations is reminiscent of *yātsattra*s: journeys up the Sarasvatī to its source in conjunction with the winter solstice, and then back down. *Yātsattra*s, associated with Vrātyas, are first mentioned in the *Brāhmaṇa*s and are fairly frequently referenced in the *Mahābhārata*, with this citation a case in point: the listener is Kṛṣṇa's brother Baladeva, who is making just such a journey (Hiltebeitel 2001a, 120–26, 138–61). Along these lines, in Book 13, the *Anuśāsanaparvan*, Gārgya reports that once when

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[33] One cannot rule out the possibility that the *Yuga Purāṇa* could have been composed during these subsequent periods, but that is unlikely, given the seeming freshness of the *ex eventu* history it highlights.

[34] See Härtel 2007, 324: "Based on the archaeological data [at Sonkh, near Mathurā]. the Mitra period ends with Level 25 in about ± 25 B.C." Cf. 346.

[35] See Neelis 2007, 72–79, making the point that Brahmin texts produced xenologies identifying the Śakas as adharmic barbarians, even though "Śaka support of Buddhism did not preclude their support of other Indian religious traditions" (79 n. 100); 2008, 8–10, adding that "this support did not preclude the patronage of Brahmins, Jains, and other non-Buddhists."

[36] *Mbh* 12.59.117cd; Fitzgerald trans., 2004a, 310. He is just called Vainya in this context. Cf. Mitchiner 1986, 42.

Śiva was "pleased by my mental sacrifice, he gave [me] this great wondrous knowledge of time contained in sixty-four divisions on the bank of the Sarasvatī, as well as a thousand sons conversant with *brahman* like me, and a life-span for me and my sons of a million years."[37]

The mention in *Mahābhārata* Book 13 of sixty-four *aṅga*s is suggestive, since the *Gārgya-jyotiṣa* says of itself that it has sixty-four *aṅga*s, although it includes only sixty-two (Mitchiner 1986, 10). The *Yuga Purāṇa* is the *Gārgya-jyotiṣa*'s forty-first *aṅga*, coming in sequence after *aṅga* 39 on portents—"*Rāṣṭrotpātalakṣaṇa* (Signs and Portents of Calamity)," with twelve categories of signs and portents listed; and *aṅga* 40 on "*Tulākośa* (Weighing on a Balance)." And it is followed by *aṅga* 42 on "*Sarvabhūtaruta* (The Cries of all Creatures)"; *aṅga* 43 on "*Vastracheda* (Tears in Clothes)"; and *aṅga* 44 titled *Bṛhaspatipurāṇa* on Jupiter, one of the other two units called a "*purāṇa*" (Mitchiner 1986, 14–16, 108–10). The number sixty-four is intriguing as a cosmological and astronomical number, since, as Randy Kloetzli has discovered, it occurs both in Archimedes' "Sand-Reckoner" as the number 10^{63} or "one followed by 63 ciphers," by which one can count the grains of sand in the universe; and, in the *Visuddhimāgga*, as the total number of dissolutions that a world-system (Cakkavāla) undergoes before it turns to dust: that is, 8×7 dissolutions by water, 7×1 by fire, and a sixty-fourth by wind (Kloetzli 1983, 16, 115–22).[38] I do not think we need to date the *Anuśāsana Parvan* passage as later than the epic's other two because it refers to the same numerology as the treatise, and possibly, as Mitchiner maintains (1986, 10, 45), to the treatise itself. Mahadevan 2010 makes good new arguments against the *Anuśāsana Parvan* being absent from the archetypal *Mahābhārata* that would have been brought to the south. That would make the *Anuśāsana* passage possibly earlier or roughly contemporary with the *Yuga Purāṇa*. For if the *Anuśāsana* passage shows familiarity with a *Yuga Purāṇa* from the late first century B.C.E. (Mitchiner's proposed date), that would still be in time to date it within the time span I proposed for *Mahābhārata* composition near the beginning of this chapter: between 150 B.C.E.

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[37] Mbh 13.18.25–26: *catuḥṣaṣṭyaṅgam adadāt kālajñānam mahādbhutam/ sarasvatyās taṭe tuṣṭo manoyajñena pāṇḍava// tulyaṁ mama sahasraṁ tu sutānāṁ brahmavādinām/ āyuś caiva saputrasya saṁvatsaraśatāyutam//* Cf. Mitchiner's trans., 1986, 102. More fully, see Mitchiner 1986, 5, 7, 10–11, 16, 79, 101–3.

[38] "Expressed in other terms, 10^{63} is the 64th term of a series beginning with one and increasing by tens" (Kloetzli 1983, 122).

and the year 0 (Hiltebeitel 2001a, 18). On the other hand, the *Gārgya-jyotiṣa*'s claim of having sixty-four *aṅga*s when it has only sixty-two could suggest that it was striving for a number it never reached on the basis of Gargya's epic reputation. In any case, I see no reason to regard any of these passages to be late in the fashion that Mitchiner does in assigning them to the third century C.E. (1986, 5).

   In terms of overall structure, Mitchiner says the *Yuga Purāṇa*'s "main aim" is "to give an outline account of the principal peoples and events in each of the four *yuga*s or ages, as an illustration of what came to pass when *dharma* inevitably declined with the passing of time" (1986, 50). Mitchiner says it "is perhaps above all concerned with the preservation of *dharma*, or the proper ordering of life and society; and it laments the weaknesses of *dharma* and the adoption of *adhārmic* modes of life as the cycle of four Yugas progresses" (1986, 47). It is "primarily a Brahmin-oriented text…concerned with the proper maintenance of the four *varṇa*s or castes" (*śloka*s 15–19).[39] "It also decries the rise of Śūdras, Vṛṣalas (low-born men) and Pāṣaṇḍas (heretics) at the end of the Kali Yuga" who "usurp Brahmin roles" (*śl* 50–55). It opposes changing roles of women (*śl* 82–86); is anti-ascetic, despising low-born Bhikṣukas, both Hindu and Buddhist (*śl* 52); "and it also condemns men for abandoning an active role in favour of taking their ease as *gṛhastha*s or house-dwellers."[40]

   As Mitchiner recognizes, the events that characterize the end of the first three *yuga*s are also referred to in the *Mahābhārata*,[41] though that text does not refer to the first episode—the destruction of the demon Tāraka that ends the Kṛta Yuga—in connection with that *yuga*. But for the other two, Rāma Jāmadagnya's destruction of the Kṣatriyas thrice

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[39] Curiously, *śl*. 19 says that in the Tretā Yuga each class was intent upon its *svakarma*, but shifts the terms for the Dvāpara Yuga, in which everyone did their *svadharma* unquestioningly (*śl* 27) until the future (i.e., the *Mahābhārata* war) kicked in.

[40] And dressing up in red (*raktavāsa*s, a term again suggestive of either Hindu or Buddhist ascetics" (Mitchiner 1986, 47, citing *śl* 86; see 55 n. 112). See Bhattacharya 2008. The criticism of *gṛhastha*s strikes me as unusual, and since I am familiar with such a view mainly in certain Buddhist suttas, I would raise the possibility that it could reflect an awareness of wealthy estate-holding *mahāsāla* Brahmins in the Greater Magadha area. I raise this possibility in view of what Mitchiner will be saying about Puṣyamitra Śuṅga and what I will be calling Puṣyamitra's "Northern Midlands Alliance."

[41] He says "both in the Epics…and throughout the Purāṇas" (1986, 50), implying that these texts would develop their accounts after the *Yuga Purāṇa*. But I emphasize the *Mahābhārata*, since I believe it to be earlier than the *Yuga Purāṇa*. As to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Mitchiner makes the interesting observation that the *Yuga Purāṇa* ignores "the entire *Ramayaṇa* tradition" (1986, 45).

seven times at the transition from the Tretā to the Dvāpara Yuga, and the *Mahābhārata* war with the transition from the Dvāpara to the Kali Yuga, the *Mahābhārata* does make the correlations—albeit inconsistently, yet also right near its beginning in both cases: for Rāma Jāmadagnya at the Tretā-to-Dvāpara juncture (*Mbh* 1.2.3) and for the *Mahābhārata* war at the Dvāpara-to-Kali juncture (1.2.9)—all already prefaced as past history, *itihāsa*. What is striking is that the *Yuga Purāṇa* shifts from past to future tense right with the *Mahābhārata* war (Mitchiner 1986, 35, 50), making that war and the end of the Dvāpara Yuga a prophesy no less than the whole course of the Kali Yuga that follows it. Keeping in mind that Mitchiner brings up these matters under what he calls the *Yuga Purāṇa*'s "main aim," I will now begin to talk about the *telos* of that text.[42] According to Mitchiner, the *Yuga Purāṇa* is "selective" in two ways.

First, it does not give complete genealogies: that is, it is not focused on an epic's dynasty. Mitchiner thinks this would reflect a "fairly early stage in the formulation of the Epic and Purāṇic genealogical tradition, which was only subsequently developed into the presentation of complete genealogical lists. The *Yuga-Purāṇa* has clearly not derived its account…from any other extant literary sources or from the main Epic and Purāṇic tradition" (1986, 50). Yes and no. As Mitchiner wants to maintain here, the *Yuga Purāṇa* shows unique and original features in the events and personages it mentions. But there is no merit to his idea that it would reflect an "early stage" of the epico-purāṇic genealogical tradition. It simply lacks a genealogical telos. More than this, as von Stietencron shows, the royal genealogies of the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* are probably earlier than both the *Yuga Purāṇa* and the epics.

The second area of selectivity gets us to some of the ways the *Yuga Purāṇa* shows unique and original features, including the futurity of the *Mahābhārata*. Says Mitchiner, it is neither "a complete" nor "fully consecutive catalogue of events and characters, but rather presents…certain select and prominent occurrences: it is therefore impossible to reconstruct, from this account alone, anything more than an outline chronology for the people and events described" (1986, 50–51). Mitchiner is speaking here mainly about what the *Yuga Purāṇa* presents as late "people and events" of the Kali Yuga, which I will get to

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[42] One would like to know how and whether this aim is related to the aim of *Gārgya-jyotiṣa*.

shortly. The only outline chronology it is really interested in, however, is that of the four *yugas*, and mainly, beginning with the *Mahābhārata*, in the future, as prophesy. Considering what little it has to say about what occurs before the *Mahābhārata* in the past, one could say it is less interested in constructing history than the *Mahābhārata* itself! Indeed, it calls itself a *purāṇa*, and does not use the term *itihāsa*.

C.1. *The* Yuga Purāṇa *and* Yugas *in the* Mahābhārata

Now Mitchiner maintains that the *Yuga Purāṇa* would be "probably the earliest account of the Yugas in Indian literature" (1986, vii; cf. 35), but on this point his explanation is unconvincing. For Mitchiner, the *Yuga Purāṇa*'s "phrasing" of "its accounts of the *Mahābhārata* war and the reign of Janamejaya Parīkṣit also in the future tense…suggests" that its "account was composed before such a convention of the precise dividing-point between past and future time became widely established" (35). Dividing lines between past and future, however, are more flexible than the one between the Dvāpara and Kali Yuga, on which the *Yuga Purāṇa* simply follows the *Mahābhārata*. As we have seen, so does the *Vaṃśānucarita*, once its second section, the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa*, begins the future during the reign of the Pāṇḍava descendant Adhisīmakṛṣṇa. Indeed, the *Mahābhārata* probably establishes the flexibility of this convention when Mārkaṇḍeya shifts to the future tense to describe the end of the Kali Yuga.[43] Mitchiner overlooks that *Yuga Purāṇa* verses 28–39 are a kind of futuristic *Mahābhārata* digest,[44] and clearly show that some kind of *Mahābhārata*—almost certainly one with *yugas*—is older than the *Yuga Purāṇa*:[45]

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[43] *Mbh* 3.188.10 ff. See Hiltebeitel 2005b, 125, n. 41.

[44] It will be noted that the *Yuga Purāṇa* describes a somewhat rough-edged *Mahābhārata* that may reflect popular conceptions of it, e.g., in some of the epic names cited, and in the faulting of the war to Draupadī-Kṛṣṇā (see below, *śl* 36). One might think of relating this to what Mitchiner calls the "hybrid" features of its Sanskrit (1986, 20–36).

[45] Cf. González-Reimann 2002, 142–43, maintaining that "a text like the *Yuga Purāṇa*" could have worked out the *Mahābhārata*'s *yuga* chronology before the epic did so itself, and that the epic "only later incorporated" it. Yet he acknowledges that "The exact relationship between the *Yuga Purāṇa* and the Epic is difficult to ascertain."

28. And at the end of that Yuga, the earth will go to destruction; men, having come under the control of Time, will cook [for] their own bodies (*tasyāpi ca yugasyāṃte medavī kṣayameṣyati/ narāspakṣaṃti svāndehān kālasya vaśamāgatāḥ*).

29. Keśava (Viṣṇu) will arise at the end of the Dvāpara, in order to destroy horses and elephants, princes and men (*hayānāṃ ca gajānaṃ ca pārthivānāṃ nṛṇāṃ tathā/ vadhārtham dvāparasyāṃte samutpatsyati keśavaḥ*):

30. [he will be] four-armed, of great valour, bearing the conch, disc, and mace: [and he will be] called Vāsudeva, the strong one, dressed in yellow clothes (*caturbāhurmahavīryaḥ śaṃkhacakragadādharaḥ/ vāsudeva iti khyātaḥ pītāmbaradharo balī*).[46]

31. Then, resembling Kailāsa, wearing a garland of flowers [and] bearing the plough a weapon, there will arise Yudhiṣṭhira[47]—the excellent king of the Pāṇḍavas—for the purpose of slaughter at the end of the Dvāpara, together with [his] four brothers (*tataḥ kailāsasaṃkāśo vanamālī halāyudhaḥ/ pāṇḍavānāṃ varo rājā bhaviṣyati yudhiṣṭhiraḥ/ vadhārthaṃ dvāparasyāṃte caturbhir bhrātṛbhiḥ saha*).

32. [namely] both Bhīmasena the son of Vāyu, and of severe tapas, and the two brothers, Nakula and Sahadeva, born of the Aśvins (*vāyavyo bhīmasenaśca phālgunaśca mahātapāḥ/ nakulaḥ sahadevaśca bhrātarāv aśvinātmajau*).

33. Also Bhīṣma, Droṇa and others, and the prince Dhṛṣṭadyumna and Karṇa, the king of Aṅga, together with Aśvatthāman the invincible (*bhīṣmadroṇādayaścaiva dhṛṣṭadyumaśca pārthivaḥ/ aṅgarājastathā karṇaḥ sāśvatthāmā ca durjayaḥ*).

34. Devaka and Śatadhanvan, and Dāruka the illustrious—they will arise at the end of the Yuga, in order to protect the world of men (*devakaḥ śatadhanvā ca dārukasya mahāyaśaḥ/ rakṣārthaṃ naralokasya utpatsyaṃti yugakṣaye*).

35. So too Śakuni and Dantavaktra, and Śiśupāla the haughty: together with Śalya, Rukmi, Jarāsaṃdha, Kṛtavarman [and] Jayadratha (*śakunir-daṃtavaktraśca śiśupālaśca garvitaḥ/ śalyo rukmir jarāsaṃdhaḥ kṛtavarmā jayadrathaḥ*).

36. The cause [of strife] of these might[y] kings will be Kṛṣṇā, the daughter of Drupada: [and] the earth will go[48] to her destruction (*eteṣāmapi vīrāṇāṃ rājñāṃ heturbhaviṣyati/ drupadasya sutā kṛṣṇā dehāṃtaragatā mahī*).

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[46] Mitchiner observes the sectarian tone of these two verses on Kṛṣṇa, but correctly observes that with its overall narration by Śiva, the *Yuga Purāṇa* "has no strong sectarian bias" (1986, 46–47).

[47] As Mitchiner 1986, 46, 90 n. 19 indicates, Yudhiṣṭhira's description seems to be borrowed from Balarāma.

[48] Mitchiner 1986, 90 n. 20: lit. "went."

37. Then, when the destruction of men has occurred and the circle of kings has ended, there will be the fourth [and] final Yuga called Kali (*tato narakṣaye vṛtte praśāṃte nṛpamaṇḍale/ bhaviṣyati kalirnāma caturthaṃ paścimaṃ yugaṃ*).

38. Then at the start of the Kali Yuga, Janamejaya Pārīkṣit will be born, illustrious and celebrated on the earth—there is no doubt (*tataḥ kaliyugasyādau pārīkṣij-janamejayaḥ/ pṛthivyāṃ prathitaḥ śrīmānutpatsyati na saṃśayaḥ*).

39. And that king will cause a quarrel with the Twice-born: [49] his anger for his insulted wife[50] having come under the power of time (*so 'pi rājā dvijaiḥ sārdhaṃ virodhamupadhāsyati/ dāraviprakṛtāmarṣaḥ kālasya vaśamāgataḥ*). (Mitchiner 1986, 90 trans.; xi–xv text)

Why would the *Yuga Purāṇa* innovate in this way by placing the *Mahābhārata* war in the future? All we need to know for a reasonable answer is that the *Yuga Purāṇa* is part of an astrological text and that its frame story makes the whole unit a narrative by Śiva to his son Skanda, the general of the gods. The shift shows the power of this text to predict the *Mahābhārata* astronomically, not its priority to the *Mahābhārata*.[51] Śiva, as it were, scoops Mārkaṇḍeya and Vyāsa (who

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[49] See Mitchiner 1986, 51–52 on Janamejaya (*śl* 37–39): the *Yuga Purāṇa* knows the story of his killing a Brahmin and regaining favor after an Aśvamedha, citing *Mbh* 12.146–8! See Fitzgerald 2004a, 786 n. to *Mbh* 12.146.3, joining attempts to explain away Yudhiṣṭhira's hearing from Bhīṣma about their as-yet-unborn descendents Parikṣit and Janamejaya (called "Bhārata" [147.20d]). Fitzgerald's explanation is that "more likely…the story originated apart from the *MBh*…and was inserted…relatively late. The entire [*Āpaddharma*] seems to be significantly later than at least the first thirty-five chapters of…the *rājadharma*." But the *Yuga Purāṇa* most likely knows it from the *Mbh*, and at a quite early time. For criticism of Fitzgerald's staggering of the four anthologies of the *Śānti-* and *Anuśāsana-Parvan*s, see chapters 6 and 12 below, and Hiltebeitel 2006c.

[50] The *Mbh* does not tell of this; Mitchiner (1986, 51) cites *Harivaṃśa* 118.11–39, which tells that Janamejaya blamed the priests for letting Indra enter the body of the horse to have intercourse with his wife! On epic sensitivities concerning such Aśvamedha scenes, see chapters 8 and 9 below. In the *Mbh*, before Janamejaya is instructed to perform the Aśvamedha, he is given the option of what amounts to an archaic *yātsattra* by which he would traverse the Sarasvatī and Dṛṣadvatī Rivers (*Mbh* 12.248.10–13). On *yātsattra*s in the *Mbh*, see Hiltebeitel 2001a, 130–55 and above (section C) on "Old Garga's" auspicious *tīrtha* on the Sarasvatī.

[51] I suspect that in according the four *yuga*s, without ever defining how long they each last (González-Reimann 2002, 98), a decimally defined relation in terms of life spans of 100,000 years in the Kṛta, 10,000 in the Tretā, 1,000 in the Dvāpara, "and (by implication) 100 years in the Kali" (Mitchiner 2002, 43), with the length of a *kalpa* given as 10,000,000 years (*śls* 8, 21, 24, 115), the *Yuga Purāṇa* shows not a priority to the epic, with its 4–3–2–1 proportion of *yuga*-durations, but either a passing reference to some things the epics say about long-lived persons in long-ago times, or more likely an interpretation befitting the *Gārgya-jyotiṣa*'s interest in astronomical calculations. For

also has a prophetic side)[52] to foretell the *Mahābhārata* as the entrée to the Kali Yuga, which from its beginning thus becomes a somewhat redemptive tale. Moreover, the text shows its teleological hand by moving directly from its prophesy of the *Mahābhārata* to more recent persons and events of the late Kali Yuga. From the twelve verses on the *Mahābhārata* and King Janamejaya, the next personage, mentioned, immediately, is the Magadha king Udāyin, of the pre-Nanda Śiśunāgas, and his founding of the new Magadha capital at Pāṭaliputra (*śl* 40–43)![53] The *telos* of the *Yuga Purāṇa* will thus lie in Śiva's predictions connecting the *Mahābhārata* with certain persons, events, *and places* of the late Kali Yuga.

Now as I have already mentioned, Mitchiner argues that the *Yuga Purāṇa* was probably composed not in Magadha but in Ujjain. I believe he is right to argue that it features a northwestern/north-central Indian perspective rather than what we can now call a Greater Magadhan northeastern one, which makes it interesting to compare with the Greater Magadhan outlook of the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa*. Actually, the *Yuga Purāṇa* prognosticates about three broad regions, which we may call Greater Magadha, the Northern Midlands (for what I have just called the northwestern/north-central area), and the Deccan or South—including the Kāverī River basin (1986, 75–79 with map facing 78). As already indicated, the *Yuga Purāṇa* sketches out its program

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instance, Randy Kloetzli informs me that Berossos, a 3rd century B.C.E. Chaldean priest of Bel (Marduk) who interpreted Babylonian learning to the Greeks, used a sexagesimal system in which "the ten kings of the ante-diluvian period ruled for a total of 120 *saroi* (one *saros* = 3,600 years = 1,0,0 in base 60 notation) for a total of 432,000 years (2,0,0,0 in base 60 notation) said to be the duration of the Purāṇic Kali yuga as well" (e-mail, June 2009). Cf. Pingree 1963, 238; 1990, 275; indeed one of Pingree's points in these articles is the creativity of Indian "astronomical *yuga*" theories, which are only loosely adjusted to epico-purāṇic ones. Āryabhaṭa, for instance, made the *yuga*s' lengths equal (1963, 239). Cf. Mitchiner 1986, 15.

[52] See most memorably *Mbh* 1.119.6–8, his parting words to his mother, who will depart with the two sisters with whom, at her bidding, he sired the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas' fathers: "The times of happiness are past and times of trouble lie ahead. The days grow worse every new tomorrow, earth herself is aging. A dreadful time is at hand, confounded by much witchery, beset by many vices, when all the acts and manners of the Law shall be soiled. Go now, leave it all. Yoke yourself and live in the wilderness of austerities, lest you must witness the ruination of your own dynasty" (van Buitenen 1973, 64).

[53] As indicated above, the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa* traces Magadha expansionism to Udāyin. See Mitchiner 1986, 52–53: Udāyin, who bears epithet *śiśunāgātmaja*, was perhaps the successor of Ajātaśatru, ca. 460 B.C.E.; "for the author of the *Yuga-Purāṇa*," the founding "constituted a major event in the Kali Yuga."

highly selectively, mentioning events and personages found nowhere else in the historical record: among them, it is "the only Indian text" that "refers in any detail to the presence of Indo-Greeks in India."[54] I limit myself to two featured themes: 1. the way that the *Yuga Purāṇa* links its singular account of the Indo-Greeks in India with what I have referred to as Puṣyamitra's Northern Midlands Alliance; and 2. the *Yuga Purāṇa*'s peculiar notion of safe havens in the south. Be it noted that the *Yuga Purāṇa* interprets both these themes redemptively: after *adharmic* rule makes way for the Greek and Śaka invasions, both incursions, says Śiva, will have redemptive outcomes, which will include the invaders going back home.

C.2. *The Greek Incursion and the Northern Midlands Alliance*

The first incursion, then, is by the Greeks into Pāṭaliputra. From Udāyin's founding of that Magadhan capital, the *Yuga Purāṇa* turns immediately to a late Mauryan king there named Śāliśūka (Mitchiner dates his ascent to about 205 B.C.E.), whose *adharmic* rule (*śl* 44–46; 1986, 91) sets the stage. The *Yuga Purāṇa* disparages Śāliśūka as "an oppressor of his own kingdom" (*śl* 45), and Mitchiner takes him to display the non-Brahmanical preferences of the late Mauryas.[55] As Mitchiner says, it is not necessarily a continuous chronology from Śāliśūka to the Yavana incursion, but since the account goes on to speak of Śuṅga kings, it would appear that the incursion would not be much later than Śāliśūka. We now meet our Northern Midlands

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[54] Mitchiner 1986, 3, cited above, attempts to tie in these events with Greek presences in central and eastern India in inscriptions and with the history of Demetrios and Khāravela (55–58). Fitzgerald 2007, at the end of a section titled "The General Historical Setting of the *Mahābhārata*," convincingly dates Khāravela later than Mitchiner and an old consensus, promoting him to "the middle of the first c. B.C.E.," but he makes a rather fantastic attempt to imagine this Jaina Cedi king "or a clansman" to have had a "possible role in sponsoring the *Mahābhārata*" (n. 12). Khāravela ruled from Kaliṅga (Orissa), on which the *Mahābhārata* has many negative things to say (see Salomon 1978; Biardeau 2002, 1:298; 2:54, 756–57; Hiltebeitel 2005b, 118–21).

[55] Purāṇic sources list him as a successor of Aśoka who could have ascended "shortly before 200 B.C." Cf. Thapar 1998, 183, 191, taking him from purāṇic sources to be the fourth-to-last Maurya, and of a bad reputation also in the *Gārgasaṃhitā*. The *Yuga Purāṇa*'s last word on him is that "he will, in delusion, cause his oldest brother to establish a righteous [person] called Vijaya (*vijayaṃ nāma dhārmikam*." (*śl* 46), which Mitchiner says may be a negative-ironic twist on Aśoka's *dharmavijaya* or "conquest through righteousness" (1986, 52–55, 91 and n. 26). Proposing another interpretation linked with Jainism, see Bhattachrarya 2008.

Alliance of Greek, Mathurā, and Pañcāla forces, which pass through Sāketa (Ayodhyā) on the way to Pāṭaliputra, where they tear down the fort and leave the lands desolate. After this, however, the Yavanas do not remain in "Madhyadeśa,"[56] as war will break out in their own realm (1986, 55–58; *śl* 47–48, 56–57; 91–92). Such a Yavana incursion in alliance with Pañcāla and Mathurā after the adharmic rule of Śāliśūka is, according to Mitchiner, most conceivable "around 190 B.C.E.: a period which saw…the secession of Sogdiana in the Indo-Greek realm, which would doubtless have prompted the return of any Indo-Greek expeditionary force to their own realm [in Bactria];[57] and a period which also witnessed the final downfall of the Mauryas and the emergence of the new Śuṅga dynasty under Puṣyamitra in India" in circa 187 B.C.E. (1986, 58). Such a course of events may find corroboration in the recent discovery that a Greek era was dated back to 186/85 B.C.E.[58]

Yet the overthrow of the last Maurya Bṛhadratha by his Brahmin general Puṣyamitra Śuṅga goes unmentioned in the *Yuga Purāṇa*, and of the two, only Puṣyamitra seems to be named—as one of four kings who rules at Pāṭaliputra (Mitchiner 1986, 63). Bronkhorst associates the *Yuga Purāṇa*'s account of the Greeks' part in this invasion with the way some other sources represent them as provoking fear, or as a threat to the order of Brahmanical society (2007, 359). But note Śiva's emphasis on their retreat. In any case, Mitchiner shows a way to read these events as background to what I am calling the text's redemptive pattern. Says Mitchiner, "the confusion wrought by the advent of a joint Yavana-Pañcāla-Māthura force may have provided the opportunity for Puṣyamitra to overthrow the last Maurya king and establish his own dynasty.... [T]o judge from [Puṣyamitra's] name, it is quite possible that he himself may have come from the then Maurya domains of Pañcāla or Mathurā, where many of the subsequent 'Mitra' kings are known to have ruled" (1986, 58–59). Mitchiner goes

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[56] See Mitchiner 1986, 56: "'Madhyadeśa' seems to be intended here in the sense found also in Buddhist works, denoting the region up to or beyond Kajaṅgala" (in southeast Bihar, "and even Puṇḍra." Cf. 92, n. 33; Rhys Davids 1904; Bronkhorst 2007, 1–4.

[57] Mitchiner narrows this down from a starting period of circa 205–190 during the overlapping reigns of Euthydemos and Demetrios as co-regents in Bactria, and the span from circa 190–171 when Demetrios became supreme ruler.

[58] I thank Jason Neelis for making this point (see above, n. 1). On the inscriptional evidence for this Indo-Greek era, see Salomon 2005, 2007, 268; Bracey 2005; Mac Dowell 2007, 113; Neelis 2007, 70 n. 63.

on to enrich this hypothesis with a plot: "Seen in this light, therefore, we may suppose that the Pañcālas and Māthuras—seeking to hasten the fall of a rapidly weakening Maurya empire and to establish their own independence [which, as shall be mentioned, they achieved in their independent minting of coins]—enlisted the help of a Yavana contingent and proceeded to the Maurya capital to sound the death-knell of that dynasty. If the 'Mitra' Puṣyamitra was indeed of Pañcāla or Māthura origin, the advent of this force—comprised of many of his compatriots—would have provided him with an ideal opportunity to dispose of his Maurya master and to have himself proclaimed as ruler" (1986, 59; my insertion).

Mitchiner goes on to propose that the seven kings of Sāketa, whom the *Yuga Purāṇa* mentions next without names or details (*śl* 58–59), serve not only to take us down to the conditions that presage the next invasion by the Śakas, but might include descendants of Puṣyamitra as rulers of Kosala, which bordered on Pañcāla (1986, 59). Whatever we make of Mitchiner historical reconstruction, we are left with the question of why the *Yuga Purāṇa* features a Yavana-Pañcāla-Mathurā coalition in a destruction of the Magadha capital, to which Mitchiner's solution offers a cogent answer. Along the same lines, why, according to the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*, should a king, who is given no particular location for his capital, be urged to deploy soldiers "from the lands of the Kurus, Matsyas, Pañcālas, and Śūrasenas" on his front lines when he goes to battle (*Mānava Dharmaśāstra* 7.193)? With the Śūrasenas being from Mathurā, it is much the same folk. The recommendation would likely reflect that these lands yield loyal soldiers from the Mid-lands, as they are said to have done in the *Mahābhārata* war.

Now if the *Yuga Purāṇa* does not mention Puṣyamitra Śuṅga in connection with the overthrow of the Mauryas, it probably does refer to him under the name of Puṣpaka—identifying him as the cofounder and then sole ruler of the kings called Agniveśyas (Mitchiner 1986, 3, 75, 93 *śl* 71–72)—that is, Śuṅga kings[59] whom Mitchiner also calls the "the 'Mitra' kings" with reference to their coinage. Not known by either

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[59] *Śl* 61, 70c-81. Says Mitchiner (1986, 62), the "name is apparently given to both the dynasty as a whole (*śloka* 62) and also to one of its prominent members, who is nonetheless not its founder (*śloka*s 79–80)." It is, however, not clear that the name pertains to the whole line. The uncertainty of the chronology is compounded by the mention before this (*śl* 60 and 65–70b) of a low-born ruler named Āmrāṭa, who takes over Pāṭaliputra after an uprising. Mitchiner suggests he may be Khāravela (1986, 60–62), on whom see Fitzgerald 2007 and n. 54 above.

name from other sources, they are said to have ruled prosperously at least for a while in Pāṭaliputra (a.k.a. Puṣpapura), but also elsewhere. Attention thus switches to a land called Bhadrayaka or Bhadrapaka, otherwise unknown, where Agnimitra, possibly as a Śuṅga viceroy,[60] and Agniveśya, probably another Śuṅga, may have ruled. Agniveśya is said to have fought the Savaras there, which would suggest the Vindhyas (Mitchiner 1986, 62–63).

Looking at coins found from the Śuṅga period, Mitchiner remarks on the rise of dynasties across northern India that issued anonymous silver and copper punch-marked coins first from Pāṭaliputra, then briefly at Mathurā, and subsequently from mints in Vidiśā, Ujjain, and Eran. In these circumstances, the central areas of Mathurā, Pañcāla, Kosala, and Kauśāmbī (capital of Vatsa)[61] take prominence, while "in western India and the Panjab, a number of small states and tribes asserted their independence and issued coins," including the Kurus, Purus, Vṛṣṇis, and Yaudheyas. But there were also coins of "further 'Mitra' kings—including Indramitra" found at Pāṭaliputra (1986, 63–64). With these so-called Agniveśya or "'Mitra' kings," we thus find a proliferation of "little kingdoms," reminding us how that ideal has flourished over the centuries in Indian martial culture, and interestingly—given the early names Agnimitra and Agniveśya—flourished under the name and mythology of Agnikula or Agnivaṃśa Kṣatriyas or Rājpūts. That is, it is used for kings, some of them of Brahmin extraction, who do not trace their descent in the Lunar or Solar dynasties made normative in the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* respectively (see Hiltebeitel 1999a, 211–363, 439–75; 1999b). One feature of the *Yuga Purāṇa*'s redemptive history could thus be called the little kingdomization of Pāṭaliputra as preferable to rule there by the imperial Nandas or Mauryas. In the post-Maurya period and before the rise of the Śaka Kṣatrapas (Satraps) and Kuṣāṇas, the Mitras were little kings, the biggest being Puṣyamitra. Says Mitchiner, "We might even go so far as to suggest that Puṣyamitra

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[60] Agnimitra falls in love with a beautiful girl of the land in Kālidāsa's *Mālavikāgnimitra*, wherein he is a viceroy of Puṣyamitra in Vidiśā, after being a co-ruler with him at the beginning of his reign (Mitchiner 1986, 63). Mitchiner notes that an astronomical feature of his description in the *Yuga Purāṇa* may assign the beginning of his viceroyalty in Vidiśā to 183 B.C.E. (66).

[61] Kauśāmbī (see n. 32 above) is the royal city at stake in the comparable and probably later north Indian Buddhist prophesies of the end of the *dharma*, which usually mention the Greeks, Śakas, *and* Pahlavas; see Nattier 1991; Hiltebeitel forthcoming, chapter 6.

was instrumental in establishing certain viceroys or regents in such regions as Kosala, Pañcāla and Mathurā who—or whose successors—thereafter asserted their own independence." The Śuṅgas quickly lost power in northern India,[62] the focus of power shifting to "Malwa, centered on the three cities of Vidiśā, Eran and Ujjain"—where Mitchiner posits that the *Yuga Purāṇa* would have been written (65).

Meanwhile, in around 110 B.C.E. and close to Vidiśā, something of this Śuṅga period Northern Midlands Alliance with the Greeks could still have inspired the Indo-Greek ambassador Heliodorus to inscribe his Vaiṣṇava sentiments on the famous Besnagar Garuḍa Pillar in a *śloka* verse similar to one in the *Mahābhārata* (see Brockington 1998, 134; Witzel 2005, 62, 64, 66).

C.3. *The Śaka Invasion and the Southern Safe Havens*

It must be admitted that to call this amorcellization of kingship redemptive is to play into a dead-end historiography. It may be better than life under the Nandas or Mauryas, but it is going nowhere. The basic pattern thus repeats itself. Following an interlude on evil conduct of men and women, another bad ruler, King Satuvara (*śl* 87)—Mitchiner thinks he is probably Śātavāhana or one of the early Śātavāhana kings (1986, 66–67)—rules for ten years to set the stage for the Śaka invasion, which is mentioned in the next verses (*śl* 88–89), though it is also mentioned earlier (*śl* 62–64). This discontinuous chronology would take us down to about 60 B.C.E. According to the *Yuga Purāṇa*, a Śaka king plunders and destroys until he is killed by a Kaliṅga king and a group of Sabalas, which for Mitchiner again suggests a Vindhya location, now one close enough to Ujjain. Thereafter the Śakas, like the Greeks, return to their own city (1986, 68).

Although the *Purāṇas* do not mention any Śaka incursion, the story is related in the cycle that launches the Vikrama era, which was

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[62] See Härtel 2007, 346, finding it "amply clear that the Śuṅgas did not inherit the Mauryan empire in its entirety; various small principalities had cropped up in the various parts of the Mauryan empire along with the coup d'etat of Puṣyamitra or soon after it." "The majority of historians agree on dating the beginning of the Local States of Northern India to the second or later half of the second century B.C., taking for granted the disintegration of the Śuṅga empire soon after Puṣyamitra."

adopted by the Guptas and Cālukyas.[63] The *Yuga Purāṇa*'s redemptive predictions now draw to their climax with a description of what Mitchiner calls "Regions in Which Men Will Survive and Prosper" (1986, 75–76; *śl* 98–113). As he indicates, the area in question lies "between the Vindhyas and the river Krishna (modern western and central Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra), together with the southern part of the eastern Ghats in Orissa, and the area around the river Kāverī in Tamil Nadu" (75). As Mitchiner maps the locations (facing p. 78), he must set the Kāverī area apart, but all the rest are contiguous, and he takes them to imply a territory enjoying "renewed prosperity" under the Śātavāhana empire (75–76). Noting the *Yuga Purāṇa*'s prognostic emphasis, Mitchiner takes it that its author, who he says is "well acquainted on the one hand with various regions of northern India—which are mentioned in the context of the Kali Yuga," now mentions these "survival regions for the start of a new (Kṛta) Yuga" (79): "clearly linking his account of the Yugas to historical events," this author "believes that, shortly after the advent of the Śakas, the Kali Yuga had come to an end; and that after an interval of harsh conditions, a new Kṛta Yuga was beginning to dawn—an event which he evidently believed was occurring at his own time of writing" (82).[64] Mitchiner suggests that others in Ujjain would have shared this view and its "optimism" in around 25 B.C.E., and that this would "explain why the era of 58 B.C.—that was almost certainly founded by [the Indo-Scythian king] Azes[65]—came to be called the Kṛta Yuga when it was subsequently adopted by the inhabitants of Ujjain and Malwa" (82).

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[63] Mitchiner 1986, 71; cf. 74–75 offering a "summarized reconstruction" of the expulsion of the Śakas from Ujjain, leading to the founding of the era. On the story cycle, see Brown 1933.

[64] Cf. Mitchiner 1990, 321: After the Śakas' "relatively brief plundering foray," "the *Yuga Purāṇa* describes the end of the Kali Yuga and the dawn of a new Kṛta Yuga."

[65] The equation of the Azes and Vikrama eras is recently disputed in Bracey 2005 based on an inscription dated in two eras, a Greek and Azes era; he concludes: "The Azes era cannot be dated later than 30 B.C. or earlier than 80 B.C." Cf. Cribb 2005. See also González-Reimann 2002, 99; Hiltebeitel 1999a, 263–64: a probably fictional Vikramāditya is credited with founding an era in 58 or 57 B.C.E. that may have Scytho-Parthian origins in eastern Iran. Śālivāhana, linked with the Śaka era that seems actually to mark the beginning of Kuṣāṇa rule in 78 C.E., is probably a personification of the Śātavāhanas (based in Paithan on the Godavari River near Aurangabad in Maharashtra, but with origins in Andhra and north Kanara). He seems to draw his profile especially from the first dynast Simuka-Śātavāhana (mid-first century B.C.E.) and Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi (ca. 106–30 C.E.) who defeated a branch of Śakas.

This credulity of the people of Ujjain twenty-five years before the common era might, however, strike us as rather contrived. The *Yuga Purāṇa* never makes it explicit that its closing events, involving what Mitchiner calls the "Regions in Which Men Will Survive and Prosper," have anything to do with the Kṛta Yuga: a point acknowledged by González-Reimann, who nonetheless says that "the text implies that at that time, and in those places, a new Kṛta Yuga will commence" (2002, 99).[66] Mitchiner is also misleading when he says men will "prosper" in these regions due to what he calls "renewed prosperity" (75–76, 82) under the Śātavāhana empire. They are better named by González-Reimann, who calls them "safe havens" (2002, 99)—but in troubled times. Although as we shall see, the safe havens sequence repeatedly uses words for "the end of the *yuga*," it never uses the term Kṛta Yuga, and, I will argue, is not describing one as imminent or, much less, as a "realized eschatology." Here I must disagree not only with Mitchiner but with González-Reimann, who launches his discussion of the *Yuga Purāṇa* with the comment that, "At some point in the last centuries B.C.E., and the early centuries C.E., there must have been real expectations that Kali would end in the foreseeable future" (2002, 97–98; cf. 144).[67] I believe Mitchiner is again overstating his case to argue for the priority of the *Yuga Purāṇa*'s *yuga* skein to that of the *Mahābhārata*. Mitchiner attempts to make capital of the fact that the *Yuga Purāṇa* does not mention the myth of Kalki, and takes the *Mahābhārata*'s prophetic account of that myth by Mārkaṇḍeya—in which Mitchiner finds similarities to the *Yuga Purāṇa* account, and one identical line[68]—to

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[66] See similarly Bhattacharya 2008: The *Yuga Purāṇa* "is the only text to speak of 12 regions (*maṇḍala*s) that are peopled after the end of the yuga. It is unique in not terming these survivors as *mleccha*s." Bhattacharya seems to miss the point that these havens would be above all for Brahmins. Further, "For the *Yuga Purāṇa*, the end of the Kali Yuga comes with the invasion of the Shakas, *followed* by drought...."

[67] With his view that the *Mahābhārata* accreted over many centuries, González-Reimann (2002 and 2006), makes his project the working out a long developmental logic of the *yuga* concept, from "mere metaphor" and "simple story" to systematic complexities; but he takes a more restricted, if still vague, view of Vaiṣṇavism, suggesting that the beginnings of its possible impact upon the epic would have begun "[a]round the beginning of the common era" (2006, 227). For my views on this matter, see Hiltebeitel 2001a, 20–31, and chapters 3, 7, 11, and 12 of this volume.

[68] Mitchiner 1986, 38: *Yuga Purāṇa* śl 55ab = *Mbh* 3.186.33cd: *bhovādinas tathā śūdrā brāhmaṇāś cāryavadinaḥ*. Van Buitinen 1975, 587 translates, "The serfs will say 'Hey you!', the brahmins will say 'Pray sir!'" It looks to be simply proverbial. Mitchiner says the *Mahābhārata* borrows this line (42). But why just a line?

be later.[69] But an omission is not a sufficient reason to date one text before the other. We are, in other words, back to the question of the redemptive telos of the *Yuga Purāṇa*, which is obviously—to begin with—just simply different from that of the *Mahābhārata*'s myth of Kalki. To appreciate the distinctiveness of the *Yuga Purāṇa*'s redemptive telos, we must consider how it uses the notion of "the end of the *yuga*" in relation to the account of the safe havens that closes Śiva's prophesy to Skanda.

The *Yuga Purāṇa* refers to "the end of the *yuga*" in its run-up to the description of the safe havens, first to describe the destructive situation: "there will be an end of the Yuga, the destruction of all living beings (*bhaviṣyati yugasyāntam sarvaprāṇivināśanam*)" (Mitchiner 1986, 95, *śl* 91cd). There are then three successive verses that end in *yugakṣaye*, to describe the good and the wicked who will "remain at the end [or destruction] of the *yuga*." The good are those of "calmness, patience and self-restraint" (*śamakṣamadamās*; *śl* 95c) and "those who maintain firmness" (*dhairyam*; *śl* 97c). But the wicked, those "dear to Kali who ever cause disbelief" (*nāstikyam…kalipriyam*), will also remain at the end of the *yuga* (*yugakṣaye*) (*śl* 96). Such stock usages of "at the end of the *yuga*" for a bad time—what González-Reimann likes to call a "mere metaphor" (2002, 77)—are not sufficient to establish that a Kṛta Yuga follows.

The same compound, *yugakṣaye*, is then used at the end of the two transitional verses that describe the "creation" of the twelve safe havens (*dvādaśamaṇḍalaḥ*):

> 98. When the world has been afflicted with famine and has become a terrible fire, [then] from regard for the welfare of living beings, twelve regions were [i.e., will be] created (*durbhikṣābhyāhate loke agnibhūte sudaruṇe/avekṣyartham prāṇiṇām sṛṣṭā dvādaśamaṇḍalaḥ*).
>
> 99. The remnant in the world who are dear to *dharma*, those men who resort to *dharma*, they will remain at the end of the Yuga, wearied by hunger and thirst (*śeṣā dharmapriyā loke ye narā dharmasamśritāḥ/*

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[69] See Mitchiner 1986, 40–42, 44, adducing additionally that the *Mahābhārata* prefaces the Kalki account by speaking not of individual kings, as the *Yuga Purāṇa* does, but of peoples (3.186.30); the *Mahābhārata*'s citation of the *Vāyu Purāṇa* at 3.189.14, though not the extant one by that name; and that the *Yuga Purāṇa* account also omits any mention of an era of the Seven Ṛṣis, i.e., a Manvantara. Bhattacharya 2008 follows Mitchiner on these points. As von Stietencron shows, however, and as we know from the *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra*, they are probably named *purāṇa*s before the *Mahābhārata*.

 kṣutpipāsapariśrāṃtāste sthāsyāṃti yugakṣaye). (Mitchiner 1986, 96;
xxxiv–xxxv)

When it comes now to describing the twelve havens themselves and
the conditions under which this remnant of the good will survive, they
are said to do so in four cases "at the end of the *yuga*" (*yugakṣaye*; *śl*
102d; 103d; 104d; 113d)—in the last case, which summarizes for the
whole, "in that terrible end of the *yuga*" (*ghore tasmin yugakṣaye*).
Clearly none of the remnant is experiencing anything like a Kṛta Yuga.
Indeed, although after mentioning that those who seek refuge, "long-
ing for a better condition" in the first two havens, "will attain excellent
happiness" (*sukham uttamaṃ*)" there (*śl* 101), the conditions elsewhere
seem to be reminiscent of *āpaddharma*—that is, of topsyturvy *dharma*
for times of distress: in riverside, oceanside, mountainous, and for-
ested regions, "men will live on fish and costly flesh" (102); elsewhere,
"…through fish and birds" (107); "…on lotus fibres and lotus flowers"
(111). And "on the banks of the Kāverī…men will have contentment
there, through fish and boars" (106)! These are safe havens primarily
for Brahmins. Indeed, as T.P. Mahadevan reminds me, supplying the
following references, Tamil Sangam poetry depicts one poet, Kapilar,
as a Brahmin who "feasts full on meat" that was "stewed" or "fried"
(Hart 1975, 53; Hart and Heifitz 1999, 248–49).

   I believe, then, that we must certainly rule out Mitchiner's inter-
pretation that the *Yuga Purāṇa* ends with the author and the people
of Ujjain enjoying "prosperity" and happily anticipating or experienc-
ing the Kṛta Yuga. And with the rejection of that interpretation, we
must also dismiss his argument that the account would be an earlier
alternative to the *Mahābhārata*'s Kalki myth. There is nothing solid on
which to base a claim that it is earlier than the Kalki myth. But more
important, it is not an alternative to it,[70] and it is not evidence that the
Yuga Purāṇa would be authoring "the earliest account of the Yugas in
Indian literature" (1986, vii). But if the *Yuga Purāṇa* is not describing
a pre-*Mahābhārata* account of the Kṛta Yuga, what is it describing and
what are its models? I believe there are two possible answers, both of
which would have *Mahābhārata* prefigurations.

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[70] A position that González-Reimann takes, in agreement with Mitchiner that the
Kalki myth is "probably a late adaptation or reformulation of ideas presented earlier
in the *Yuga Purāṇa*, or some other external source" (2002, 99).

The first explanation would draw on the *Mahābhārata* doctrine, also aired in *The Laws of Manu* (9.301), that the king makes the *yuga*. This explanation could borrow a little from Mitchiner's view that the Śātavāhana empire had created "Regions in Which Men Will Survive and Prosper." But the explanation has obvious difficulties. Since no particular king is credited, the doctrine would have to be modified to say that "the empire makes the *yuga*." More than this, it is an account of safe havens in troubled times. Of course, to say a king creates the *yuga* is not to limit him, or an empire, to a Kṛta Yuga. But we don't hear about kings who create Tretā or Dvāpara Yugas, and since creating a Kali Yuga would be redundant, I think this explanation must be put back on the shelf.

The second explanation, however, is sound, and has a more well-developed *Mahābhārata* background, indeed, a myth. As we have seen, Rāma Jāmadagnya empties the earth of Kṣatriyas twenty-one times. But the job is never complete. Yudhiṣṭhira, who has heard the story once in the forest, hears it a second time after the war from Kṛṣṇa, who tells it to deter him from disavowing his hard-won kingdom.[71] In this account, the goddess Earth tells the Brahmin Kaśyapa she has made safe havens for the eventual regeneration of the Kṣatriya class, and implores Kaśyapa to reinstate them as kings to protect her. As Kṛṣṇa tells it (*Mbh* 12.49.66–75), neo-Kṣatriyas were raised in different forest, mountain,[72] riverside, and oceanside[73] locations by bears, seers, cows, calves, monkeys, and the ocean (see Hiltebeitel 1999a, 460; Fitzgerald 2004a, 279–80).

D. *Conclusions*

The following ten points can now be made by way of conclusion.

1. Megasthenes' report from Candragupta's Maurya's time of a genealogy of 153 kings shows that the Mauryans had an early historical

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[71] At first, says Kṛṣṇa, Śūdras and Vaiśyas united with Brahmin women to produce a kingless condition in which the strong ruled the weak (12.49.61–62). The Southern Recension adds that Brahmins abandoned their *dharma* and turned to heresies (*pāṣaṇḍān*; 111* line 4 following 49.62).

[72] Including a Vulture Peak (*gṛdhrakūṭa*; 12.49.73).

[73] I assume Ocean did its protecting by the oceanside. Some northern texts add that the ones thus protected lived among blacksmiths, goldsmiths, and such (*vyokāra-hemakārādi*; 75 and 114*).

record even before Aśoka, probably without *yugas*, or with them desig-
nating only short time-cycles. Aśoka himself, in a context where—had
he had access to it—the theory of *yuga*s could have served him better,
tries rather falteringly in two of his edicts to imagine *dhaṃma* pro-
gressing through his dynastic descendants until the end of the *kalpa*.
Some time after Aśoka, a four-age *yuga* theory was probably brought
into Brahmanical texts as an historical armature with which to reframe
such genealogical information, filling out dynastic accounts in both
Sanskrit epics, and developing other temporal narratives, including
mythic pasts and dharmic prophesies.[74]

2. Coming then at the end of the Mauryan dynasty, a Yavana-
Pañcāla-Mathurā coalition to destroy the Magadha capital in conjunc-
tion with the rise of Puṣyamitra Śuṅga in circa 187 B.C.E., could, when
looked at in retrospect, be among the "connection points" by which,
not too long after those events, the *Mahābhārata* poets would have
conceived of the *yuga* as a new way to think about turning points in
historical time.

3. The epic would have been composed by people interested in nar-
rating, preserving, and forwarding their own history in Vedic idioms,
with the emphasis on their Kuru-Pañcāla and still deeper Vedic pasts.
The recent Yavana-Pañcāla-Mathurā coalition would have prepared
them to link the Vedic name of *yuga*s with what Fernando Wulff calls
the Greek repertory, with its five ages, the fourth—preceding ours—
being an Age of Heroes.

4. If this was done by out-of-sorts Brahmins in territories ruled by
little "Mitra" or "Agniveśya" kings, we don't have to worry about find-
ing them a big royal patron.[75]

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[74] The essentially linear *yuga* would have served the epic's poets as a better armature
for history than the *kalpa*, which—Aśoka aside—Buddhists found more relevant to
Jātakas and remembering past lives, as in the Buddha's recollection of a lost city in the
Mahāsudassana Sutta, of which Rupert Gethin can say, "There is nothing here that the
modern mind would be tempted to read as history" (2006, 63).

[75] See Hiltebeitel 2001a, 19 proposing that the *Mahābhārata* "was written by out of
sorts Brahmans who may have had some minor king's or merchant's patronage, but,
probably for personal reasons, show a deep appreciation of…Brahmans reduced to
poverty." Fitzgerald's turn to Khāravela (2007; see above nn. 54 and 59]) builds from
an opposite assumption, which he stated earlier as follows: "The production and prom-
ulgation of this text would have required a major effort and significant expense, so we
must imagine the support and backing of some prince or princes, or direct imperial
support" (2001, 69). Cf. Witzel 2005, 48, 60, 62 n. 132, 64, 70.

5. Like the *Mahābhārata*, the *Yuga Purāṇa* would then also look askance at Magadha. But in contrast with both the *Mahābhārata*'s northern Midlands orientation and with the *Bhaviṣya(t) Purāṇa*'s Magadha-oriented eastern one, which probably, under the impact of the *Mahābhārata*'s frame story, only belatedly preponed an epico-purāṇic Naimiṣa Forest setting for itself, the *Yuga Purāṇa* also looks hopefully to a third region, the South. In looking south, however, the *Yuga Purāṇa* looks to two separate regions there: one, the northern Deccan; the other, the Kāverī River valley, with its welcoming fish and boars.

6. This look to the south may coincide with one of the reasons why the *Yuga Purāṇa* stops its north Indian history with the Mitra kings and Śakas. Its redemptive history was proving to be wishful thinking. The Śakas did not really go home like the Greeks. Around 25 B.C.E., they established themselves as Kṣatrapa successors to the Mitra kings, and remained to stay, forming trade networks and points of power at major centers from Taxila in the northwest to Mathurā in the midlands, and also in Ujjain toward the southwest, where they contributed to the support and spread of mainly Buddhism.[76] There would be no reason for the composer of the *Yuga Purāṇa* to envision safe havens in the south under the Mitras, but there would have been under the Kṣatrapas.

7. Following the arguments of T. P. Mahadevan, this could describe the conditions in which, by around 25 B.C.E., out-of-sorts Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins from the Mathurā-Kuru-Pañcāla northern midlands would have headed south and reached the Tamil-speaking regions with something close to the *Mahābhārata* archetype in their possession.

8. As it does today, that archetype would have included passages reflecting the theory of four ages and association of the epic's main story with the turn from the Dvāpara to the Kali Yuga—albeit, as González-Reimann has demonstrated, associated loosely, inconsistently, and often metaphorically treated, and sometimes "confusing" *yuga*s and *kalpa*s (2002, 72, 85 n. 150), since, by the post-Aśokan time of the *Mahābhārata*'s composition, this originally Greater Magadhan concept of cyclical time—the *kalpa*—had been taken up in Brahmanical texts and considerably modified in the *Mahābhārata* to round in the *yuga*.

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[76] See Neelis 2007, 72–79; 2008, 8–10; 2009. Eventually, they would be accorded the little king status of "degenerate (*vrātya*) Kṣatriyas (Thapar 1992, 153), which would lend itself to the colonial period's idea of the "Scythian origins" of the Rājpūts (Hiltebeitel 1999a, 439–40).

9. As to their futures, the *Mahābhārata* poets opened a much larger canvas than the *Yuga Purāṇa*. There is obviously a difference between a redemptive telos prophesied by Śiva to his son the war god, as if the two were holding their destructive power in reserve, and a text whose redemption of *dharma* prophesies a restoration of the Kṛta Yuga under Kalki Viṣṇuyaśas, "the fame of Viṣṇu" (*Mbh* 3.188.89a), and whose redemptive history itself features a Kṛṣṇa who takes birth from *yuga* to *yuga* whenever *dharma* declines.

10. The *Mahābhārata* poets may have "invented" the five Pāṇḍavas, but not without also inventing the hundred Kauravas, and the three generations preceding them, beginning with Gaṅgā.[77] It is not only that they traced the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas' dynastic genealogy from deep in the Vedic past through the eponymous kings Pūru, Bharata, and Kuru, and the Kuru-Pañcālas. With the killing of King Jarāsaṃdha of Magadha in *Mahābhārata* Book 2, the downriver rivalry with Magadha in the east could, at least "for the first time," long ago, have been resolved in the Midlands' favor.[78] Indeed, that would be part of a plot that could thicken into the *itihāsa* of the Bhāratas once Mother Gaṅgā had intervened in that genealogy and returned to her own element(s), leaving her blessing that she would love the famous Bhārata lineage whose *guṇa*s could not be counted even in a hundred years.

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[77] This is, again, a comment on Fitzgerald 2007, who, like many others before him (see Hiltebeitel 2001a, 2 n. 10), including Witzel (2005, 28, 35), wants to limit "invention" in this span to just the Pāṇḍavas. One of the fascinations of Wulff's thesis (2008, 81–92. 102, 205–24) is that the *Mahābhārata* poets could have begun their reworking of the Greek epic repertoire as one that unfolds from a water goddess who, like Gaṅgā, gives birth to a mortal son over whom she will eventually grieve.

[78] On the importance of this Magadha episode in the *Mahābhārata*, see Hiltebeitel 2006c and chapters 18 and 19 of this book.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ARCHETYPAL DESIGN OF THE TWO SANSKRIT EPICS

Thanks to the Critical Editions of the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, it is, I believe, possible to demonstrate that they have been pulled into a similar archetypal design.[1] My view of the Critical Editions is that, despite complaints from all sides, they are more dispositive of an archetype than has been appreciated.[2]

A related matter is the status of the substories in each epic, which the Critical Editions show to be integral. Among *Mahābhārata* substories, the *Rāmopākhyāna* has special implications for thinking through the relation between the two archetypes, since this "Rāma Story" does not have the structural design the two epics share.

Taking in these three texts, I propose that one of our best opportunities to assess the relations between them, and the hands of their "authors," may lie in their treatments of the chief heroines Draupadī and Sītā. Having explored this suggestion in some detail, I will turn to some intertextual implications beyond the epics.

A. *Common Archetype*

I begin by outlining the epics' common archetypal design by "Books" (the *Mahābhārata*'s eighteen *parvan*s; the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s seven *kāṇḍa*s) with reference to the roles of the two heroines, limiting myself to Books 1 and 3, since they will be the focus of this essay.

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[1] This chapter keeps much to the oral form in which its was presented in 2008 at the 5th Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas.

[2] In this chapter, I approach the baseline integrity of this archetypal *Mahābhārata* mainly in terms of themes and content, commenting on recensional history only at footnote 9 to reject the idea that what we have in the Critical Edition results from a second (or as some would put it, *only* from a late) Gupta recension, and in my closing discussion of Mahadevan 2008. On what I consider to be the pre-Gupta recensional history of the *Mahābhārata* that can be identified, following Mahadevan 2008 and 2010, by looking at early modifications of the Southern Recension, see chapter 7 below, Hiltebeitel 2010b, and Hiltebeitel forthcoming, chapter 1, which critiques some of the Critical Edition's best known critics.

In each epic, Book 1 introduces Frame Stories involving the poem's Composition and Transmission. Draupadī is not prominent in the *Mahābhārata*'s Frame, but Sītā is in the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s. The *Rāmāyaṇa* uses the term *carita* (which I will translate "adventure") four times to describe itself in its short *upodghāta* or "preamble," the second of which calls "the whole *Rāmāyaṇa* poem the great adventure of Sītā" (1.4.6). Once past the Frames, each epic introduces Dynastic Origins connected with Vedic names, and turns to the Youthful Lives and Marriages of the heroes. Each heroine marries, and one learns about their births. Draupadī bears one son with each Pāṇḍava. Sītā as yet has no issue.

Book 3 is in each case about Forest Exile marked by monstrous encounters as the heroes and heroines enter the Forests and leave them. I will call these episodes the Forest Books' bookends. Unencumbered by children, the couples undergo Forest Trials and continue to receive Instructive Guidance from Great Ṛsis. Toward the beginning of these Books, each heroine sounds words of concern: Draupadī, speaking as a lady pandit, tries to prod Yudhiṣṭhira to action (Malinar 2007a); Sītā cautions Rāma that he should not give way to excessive violence in hunting deer. But each is at one point left unprotected, and is abducted—Sītā after Rāma has gone out chasing a magical golden deer she asked him to bring her as a pet, or if he kills it, which he does, to bring its hide. Draupadī's abduction is brief, and when her husbands recover her, they all sit down to hear the *Rāmopākhyāna*. In Sītā's case, insofar as it provides the provocation that makes the Great War inevitable, her abduction is the counterpart to the outrage against Draupadī during the dice match in Book 2. Subsequently, both heroines are absent during their husbands' Forest-exiting transformative encounters with a benign monster, which signals their return to society (in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, a society of monkeys).

Compared with their husbands, the two female leads get more staggered attention at different points and with more contrasting accents. The defining outrage against Draupadī occurs in Book 2, that of Sītā in Book 3. Draupadī has children early, Sītā very late, bearing twins in Vālmīki's hermitage who, like Vālmīki himself, are never mentioned in the *Rāmopākhyāna*. As fuller discussion would show, the *Rāmāyaṇa* works the common blueprint along most carefully through Books 1–5.[3] Such a design cannot be accidental. One epic must have had it first.

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[3] For fuller book-by-book comparisons and discussion of other authors' work in this direction, see Hiltebeitel 2005a, 460–61 (= chapter 6 below); 2006b.

This study presents matters from the standpoint of the likely priority of the *Mahābhārata*, with the corollaries that *Rāmāyaṇa* Books 1 and 7 are integral to its earliest design and that the *Rāmāyaṇa* poet is familiar with the *Mahābhārata*'s archetypal design and intent upon refining and working from it. Further, if, as the *Mahābhārata*'s Critical Edition shows, its subtales (*upākhyāna*s) too are part of its archetypal design (Hiltebeitel 2005a), and if the *Rāmāyaṇa* is composed with that design in view, then the *Rāmopākhyāna,* which lacks that design, would have to be considered a source (let me add: not the only one) that the *Rāmāyaṇa* poet shapes to the familiar archetypal pattern.

These considerations are especially relevant to Vālmīki's portrayal of Sītā, for where she is concerned the innovations are most salient. I mention only as background a "poet"-and-"path" theme I have developed elsewhere (Hiltebeitel 2009): that the two heroines' "paths," which set the heroes' course, involve meetings with important Ṛṣis, who in Sītā's case include especially Vedic ones, most of whom make no appearance in the *Rāmopākhyāna*; and that whereas Draupadī's path begins with the author-poet vouching for her purity where it would otherwise be doubted in marrying five men, Sītā's path ends when the poet-author removes public doubt of her purity before she reenters the earth from which she was born.

Keeping all this in mind, I will concentrate mainly on the construction of the heroines' narratives first around their births, and second around their marriages. Third, I look at the monstrous encounters that provide Bookends to their husbands' lives in the Forests.

B. *Birth and Family Background*

Draupadī and Sītā begin their lives as extraordinary females who are *ayonijā,* "not born from a womb," with both, it seems, being born from the earth. Draupadī takes birth from a *vedi*; Sītā from a "furrow" (*sītā*), from which she gets her name (*Rām* 1.65.14). Despite widely popular vernaculars and folklores it does not appear that Draupadī was born from fire. Of the few things we know about the rite from which she is born, we can mention the following: It implies a Brahmanicide, since her father Drupada wants a son who will avenge him against the Brahmin Droṇa (155.1–30); his queen is summoned "at the end of the offering (*havanasya-ante*)" but is told the rite is efficacious no matter what she does; Dhṛṣṭadyumna, incarnation of the Fire god Agni, then rises armed from a sacrificial fire and rides forth

on a chariot. As the thrilled Pañcālas roar approval, a heavenly voice announces that Dhṛṣṭadyumna will kill Droṇa (33–40). The rite's purpose has thus been fulfilled at "the end of the offering." But immediately, beyond the stated end (purpose or completion) of the rite, Drupada has a daughter:

> And also a Pāñcālī girl arose from the middle of the *vedi,* ... And just as that full-hipped one was born, a disembodied voice said: "Best among all women, Kṛṣṇā will lead the Kṣatra to destruction. The fair-waisted one will in time accomplish the work of the gods (*surakāryam*). Because of her, a great fear will arise for the Kṣatriyas." Having heard all this, the Pañcālas roared like a pride of lions.... (155.41—46)

Subsequent descriptions seem to keep the brother's fire-birth and the sister's altar-birth distinct. For instance, in the account of "partial incarnations,"

> So too was Dhṛṣṭadyumna born from Fire, visibly having the same luster as Agni, when a rite had been spread—a hero for the destruction of Droṇa,..; and so too was Kṛṣṇā born even on [or in] a *vedi (vedyām)*, effulgent, auspicious, shining wide with beauty, bearing a consummate form. (1.57.91–92; cf. 1.153.10; 175.7–10)

But here her "dark" name Kṛṣṇā, which would seem to link her with the earth, is accompanied by implications of fiery radiance. It appears that Draupadī *is* born from the earth, but with a dark luminosity that is *like* fire, or like dark fire, and that the simile is ready to take on a life of its own. Meanwhile, the notion of dark fire is there too in an epithet for Agni, who is *kṛṣṇavartman*, "he whose path is dark," particularly in contexts that allude to the dark smoke that rises as a path to heaven from animal sacrifices (*Mbh* 1.50.10; 217.11–16; 223.19; 13.126.30) or from the sacrificial fires of war (5.32.27; 47.13; 10.7–9).

Just as it took a sacrificial rite to produce Draupadī, *Rāmāyaṇa* commentators suggest that Sītā's birth may have occurred as an outcome of a less explicit sacrificial activity. Where Sītā's father Janaka first describes Sītā's birth—"I found her as I was clearing the field" (*Rām* 1.65.14)—the word translated as "clearing" (*śodhayatā*) literally means "cleaning or purifying," and has been taken to refer to a plowing done "for the laying of the fire of the sacrifice" (Goldman 1984, 385). The *Rāmāyaṇa*, however, does not link Sītā's birth with any Vedic sacrificial narrative. Indeed, unlike Draupadī's birth, which is described by the epic's main narrator, Sītā's birth is never directly told in Vālmīki's narration, but only in his characters' recollections. First, as just cited, Janaka recalls it to Rāma. Second, it is a question of a "story" (*kathā*)

that Sītā is asked to recount in the Forest by Atri's wife Anasūyā, who had heard the "story" but wants to hear it from its lovely subject herself (110.22; 23; 111.1). Third, Hanumān recalls it when he is telling Sītā her own story to reassure her that she can trust him (5.14.16). A fourth and last reference, however, complicates our picture.

After Rāma has slain Rāvaṇa, the same Ṛṣi Agastya can finally tell Rāma who Sītā was in her previous life. She was Vedavatī, daughter of the Brahmarṣi Kuśadhvaja, son of Bṛhaspati. Vedavatī gets her name from being born from her father's constant Vedic recitation (*Rām* 7.17.8). Much sought by gods, demons and other celestials, her father had chosen her for Viṣṇu, and because of this the demon king Śumbhu killed her father while he slept—whereupon her mother joined the father on the pyre. Making her father's will to marry Viṣṇu her own, Vedavatī did *tapas* to win Nārāyaṇa as her husband (7.17.1–17). She told all this to Rāvaṇa, who found her in her Himalayan retreat. When Rāvaṇa grabbed her hair, she avoided him by cutting it off and entering fire, uttering her dying words as an act of truth by which she sought to be reborn as "a female not born from a womb, a good woman (*ayonijā sādhvī*), the daughter of a virtuous man" (27). It is by this means, says Agastya to Rāma, that Vedavatī was able to bring about Rāvaṇa's death by appealing to "your inhuman manliness" (*vīryam amānuṣam;* 29) when she was "reborn among mortals on a field that was turned by the blade of a plow, like a crest of fire on a *vedi* (*vedyām agniśikhopamā*)" (30). That is, without it quite being Vedavatī's stated intent, she could kill Rāvaṇa in her next birth by inspiring Rāma. Moreover, now that Rāvaṇa is slain, Rāma can understand what Agastya means by his *vīryam amānuṣam: "amānuṣam"* here means not just "extraordinary"; it implies "divine." Until Rāma slew Rāvaṇa, he had thought he was human. But he learned thereafter that he was Viṣṇu, whose birth as a man was necessary to counteract Rāvaṇa's boon (7.10.13–18; see Pollock 1984). Sītā's birth thus results from a rite: one of self-immolation. Vedavatī's *stated* intent is purely noble. Even though eventually, as Sītā, she does want Rāvaṇa's death, her birth stories never make it explicit that she is being born into the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s divine plan. Indeed, neither Vedavatī nor her father could not have known that Viṣṇu would be born as a man to kill Rāvaṇa. Indeed, in neither epic is killing a stated intent of the heroine herself. In Draupadī's case, however, her father does want someone killed, but not anyone Draupadī will ever want killed. Draupadī will want many people killed, headed by Duryodhana. But that is not explicitly part of her birth narrative. What is

explicit is that she is born as the surplus outcropping of a divine plan that is neither her father's nor her own.

It is interesting that Agastya says Sītā appeared "like a crest of fire on a *vedi*" (7.1 .30d). The *Rāmāyaṇa* poet would seem to have magnified the *vedi* in question into a *mahāvedi* or *uttaravedi* (he is after all talking about the earth). But he would also seem to be comparing Vedavatī's *ayonijā* birth from the earth as Sītā with Draupadī's fire-*like* birth from an earthen *vedi*. Vālmīki has already used this simile to describe Kaikeyī, who, as she was about to listen to her troublemaking servant Mantharā, "still lay on her luxurious couch like a crest of fire on a *vedi*" (*Rām* 2.9.40). Vālmīki does not get this simile from the *Mahābhārata,* which never uses it. Nor does he get his story of Sītā's birth from the *Rāmopākhyāna,* which knows nothing of Sītā being *ayonijā* or of her birth in a furrow. The *Rāmopākhyāna* takes care of Sītā's birth and marriage in one and a half verses, with the meager information that Tvaṣṭṛ "made" her (*cakāra*) to be Rāma's beloved wife (3.258.9–10)! This would be our first indication that Vālmīki innovates upon the *Rāmopākhyāna* with the *Mahābhārata* heroine in view.

Draupadī and Sītā's births also relate to portrayals of their families. Draupadī's name Pāñcālī evokes the deep embeddedness of her Pāñcāla family cycle in the *Mahābhārata's* central narrative, where it recalls a period in middle Vedic culture when Kuru and Pāñcāla kings ruled the Gaṅgā-Yamunā Doāb, and represented a ritual complementarity for the codifiers of the Vedic sacrifice. Her Pāñcāla people are already in evidence when they roar approval, despite having heard that her birth "will in time accomplish the work of the gods" by bringing on their own destruction (Hiltebeitel 2001a, 187). In contrast, Sītā's family, the Videhas of Mithilā, are of no wider interest to Vālmīki than for supplying brides to Rāma and his brothers (*Rām* 1.72.14–23). Vaidehī and Maithilī are just affectionate names of Sītā.

Putting these matters together, one can say that Vālmīki draws on, or perhaps constructs, a folkloric birth for Sītā, and leaves the Videhas out of the complexities of his narration.

C. *Marriage and Divine Plan*

In mentioning that Draupadī is born to do "the work of the gods" and that Sītā's appeals to Rāma's "inhuman manliness" bring about the death of Rāvaṇa, I have cited a few of the many understated hints that each heroine is born into a divine plan that their marriages will be key

to achieving.[4] In each epic, certain gods, foremost among them Viṣṇu, agree to a plan to counteract a demonic surge on earth by taking on human births. Each heroine is identified with Śrī, but with an important difference. Draupadī is an incarnation of Śrī (e.g. *Mbh* 18.4.9–10), whereas Sītā is only said to be "like" her (e.g. *Rām* 1.76.17; 2.39.12; 5.14.6; 6.5.12; 101.43).

From its first mention in the *Mahābhārata's* table of contents, the *Parvasaṃgraha,* Draupadī's marriage is called a *svayaṃvara* or "Self-choice" (*Mbh* 1.2.36). This is the celebrated heroic mode of marrying in which a princess "chooses" a husband in a ceremony that also calls on suitors to distinguish themselves. Her vivid marriage tale emerges from the agonistic "work of the gods" that she is born to enable, and its complexities take in major players.

The Pāṇḍavas hear about both Draupadī's birth and the plans for her *svayaṃvara* together while they are undergoing youthful trials. Disguised as Brahmin Veda students since Duryodhana had attempted to kill them, and hunting in various lands, including Pañcāla, they meet Vyāsa, the "author," who settles them in a town called Ekacakrā, predicts Yudhiṣṭhira's eventual rule of the earth as Dharmarāja, and advises them to stay put until he returns (*Mbh* 1.144.1–20). After they rid the town of the cannibal Baka, a strict-vowed Brahmin, a great raconteur, comes and regales them and their mother Kuntī with stories. One is about the announced *svayaṃvara* of Draupadī, who was born not from a womb but from the middle of an altar (1.153.1–10). The detailed account goes on to tell of Dhṛṣṭadyumna and Draupadī's "twin" birth, as discussed in the previous section.

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[4] When Yudhiṣṭhira sees himself and his brothers overwhelmed by Draupadī's beauty and decides all five will marry her, he sees that "Pāñcālī's winsome beauty, ordained by the Ordainer [Vidhātṛ] himself, surpassed all other women and beguiled all creatures" (*Mbh* 1.182.13). At the end, just as he has had his last longing to question her, Indra breaks in to tell him he cannot because he has already returned to her divine identity: "O Yudhiṣṭhira, she is Śrī, who took the form of Draupadī for your sake, becoming human though not born of a womb, beloved of the world, she who smells good, born into the line of Drupada and supported by you (plural), fashioned by the Holder of the Trident (Śiva) for the sake of your (singular) pleasure (*rati*)" (18.4.9–10). When Rāvaṇa abducts Sītā, Brahmā speaks of it as something that had to be done, and the Daṇḍaka Forest's supreme Ṛṣis are "thrilled" at the sight (*Rām* 3.50.10–11); or when Hanumān looks down from a tree upon Sītā, emaciated in her captivity, he reflects "with uncertainty: for she seemed barely discernible, like some Vedic text once learned by heart but now nearly lost for lack or recitation" (5.13.36), which one might recall when Rāma learns that Sītā, in her previous life as Vedavatī, got that name from being born from her father's constant Vedic recitation.

Seeing her sons unsettled by this story "as if they were struck by spears," Kuntī says it is a good time to leave Ekacakrā, taking special note, as her pretext, that although they have received alms (*bhaikṣā*) there, their welcome for doing so could be running out, and "the Pāñcālas are heard to be generous with alms (*subhikṣās*)" (*Mbh* 1.156.1–7). Kuntī's maternal interest in the food her sons can beg seems natural enough, but also holds a fatality in store for Draupadī. Having said farewell to their host, they head for Pañcāla, when Vyāsa drops in on them again. He regales them with more colorful stories, coming to this one: an unnamed maiden, "daughter of a great-spirited seer, with a narrow waist, full hips, and a lovely brow—a girl favored with all virtues," once did mortifications to ask Śiva for a husband, since, because of unnamed acts she had done, she was "ill-fortuned" and had not found a husband even though she was beautiful and good. When Śiva granted her request, she repeated it five times, upon which he favored her to have five husbands at once, but yielded, when she protested she wanted only one, and postponed her polyandry to her next life. She is now the daughter of Drupada whom they have been hearing so much about, "the blameless Kṛṣṇā Pārṣatī destined to be your wife!" Having urged them on, he departs.

One thus meets stories about both Draupadī and Sītā's previous lives. Both were "good women," but each had a problem finding a husband. Draupadī's unnamed precursor had the slight flaw of overanxiouosness or insistence, which seems to have followed from some other previous karma of her own. Vedavatī had no evident flaws, but suffered from being orphaned, and from being manhandled by Rāvaṇa.

Kings come from all over to Draupadī's *svayaṃvara*. While the Pāṇḍavas sit with the Brahmins and the crowd swells, Draupadī descends into the arena on the sixteenth day (*Mbh* 1.176.16–30). Dhṛṣṭadyumna announces the challenge and names the Kṣatriyas who have come, ostensibly as contestants (177). As the rivals begin to try their hand and celestials of all kinds, including Daityas, watch from above, Kṛṣṇa, whom Dhṛṣṭadyumna had mentioned among the potential contenders (177.16), notices the five Pāṇḍava brothers and exchanges a gleeful glance with his brother Baladeva (178.6–13). Finally, after the kings have exhibited their futility, Arjuna rises and in the twinkling of an eye strings the bow and hits the target, to celestial applause and a rain of flowers (179.16–17). Drupada is pleased, and although he is yet to know who has won his daughter, he stands ready to aid him with his army. Draupadī, smiling, garlands Arjuna, completing the rite itself, and begins following him as his wife (20–23).

Now come interventions by Kṛṣṇa, Kuntī, and Vyāsa that compli-
cate this happy outcome by bringing about what Vyāsa has already
seeded in the Pāṇḍavas' minds. I will mention details only of the first
of these. Kṛṣṇa is now making his first appearance in the *Mahābhārata*
plot: a modest one that it is tempting to call a cameo, since his repu-
tation obviously precedes him. He has been mentioned as if he were
a potential suitor, but this seems to be a narrative ruse. In elaborated
versions, different heroes compete, but never Kṛṣṇa. As is evident, he
is the first to recognize the Pāṇḍavas. He is familiar with the story of
their divine births, and (consonant with Vyāsa's prediction) he calls
Yudhiṣṭhira Dharmarāja before he has ever been king of anything (*Mbh*
1.180.17–22). Insofar as he might be party to the divine plan (which
gradually becomes indubitable), he is there to see that Draupadī does
not fall into the wrong hands. But it is more to sanction her falling into
the right ones. When there is a lull in the fighting, he makes his first
public statement: "She is won according to *dharma* (*dharmeṇa labdhā*)"
(181.32). The Kṣatriyas stop fighting and go home. His words are author-
ative and definitive, and his first word in the epic is "*dharma*."

Now Sītā's marriage to Rāma has a reputation for being a *svayaṃvara*
too. But just as with her birth, we see evidence of streamlining and
stitching. Moreover, our intertextual hypothesis can now be sharp-
ened. If one of the versions of the Rāma story that the *Rāmāyaṇa*
poet knows is the *Rāmopākhyāna*, which takes care of Sītā's birth and
marriage cursorily without mentioning either her earthen birth or her
svayaṃvara, then the *Rāmāyaṇa* would be seeking to enhance Sītā's
story by making it more like Draupadī's in these early episodes, even
while making Sītā herself unlike Draupadī in ways that have to do
with the purity and morality of their marriages. One can already see
a suggestive point in the way the two Rāma-Sītā narratives treat the
heroine's part in the divine plan. While the *Rāmopākhyāna* tells us
little about Sītā's birth and marriage, it has no hesitation to make Sītā,
like Draupadī, part of the plan in the one thing it does say about them:
that Sītā was "made" for her marriage by Tvaṣṭṛ. On the contrary, in
the *Rāmāyaṇa*, marrying Rāma certainly draws Sītā into the divine
plan. But unlike Draupadī, she is not part of the gods' formulation of
that plan, which, in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, accounts only for incarnations of
male divinities, and routes Sītā into the narrative from her previous
birth as Vedavatī. Otherwise, the *Rāmopākhyāna* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*
agree that Viṣṇu descends as Rāma and that the gods led by Indra take
birth among monkeys and bears (*Mbh* 3.260.4–15). All this makes the
Rāmopākhyāna's non-mention of Sītā's *svayaṃvara* interesting.

Surprisingly, just as Sītā's birth from the earth is never directly told in Vālmīki's narration, but only as a "story" that certain characters recall, the same applies to Sītā's marriage being a *svayaṃvara.* But whereas the birth story is recalled on four occasions, a "*svayaṃvara* story" is recalled only once, during Sītā's exchange with Anasūyā.[5] When Sītā tells the story of her birth, Anasūyā's question is really about her having *heard* that Sītā had a *svayaṃvara*, whereupon the two of them become the only persons to use this term for Sītā's marriage in the *Rāmāyaṇa*:

> Anasūyā put a question to her about a certain story she was fond of. "It was at a *svayaṃvara*, they say, that glorious Rāghava obtained you, Sītā. This is at least the story that has reached my ears. I should like to hear that story in full, Maithilī, exactly as it happened, in its entirety. Would you tell it to me, please?" (*Rām* 2.110.23–24)

Once again, it would seem that Vālmīki is drawing on a folklore for Sītā, or perhaps constructing it with particular echoes—and in any case reconstructing Sītā's story to parallel and rival Draupadī's.

Continuing from the so-called "story" of her birth, Sītā tells that it was her not being born from a womb that led her father, after much worry, to think of holding a *svayaṃvara* for her. The unstated point seems to be that, even if such an abnormal birth makes it hard to find a good match, lords of the land would want to vie for such a bride.[6] Sītā says Janaka had received an immense heavy bow and two quivers with inexhaustible arrows from Varuṇa (in Janaka's account, the bow came to one of his ancestors from Śiva [1.65.8–13]), and invited the kings to win his daughter by raising and stringing it. But the kings only looked and left, unable to lift it (in Janaka's version, they mounted a long siege [1.65.21–25]). After a long time, one day the Ṛṣi Viśvāmitra came with

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[5] Cf. Brockington 2006, 35–36, 40, making the same observation but with different conclusions.

[6] In his earlier account, Janaka links Sītā's *ayonijā* birth with his setting of a *vīryaśulkā* as the "price" of winning her [*Rām* 1.65.151]). In the *Rāmāyaṇa,* Janaka never mentions a *svayaṃvara* either. He says his daughter may be won by a *vīryaśulkā*, a "bride-price of heroism" (*Rām* 1.65.15, 17). This compound seems to denote a certain kind of *svayaṃvara* (Jamison 1996, 225; cf. Brockington 2006, 35), and a *Mahābhārata* line uses its two components separately to describe the "price" (*śulkā*) Drupada set by which a hero (*vīra*) won Draupadī (*Mbh* 1.185.23). Yet the basic term *śulkā*, "price," is used in Dharmaśāstra marriage law to describe the purchase of a bride through the Āsura type of marriage, which is said to be worthy of Vaiśyas, not of Kṣatriyas, since the usual bride-price is money, *dhanaśulkā*.

Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa and told Janaka the two princes were eager to see the bow; and again Janaka brought it out. Like Arjuna, Rāma strung and drew it "in the twinkling of an eye," but more than this (or less, since he didn't have to shoot at anything), he broke it (2.110.36–47)! Says Sītā,

> Thereupon my father, true to his agreement, raised up a splendid water vessel, ready to bestow me on Rāma. But ready though my father was to bestow me, Raghava would not accept me right away, for he did not know the will of his father, the lordly king of Ayodhyā. So my father invited my father-in-law, aged king Daśaratha, and afterwards bestowed me…. And that is how I was bestowed on Rāma, there at the *svayaṃvara,* and as is right (*dharmena*) I love my husband, the best of men. (2.110.48–52)

As Pollock notes, Sītā's story is known for a certain "simplicity" (1986, 525), but one can also feel the strains in it. If she had a *svayaṃvara*, it was an interrupted, disappointing, and even failed one between the suitors' departure and Rāma's arrival long after, with no rivals remaining. Nor is there anything left of the bride's "Self-choice." Unlike Draupadī, who gets to garland Arjuna with a smile, it is not Sītā but her father who acts for her by lifting a vessel. Unlike Draupadī, who immediately sets off with Arjuna, Sītā has to wait until approval from Rāma's father. Yet oddly, Sītā does get to say, however belatedly, that it all come out right (*dharmeṇa*). In the *Mahābhārata*, Kṛṣṇa makes that pronouncement.

D. *Forest-Book Bookends*

I now turn to the monstrous encounters that bookend Forest life in each epic's Book 3. The two entry-monsters, Kirmīra in the *Mahābhārata* (3.11–12) and Virādha in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (3.3), merely guard access to the forests, and have little to do with the larger plot or divine plan. In contrast, the exit encounters are momentous. Rāma must subdue Kabandha to learn about Sugrīva, and thus how to find Sītā. In Draupadī's case, while the Pāṇḍavas leave her behind in Mārkaṇḍeya's hermitage, they meet Dharma disguised as a murderous Yakṣa, whose second of three boons is that the Pāṇḍavas (and Draupadī) will be able to pass their thirteenth year incognito in a place of their choosing.

Yet if the exit-encounters have more to do with the divine plot, the entry-encounters are the most revealing in terms of a common archetype. The *Rāmāyaṇa's* Virādha episode goes unmentioned in the

Rāmopākhyāna.[7] This means that although the bookend symmetry one finds in the *Rāmāyaṇa* could be modeled on the *Mahābhārata*, it cannot be modeled on the *Rāmopākhyāna* (nor could the reverse apply). Moreover, the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s forest-entry and forest-exit scenes have far greater symmetry between themselves than those in the *Mahābhārata*. Whereas the *Mahābhārata's* Kirmīra and Yakṣa encounters share only their bookend positions, the two *Rāmāyaṇa* encounters are virtual duplicates. Soon after Rāma, Sītā, and Lakṣmaṇa enter the Daṇḍaka Forest, Virādha ("One Who Thwarts") looms before them, seizes Sītā, and challenges the brothers for entering this forest *with her*. Pained by seeing Sītā touched, Rāma fills Virādha with arrows and he and Lakṣmaṇa then each break off an arm to release her. Asking Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa who they are (3.3. 1), Virādha realizes he has been slain by Rāma: a long-awaited blessing that relieves him from a curse. He can now go to heaven, but before that he tells Rāma to go next to the Ṛṣi Śarabhaṅga who "will see to your welfare" (3.22–24). Like Kabandha, and unlike Kirmīra, he too is benign—up to a point.[8] The obvious difference, though, is that Kabandha cannot grab Sītā, who is now abducted, and seizes both brothers instead. I believe that Vālmīki would have had three reasons to invent the Virādha encounter. 1. It supplies a bookend on the model of the two Monstrous Encounters in the *Mahābhārata*. 2. It is a rehearsal for the Kabandha encounter, which the *Rāmopākhyāna* does include, quite indispensibly. And 3., most important since it carries forward into Vālmīki's rehandling, so different from the *Rāmopākhyāna*, of Sītā's two ordeals, in preparing us for Sītā's abduction by Rāvaṇa in this same Book 3, it provides a glimpse of how Rāma reacts to Sītā being touched—something that bothers Rāma much less in the *Rāmopākhyāna*, and Yudhiṣṭhira not at all (for discussion, see Hiltebeitel 2009).

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 [7] It could easily have been slotted at *Mahābhārata* 3.26 1.39–40, where, following Bharata's return to Ayodhyā, Rāma enters the Daṇḍaka Forest with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa by the hermitage of Śarabhaṅga because he fears his townsfolk and countrymen may return to bother them.

 [8] For from there, Rāma is relayed by Ṛṣis from one forest site to another until Sītā is abducted, whereupon Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa start looking for her and happen upon Kabandha. A suggestive piece of evidence that Vālmīki has imported features of the Kabandha story back into his Virādha story is that Virādha is a former Gandharva named Tumburu (*Rām* 3.3.8), just as Kabandha is a former Gandharva named Viśvāvasu in the *Rāmopākhyāna* (*Mbh* 3.63,38). In the *Rāmāyaṇa* Vālmīki upgrades Kabandha into a former unnamed Dānava (*Rām* 3.66.8).

E. *Implications*

Now to some implications. Are the two epics' archetypal similarities the work of late overlay, or do they get us back to similarities in underlying conception? The former has been the usual argument, but those who have advocated it have not examined the close details relating the two epics and the *Rāmopākhyāna*, or answered what would have drawn the two larger works into similar formations other than the alleged lateness of *bhakti*. If, then, the two epics have a similar underlying conception modeled on the *Mahābhārata*, what would have motivated a second deployment toward similar but different ends? My short answer is threefold. It takes in *bhakti* as a thoroughly imbricated yet subtle feature of both works, and the two epics' different treatments of *dharma* and their understandings of poetry. In brief, the *Rāmāyaṇa* streamlines *bhakti*, disambiguates *dharma*, and proclaims itself the *ādikāvya*. Since I have made these arguments elsewhere (Hiltebeitel 2009; 2010a), I must go on to further points. My present intent is to take up intertextual implications beyond the epics themselves. Let me raise one set of considerations in each of these three areas, beginning in each case from a touchstone among the passages I have discussed. In each case I will raise the possibility that our considerations imply *termini ante* or *post quem* for the epics' composition. Let me just mention that I have offered many reasons to reject a "second Gupta redaction" of the *Mahābhārata*,[9] which has served mainly to fuel fancies of a pre-*bhakti* 'Bhārata'" and has never had a convincing Gupta rationale.

I have mentioned the term *dharma* only a few times in this essay, but often enough to indicate that the two epics, *as they are*, are inconceivable without it. Many other citations of *dharma* could have been cited in the sequences discussed, but it will suffice to recall that Kṛṣṇa's first word in the epic is "*dharma*," which I regard as no more an accident than that it is the first word of the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Now there is always the question of oral precursors to the Sanskrit epics. Suffice it to say about prior "bardic" and "oral epic" "proto"-forms that various scholars have imagined as forerunners of these two epics: These bardic oral versions could not have been about *dharma* to anything

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9 See Hiltebeitel 2001a, 25–30; 2004c, 205–6, 213, 220; 2005a, 458–61, 486–93; 2005c, 87; 2005d, 242–46; 2006a, 227–33, 249–53.

near the extent that the epics in their archetypal written forms are about it, since both texts speak of *dharma* in ways that show them participating in *dharmaśāstric* discourses that, if Patrick Olivelle is right, as I believe he is, cannot be traced back earlier than Aśoka or the early Mauryas.[10] Indeed, it follows from the absence of Kuśa and Lava in the *Rāmopākhyāna* that they are an invention of Vālmīki to fit bards into the *Rāmāyaṇa* frame to match Ugraśravas's part in the *Mahābhārata* frame—with the proviso that whereas the *Mahābhārata* pulls its "bards" into the mixed-caste discourse of *varṇasaṃkara* that takes off only after the *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* (Olivelle 1999, xxxi), Vālmīki draws the Kuśīlavas[11] into his story only indirectly or implicitly, since they would not descend biologically from two pure Kṣatriya princes. Both epics are Brahmanical as we have them and "bardic" only in stories of their transmission.

As to *bhakti*, my touchstone is the passage where Agastya tells Rāma that Vedavatī was able to bring about Rāvaṇa's death through Rāma's "inhuman manliness." Granted there are other ways to read this phrase, my point is that a *bhakti* reading is a legitimate one. The same goes for something Agastya says earlier when he first greets Rāma into his *āśrama*. Last of the great Vedic Ṛṣis to mark out Rāma and Sītā's path, Agastya welcomes Rāma with joined hands, saying:

> King of the whole world, *dharmacārī*, a great chariot warrior, a man offered reverence and esteem, you have come as my beloved guest (*pūjanīyaś ca mānyaś ca bhavān prāptaḥ priyātithiḥ*). (*Rām* 3.11.27)

Although Rāma would not yet be able to fully understand why Agastya is using such reverent yet knowing terms for him, Agastya is "doing the gods' work" in receiving the trio, and will likewise be doing it when he points their way to Pañcavaṭī, where Sītā will be abducted. Like all the great Vedic Ṛṣis and Nārada in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and like Nārada,

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[10] See Olivelle 1999, xxviii–xxxiv, placing *Āpastamba* first, in the early 3rd century B.C.E. and thus roughly contemporary with or even prior to Aśoka's edicts; *Gautama* second, in the mid-3rd century B.C.E.; *Baudhāyana* third in the mid-2nd century B.C.E.; and *Vasiṣṭha* last, bringing us down to the 1st or 2nd century C.E.; 2005a, 20–21 and n. 32, holding to the same sequence and finding these dates "still…reasonable," but "inclined now to place them somewhat later." Recently, he writes, "The very creation of a Brahmanical genre of literature dedicated to *dharma* was possibly due to the elevation of this word to the level of imperial ideology by Aśoka" (2005a, 39; cf. 2005b; cf. 2004a, 506).

[11] Kuśīlavas are mentioned at *BDhS* 1.5.10.24; *VDhS* 3.3; 14.12; *MDhS* 8.65; 8.102; 9.225; and twenty-three times in the *Arthaśāstra*.

Mārkaṇḍeya and other Paramarṣis in the *Mahābhārata*, Agastya is hip to the divine plan.[12] Now, along with the fact that the Sanskrit epics make their divine plans intelligible within what Madeleine Biardeau calls the "universe of *bhakti*," three points can be made about its narration. One is that the poets do not always hit us over the head with *bhakti*, like, say, Tulsī Dās in his Hindi version of the Rāma story. It can be alluded to subtly as in the instances just mentioned. A second is that the great Ṛṣis take consistent delight in witnessing how the divine plan is working itself out and, occasionally, in helping it along. Third, the divine plan is variously narrated and involves the interplay of more than one god. Those who emphasize the fragmentary or episodic treatment of the divine plan to support notions of textual strata often tell us that its disclosures occur only intermittently, and without "a coherent theistic 'red thread'";[13] others tell us that certain passages describing the divine plan lack rhetorical plausibility because they are silly,[14] or, which amounts to the same thing, because they do not persuade us, even though they persuade, say, Drupada or Dhṛtarāṣṭra.[15] But should we expect "Hindu epics" to be Greek or monotheistic, or their poets to be convincing when they work out their reality effects? In the same vein we find a recent argument about *yuga*s: that that *Mahābhārata* would not originally take place between *yuga*s because one finds that "late" notion referred to only nine times (González-Reimann 2002, 86 and *passim*)! These are all arguments that have *made* the glass half empty. Many important things are said in the epics just *once*. The important thing is that both epics have such divine plans. This may point us to another *post quem* intertextual *terminus* for both

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[12] See Wulff Alonso 2007, 114–37, noting the contrast between the *Iliad* and the *Mahābhārata* on the point that only in the Indian epic do Ṛṣis and gods cooperate in the divine plan.

[13] Malinar 2007b, 3: "There are speculations concerning divine scheming in some passages" of the *Mahābhārata*, the latter are not made the overarching framework, as is the case, for instance, in Homer's *Iliad*. The redactors of the epic, in its 'final redaction,' did not weave a coherent theistic 'red thread' into the manuscripts they produced, nor is there just one major god presiding over or pervading all the epic events."

[14] "Van Buitenen 1973, xix–xx; cf. Winternitz 1993–34, 174; Bigger 1998, 200, 259—all cited and discussed for their allegations of "fluff" in Hiltebeitel 2001, 164 n. 118.

[15] Emily Hudson wants to caution those who see a "cosmic explanation" of the *Mahābhārata* war as "all-encompassing" (2006, 128 n. 45) and finds Vyāsa's explanation to Dhṛtarāṣṭra that he has lost his sons by a "divine design" to unburden the earth (11.8) less persuasive than others by Saṃjaya and Vidura that she finds more "satisfying" (2006, 148–59).

epics.[16] No text in India has such a notion before the *Iliad,* which Alexander the Great introduced under his pillow (Hiltebeitel 2001a, 6)—a topic on which Fernando Wulff now has much more tell us (see Wulff Alonso 2008, 81–146). As Michael Witzel now half allows, "An Indian Homer, however, who would have put all of this together with an ingenious framework still is not in sight,—unless one wants to accept, with tradition, Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa as such" (2005, 55–56).

Finally, let me recall that Vedavatī is born from her father's Vedic recitation (*Rām* 7.17.8), which may remind us that when Hanumān looks down from a tree upon Sītā, emaciated in her captivity, he reflects "with uncertainty: for she seemed barely discernible, like some Vedic text once learned by heart but now nearly lost for lack of recitation" (5.13.36). I cite this to recall that both epics are beholden to the Veda and Vedic poetics in complex and also distinctive ways that scholars have only begun to explore—one of them, with some fresh twists, being T. P. Mahadevan in his landmark article, "On the Southern Recension of the *Mahābhārata*, Brahman Migrations, and Brāhmī Paleography" (2008). This study should stimulate us, among other things, for its identification of a "tri-Vedic axis" of Pūrvaśikhā Śrauta Brahmins,[17] with cooperating "branches" from all three liturgical Vedas (16–17), positioned to have written the *Mahābhārata* archetype in the Kuru-Pañcāla area sometime between 300–100 B.C.E. (11–15, 18–19; 101–2 nn. 9 and 10). According to Mahadevan, this archetype would lie behind the Śāradā and Kaśmīrī manuscripts that anchor the Pune Critical Edition. Around the turn of the millennium if not before (4), this trifecta of Vedic Śrautins, coming from the Mathurā area (6), would have transported an early written text like the Śāradā one, and close to the archetype, south (103 n. 17). There, this "*parvan*-based" manuscript (85–88) would have served as a "template" for the first Southern Recension text, being submitted to a "makeover" in the Southern Brāhmī script while its redacting community interacted with and contributed to Tamil Sangam culture[18] (circa 100 B.C.E.–200 C.E.) (7–9, 15, 84–92). This earliest southern "makeover" would

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[16] And first, of course, the *Mahābhārata* where it is probably not only earlier but more variously articulated.

[17] Most active of the possible Pūrvaśikhā Veda *śākhā* axes was the combination of *Kauṣītaki Ṛg Veda, Baudhāyana Yajurveda,* and *Jaiminīya Sāmaveda* (Mahadevan 2008, 18–19). See 102 n. 12 on the inclusion of Jaimini among Vyāsa's disciple-transmitters. Cf. further 105 n. 31 on Jaiminīyas and southern migration of the *Mahābhārata*.

[18] See Mahadevan's discussion of the *kuṭumi* (2008, 25–27).

then have had two destinations: one, after being kept up in the Tamil country by Pūrvaśikhā groups who come to be called Cōḻiya Brahmins, it would serve as the host version of the expanded Southern Recension when it comes to be mixed with changes since made in the Northern Recension that were brought south by the second wave of Brahmins, now mostly Aparaśikhās, who came south first under the Pallavas; second, it would have been sequestered into Kerala by other Pūrvaśikhās keeping up their *śrauta* praxis while fleeing the Kaḷabhra interregnum (ca 4th–7th century C.E.) (100 n. 3)—those who would come to be known as the Nambudiris, who would eventually reproduce their *Mahābhārata* manuscripts in Malayālam and keep them in Nambudiri libraries, where they would await their twentieth-century summons to Pune (8–16). As Mahadevan hints, the early editors of the Baroda Critical Edition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* ignored the implications of the similar relative brevity of Malayālam *Rāmāyaṇa* manuscripts, making it impossible for the last editors involved in the project to do any more than acknowledge the seriousness of the oversight (99–100, n. 2). Elsewhere, I have cited Mahadevan's findings to make the point that such an early reworking of the *Mahābhārata* not only included the *Nārāyaṇīya,* but found it important enough—in its *Malayālam* branch only—to try to simplify it by reducing its dialogue level from the outer Ugraśravas-Śaunaka frame to the more regular inner frame involving Vaiśampāyana and Janamejaya (Hiltebeitel 2006a, 254–55). For the *Nārāyaṇīya* to be an important part of the *Mahābhārata* archetype has, of course, implications for thinking about *dharma* and *bhakti.* But here I cite it in recollection of one of my favorite conversations with Madeleine Biardeau. When she was finishing her two-volume study of the *Mahābhārata* (2002), she told me she had decided to conclude it with some thoughts on what she had learned. When I asked her, "What have you learned, Madeleine?" she paused for a long smile and replied, "You have to read the whole thing." Well, I took her to be referring to the *Mahābhārata,* though I've since realized she could have been referring to her own book. Either way, the lesson stands. Let me close on some wider intertextual implications of reading "the whole thing."

In her chapter on "The *Ugra*[-*Paripṛcchā Sūtrā*] as a Historical Source: Methodological Considerations" ([2003] 2005, 48–72), Jan Nattier writes: "The fact that many—perhaps most—Buddhist sūtras contain passages that were added after the initial composition of the text has long been recognized by specialists in the field. Yet what constitutes

a valid procedure for identifying such interpolations has been far from clear. In many cases scholars have simply followed their own intuition, employing a method that could be characterized (only somewhat facetiously) as 'If I like it, it's early; if I specialize in it it's very early; if I don't like it at all, but it's in my text, it's an interpolation.'" She continues: "Referring to attempts by various scholars to stratify the texts in the Pāli canon, Rupert Gethin aptly observes: 'Many of the criteria employed by Winternitz, Law, and Pande only work if one is already prejudiced as to the nature of early Buddhism. If one feels at the outset that the Buddha, being, as it were, a reasonable sort of chap, taught a simple ethical doctrine uncluttered by myth, legend, and magic, then it is a fairly straightforward matter to stratify the Nikāyas accordingly…" (Nattier [2003] 2005, 49, citing Gethin 1992, 11). Nattier goes on to make Edward Conze an exemplar for excising passages from the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-Prajñāpāramitā* in which the Buddha Akṣobhya appears, and comments, "…it is clear that his principal basis for declaring those passages to be interpolations is the nature of their content, and not their presence or absence in another text. In Conze's mind, it would seem, such 'devotional' passages simply could not have been composed by the same person who was responsible for the more philosophical sections of the text, those that deal (in Conze's terminology) with the 'Absolute,' and with emptiness" (Nattier [2003] 2005, 50–51, discussing Conze 1967).[19] Meanwhile, Gethin has shown the value of reading certain Nikāya texts whole around the theme of "cosmology" or "mythology as meditation" (1997, 2006). Gethin credits Steven Collins on "understanding these suttas as redacted wholes" (2006, 81, 86).[20] For Collins, the *Aggañña Sutta* "as we have it is a coherent and continuous whole, with lexical, semantic, and thematic elements common to both the parable of origins and its frame" (1993, 324). Meanwhile, let me conclude with an apparently new idea that I

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[19] As Nattier has shown, Akṣobhya's paradise, Abhiratī, is an important precursor to Amitābha's Pure Land, the primary destination of early Indian Buddhist *bhakti* (2000, 2003).

[20] In approaching the *Aggañña Sutta*, Collins eschews the chop-and-block methodology that licenses scholars to dismantle texts by divining their "original" components and detecting later interpolations and additions, among which wrap-around frame stories are inevitably the easiest things to spot and dismiss. We should appreciate the gains made by this literary approach, with its hermeneutic of reading the *AS* whole, its frame included, even presuming an initially oral composition; see Collins 1993, 312: "the mania—which is what I think it is—for an 'Ur-text' is entirely misplaced." See further 324; cf. 331, 378.

was pleased to find from another of our colleagues working on the Pāli canon. The industrious translator-scholar Bhikkhu Bodhi, in his Introduction to the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, poses a new way to "think whole" about the tradition that the Buddha's disciples recalled and arranged the Buddha's Suttas and the Vinaya at the First Buddhist Council shortly after his death: "It is much more likely," writes Bodhi, "that what took place at the First Council was the drafting of a comprehensive scheme for classifying the suttas (preserved only in the memory banks of the monks) and the appointment of *an editorial committee* (perhaps several) to review the material available and cast it into a format conducive to easy memorization and oral transmission" (Bodhi 2000, 30: my italics). To envision such a "comprehensive scheme" for the four Nikāyas might provide a good model for "thinking whole" about the four anthologies of the *Mahābhārata's Śānti-* and *Anuśāsana Parvans* (cf. Fitzgerald 2004a, 2006; Hiltebeitel 2005d).

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

This chapter 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 (*manasāgarasambhūtam*)" (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 bhūtvāyatproktaṃ śāstram uttamam*) consisting of a hundred thousand verses, from which proceeds *dharma* for the entire loom[6] of the

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[1] Many of the ideas in this chapter, along with fuller synopses of both epics, appear as separate entries on each epic in Hiltebeitel 2006b. 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, 1, 700–1 and ff., 726; 1999, xxxiii–xxxv), though I see a shorter time between them. See Hiltebeitel 2001a, 15–31, 165; 2004c.

[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.

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

worlds (*kṛtaṃ śatasahasraṃ hi ślokānām idam uttamam/lokatantra-sya kṛtsnasya yasmād dharmaḥ pravartate*)" (12.322.26d and 36). Even grander, it recalls a "treatise" (*śāstra*) by Brahmā of originally one hundred thousand *adhyāya*s 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 *Śatasahasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. For passing into current usage the [latter] work must have been submitted to successive reductions to 25,000, 8000 (*aṣṭasahasrikā*, which is the classical form of the treatise), 700 and 500" ([1917] 1918–20, 18–49; 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 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

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[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 *Prajñāpāramitā* 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 *Śatasahasrika* 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.

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, 1, 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 from a written text.[13] Another passage tells us that the

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[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 2004a, 152–55, 68–70. For counter-arguments, see Hiltebeitel 2001a: that the epic would have been composed over a shorter period (1–31), 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 *upākhyana*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 ([l991] 2001), 25, seeing 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." But first credit on this recognition may go to Sastri 1931, x–xi, who states that the verses in question in his attempt to critically edit the Southern Recension "unmistakeably state that the computation of the Mahābhārata is 100,000 verses if counted along with the minor narratives, and only 24,000 verses if the minor narratives are excluded. It is not at all meant that 24,000 verses alone were originally composed and the remaining 76,000 verses were added later to complete the 100,000 verses."

[13] Fitzgerald still asks "at what stage was a putative *Bhārata* story recast as the '*Mahā*' *Bhārata*…,?" (2006, 272), and in a footnote to this continuing question cites "the purported historical observation of Vyāsa at 1.1 .61…[as] evidence that at least

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.

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

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some in ancient India distinguished larger and smaller versions of this epic" (272 n. 19). 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 *upākhyanas.*" 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 mahoj janma):* he who knows this etymology (*nirukta*) is rid of all his sins."

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 *parvans*,[15] nearly all the epic's one hundred "little books" or *upaparvans* (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.

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

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[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 2006, 270–21, nn. 15 and 17 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-Parvans* 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 *a(raṇeyam)* "or perhaps *a(jagara)*"—both sub-*parvans* of Book 3—and *(ni)ryyaṇaṃ* for the *Abhiniryāṇa* sub-*parvan* 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 sub-*parvan*.

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 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

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[16] The 18 *parvan*s 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.

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" (1.2.40d) 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*

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[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 this chapter.

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 2006a).

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 *āśrama*. 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 in the poet's mind or in

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[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; 2005d). 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.

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.

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[20] See Hiltebeitel (2001a, 99–105). Ugraśravas recital in eighteen *parvan*s (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).[21] 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),[22] an *upaniṣad* (1.1.191a), a "biography" or "adventure" (*carita*: 1.56.1d),[23] 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

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[21] That is, in its frames. See now chapter 4 above.
[22] See the discussion of this reference in Section E below.
[23] 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*).

single-genre title of *kāvya*. The *Mahābhārata* is not called a *kāvya* until
a famous interpolation, probably introduced by 400 C.E., in which the
god Brahmā appears to 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 *brah-
man.* 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*[24] and eventually *kāvya*[25]—
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*[26]—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*.[27] They present a

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

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

[26] 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
Ṛg Vedic *saṃvāda* hymns, leading to an *aitihāsika* "school" of interpretation; mention
of *ākhyānavids* 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. See now also Jamison 2007,
120–50 on Ṛgvedic usages of *kāvya* in relation to later tones.

[27] 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 Gomhach
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, 1, *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

topic whose significance—for both epics—has not been sufficiently appreciated.[28]

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:

Mahābhārata Upākhyānas:

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. *Śukanyā-Upākhyāna* 3.122–25

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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).

[28] 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, 111, 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 *upākhyāna*s 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).

18. *Māndhātṛ-Upākhyāna* 3.126
19. *Jantu-Upākhyāna* 3.127–128
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. *Maṇḍūka-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 'nvaśāt 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-Gitā/ 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
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. *Nāciketa-Upākhyāna* 13.70

65. *Kīṭa-Upākhyāna* 13.118–120
66. *Ut[t]aṅka-Upākhyāna* 14.52–57
67. *Nakula-Upākhyāna* 14.92–96

This number is reached by including all units that are mentioned to be *upākhyāna*s either in passing in the text,[29] cited as *upākhyāna*s in the PS,[30] 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.[31] 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, 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*

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[29] 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 *upākhyāna*s in the colophons and headings; the third only in passing.

[30] The *PS* mentions two in Book I: 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 (127ed); 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*" (*rāmayaṇam upākhyānam…bahuvistaram;* 1.2.126ed).

[31] 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 (*Savitṛ*), 34, 49 (*Kṛtaghna*), 50 (*Japaka*, on which see Bedekar 1963), 51 (*Cirakāri*; on which see Bedekar, 1962; Gombach, 2000, 1, 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 (*Kārtavirya*), 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 (1991a, 484–485).

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,[32] 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.[33] 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 he 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 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

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[32] These are the *Ṛśyaśṛṅga-Upākhyāna* (1.8–10), *Vedavatī-Upākhyāna* (7.17), *Saudāsa/ Mitrosaha-Upākhyāna* (7.57), *Mandhātṛ-Upākhyāna* (7.59), *Śveta-Upākhyāna* (7.69), and *Idā/ Ila-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-Upākhyāna* (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 collophons 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.

[33] 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.

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 *upaparvans*; some of its parts in the case of the *upākhyānas. 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.[34] 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 *Astīkaparvan* (1.13 53)*,* the epic's fifth *upaparvan.* Like the oft-interrupted [*Mahā*]*bhārata-Ākhyāna,* it brims with substories of its own.[35] 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*[36] 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

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

[35] By Gombach's count (2000, 1, 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 2001a, 174–176, with a suggestion that this story offers a key as to how the *Mahābhārata*'s tales and subtales "fit."

[36] 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 *upākhyānas* but in the *Tapati-Upākhyāna* that immediately precedes them (1.160–163).

and the Pāṇḍavas; Śalya tells two: one (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 lis-
teners 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. 31 as the *Nārāyaṇīye Hayaśiras-Upākhyāna.* Here the primary nar-
rator 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.[37] 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 outer-
most 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.[38] 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

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[37] The Critical Edition has suppressed this anomalous feature, overriding the pre-
ponderant manuscript evidence at 12.335.1 and 9 to have Janamejaya cite Yudhiṣṭhira
as the one addressed by Vyāsa. See Hiltebeitel (press-b).
[38] On the *Narāyaṇīya* context of this exchange, see Hiltebeitel 2006a.

northern" or milky ocean, which seems to be somewhere, like the Naimiṣa ("Twinkling") Forest itself, in the heavenly night sky.[39]

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,[40] the full total for the 67 *upākhyāna*s is 10,521 couplets or 13.87%; and if one adds certain sequels[41] 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, 1, 5 and 24). Gombach (1, 194; 225) gives 68% for the ancillary stories in the *Śāntiparvan* (Book 12), which has 14 *upākhyāna*s; 65% for those in the *Anuśāsanaparvan* (Book 13), with eleven *upākhyāna*s; 55% for those in the *Āraṇyakaparvan* (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 *Āśvamedhika-* (Book 14) with two, *Śalya-* (Book 9) with two, and *Udyogaparvan* (Book 5) with three are comprised of 54%,[42] 28%, and 17% ancillary story material respectively.

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[39] 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 2006a.

[40] 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 "*ślokas.*"

[41] These are the 151–verse *Uttara-Yayāta* (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.

[42] This is by Gombach's account which, I think, dubiously—includes the *Anugītā* (14. 16.12–19.60).

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 Citraratha 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 *adhyāyas* 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" (2004a, 79–80). Both Books abound in dialogues (*saṃvāda*s)*,* "ancient accounts" (*itihāsam purātanam*),[43] 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 leading lights of the great Brahman lineages,[44] fifteen about heroic kings of

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[43] 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).

[44] 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 Vasiṣṭhas, 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 *somānraye* 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.

varied dynasties,[45] eleven about animals (some divine),[46] seven about gods and demons,[47] four (including the first two) about early kings of the main dynasty,[48] four about women,[49] three about the inviolability of worthy Brahmans and hurdles to attaining that status,[50] three about revelations concerning Kṛṣṇa,[51] two about current background to the epic's main events,[52] and one about the Pāṇḍavas as part of the main story.[53] 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 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.'"[54] 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, 1, 73). Allowing "that some of the ancillary material

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

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

[47] 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), Vedamāta Sāvitri (50), Svarga (50), Kāma (50), Kuṇḍadhāra (52).

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

[49] 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.

[50] Numbers 56, 59, 60.

[51] Numbers 34, 36, 63.

[52] 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.

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

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

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, 1, 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.[55] "Nala" is what Biardeau now calls one of Book 3's three "mirror stories" (2002, 1, 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 unused to describe the *Rāmāyaṇa* but, excepting two interpolations,[56] 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 early agreement to yield one of these terms to the other. Neither does *purāṇa* (ancient lore) describe the *Rāmāyaṇa*,[57] which evidently places itself outside the *itihāsa-purāṇa* tradition that *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 7.1.2

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[55] With his test of style (see n. 28), Sri Aurobindo sought to salvage the *Nala-* and *Sāvitrī-Upākhyāna*s for Vyāsa as works of "the very morning of Vyāsa's genius, when he was young and ardent" (Ghosh, 1991, 44). On compilers and redactors, see my discussion of this point with regard to *Nārāyaṇiya* scholarship in Hiltebeitel (2006a), 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."

[56] 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.

[57] 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 Niśakara 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).

links with Nārada as a fifth Veda.[58] 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:[59] 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 *rasas* (1.4.8).[60] In contrast to *kāvya, carita* implies the "movement" (√*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 (*sītāyāś carītam mahat*)" (1.4.6). This suggests that although Rāma's adventure is Vālmīki's starting point the complete poem is also about Sītā's 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

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[58] 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 *soḍaśarājakīya*, the second version being *upākhyāna* number 41, as quoted by Kṛṣṇa.

[59] 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 (*gītāmādhuryam*), he [Rāma] returned to the sacrificial pavilion" (7.85.23).

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

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, 1.13.40).[61] 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 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

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[61] 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.

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),[62] 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

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[62] See now Hiltebeitel in press-c on the importance of the Śakuntalā story's primacy among *upākhyāna*s, though only in the Northern Recension, and its considerable (and probably early) rehandling in this and other regards in the Southern Recension. Although I neglected to reread Biardeau 1979 on the *Śakuntalā-Upākhyāna* in researching this chapter, I find now that this study is returning to an argument she makes there about *upākhyāna*s in the *Mahābhārata*: "the apparently secondary accounts with which the epic is stuffed, far from being what one lately calls interpolations, are the reprise under a symbolic form of the dominant message of the principal account, which they thus aide to decipher, all while contributing to the progression of the intrigue" (1979, 120, my translation).

Mahābhiṣa-Upākhyāna (number 3),[63] about how Mahābhiṣa, a royal sage residing in heaven, boldly gazes up the windblown skirt of the heavenly river Gaṅgā and is cursed to earthly birth, whereupon, as King Śantanu, he marries Gaṅgā,[64] 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 Dhṛtarāstra, 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"[65] 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

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

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

[65] 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).

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 and with death, identify dharma/Dharma as death/Yama, and, while stirring up such undercurrents below the surface, lay the groundwork for the birth of Dharma's son, Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira.

After some youthful trials, the Paṇḍavas 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 *Tapati-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.[66] 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 Indraloka only after performing "unbearable" (*aviṣahya*) and lethal karma. Further, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma have joined them incarnated

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[66] 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.

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 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.[67]

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

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[67] 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.

Agastya-, Ṛśyaśṛṅga-, Kārtavīrya-, Śukanyā-, 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 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-Upākhyānas.* 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.[68] Immediately after Vyāsa's visit, the closing three *upaparvan*s then tell of the following episodes: first, Draupadī is abducted by the Kauravas' brother-in-law Jayadratha, after which Mārkaṇḍeya tells two more *upākhyāna*s (the ones about Rāma and Sāvitrī); next, Karṇa gives Indra his natural-born golden armor and earrings; and, in closing, Vaiśampāyana recounts "'The Fire-Sticks Subtale' in which Dharma instructs his son (*āraṇeyam upākhyānaṃ yatra dharmo 'nvaśāt 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

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[68] 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 *Durvāsa-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 gram of leftover rice, whence Durvāsas withdraws lest he provoke the Pāṇḍavas by not finishing the meal provided (3, App, I, No. 25).

Rāma-Upākhyāna—a "*Mahābhārata*-sensitive" version of the Rāma story (see Hiltebeitel 2009) 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 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 promises him success in disguising himself in Book 4 during the thirteenth year in exile, which soon inspires Yudhiṣṭhira to take on the name "Heron" (an "eater of fish," like the first "crane" disguise of his father) and to introduce himself to King Virāṭa of Matsya (the kingdom of "Fish") as a dicing master thanks to his having received the boon of "the heart of the dice" after hearing how this skill saved Nala in the *Nala-Upākhyāna*.[69] 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

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[69] 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. The foregoing sentence corrects an error in 2005a, 484, before n. 67.

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 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 (58.34cd) and Yudhiṣṭhira and Draupadī's tribulations in Book 4 with those of Indra and Śaci, and a prophetic lens through which to see aspects of Yudhiṣṭhira's war conduct anticipated by Indra's.[70]

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.[71] 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

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

[71] 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 rnahākhyanam anuttamam*)" (5.121.22a) in closing.

tells Duryodhana how Ambā, determined to destroy him, came to be reborn as Draupadī's brother Śikhaṇḍin, and why Bhīṣma won't fight Śikhaṇḍin because he was formerly a woman.[72] 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 Duryodhana with a fateful secret about Bhīṣma that will disadvantage Duryodhana in the war.[73]

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.[74] 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

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

[73] Albeit charmingly, van Buitenen, typically (see nn. 28 and 67 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).

[74] 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 chapter: in particular, the relation of certain myths (mostly, however, not *upākhyāna*s) to certain parvans.

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 guilt-ridden 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 the listener to the sixteen vignettes, that briefly lightens Yudhiṣṭhira's mood.[75] 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. More-over, 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

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[75] The way Vaiśaṃpāyana sets the scene is remarkable, as are Kṛṣṇa's use of humor (*hāsyarasa*) and Yudhiṣṭhira's momentary openness to it; see Hiltebeitel 2005d.

(*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 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"[76] 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" (2004a, 147–48) over centuries, from the second century B.C.E. down to the fourth-to-fifth century C.E. (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 edition's 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."[77] No doubt Dandekar had the *Bhaṅgāśvana-Upākhyāna*

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

[77] 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

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 sus-
tains him. The four anthologies repeatedly reinforce this trope (see
Hiltebeitel 2005d), but nowhere more pivotally than in the transition
from Book 12 to 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 (Dan-
dekar, 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 fore-
most 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 fol-
lowing the "the law of treating guests" (atithidharma),[78] 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[79]—even to the point of offering him his wife—is Dharma

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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."

[78] Dandekar (1966, lviii) supplies this compound. The text speaks of atithipūja,
"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 Āpaddharrna. Cf. atithi-vratin, one who is "devoted to
guests," in the Mudgala-Upākhyāna (3.246.4 and 15).

[79] 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 Uñchavṛtti-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

himself.[80] This would be a clever, beautiful, and relieving—yet also provocative[81]—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 Brahmanic 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 Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī but the rest of their householder lives together? Indeed, in a telling case of what I have elsewhere called pacing (2005c), 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?[82] 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 arche-

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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.

[80] 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.

[81] 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.

[82] 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. 40 and 41).

typal 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 (*kathā*s)
"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*.[83]
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 rela-
tive dialogical and śāstric stringency of the three *Śāntiparvan* antholo-
gies, 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 revolv-
ing characters (Viśvāmitra, Vasiṣṭha, Jamadagni, Rāma Jāmadagnya,
etc.)[84]—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 transfor-
mation 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

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[83] On which see the discussion below at nn. 97–98 in connection with the
Rāmāyaṇa.
[84] See Sukthankar (1936, 45): "the *third* repetition of the birth of Jamadagni," etc.

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 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.[85]

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

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

this chapter, 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,[86] 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 other important *upākhyāna* themes as friendship,[87] hospitality,[88] and ingratitude (no. 49) that this chapter 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 *Bālakaṇḍa*, 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

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[86] In *Nala* at 367.15; 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. See Hiltebeitel (2001a, 202–214, 230–231, 268–270).

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

[88] See nn. 78 and 79 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).

start their Vedic education, the Ṛṣi Viśvāmitra (whose story is told
in the *Mahābhārata*'s *Vasiṣṭha-* 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 for-
est, 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 sacri-
fice 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
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 *Māhābhārata*'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],[89] *Rāma-*(Jāmadagnya),[90] and *Viśvāmitra-
Upākhyāna*s. Indeed, the *Rāmāyaṇa* knows the *Mahābhārata* story of
Rāma Jāmadagnya's effacement of the Kṣatriyas as something that hap-
pened "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

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[89] Also called the *Jāmadagnya-Upākhyāna*.
[90] 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*.

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.[91] But this view overlooks an emerging pattern. The sequence of Ṛṣis—Ṛśyaśṛṅga (a descendant of Kaśyapa), Vasiṣṭha, Viśvāmitra, Gautama (with Ahalyā),[92] and Rāma Jāmadagnya (son of Jamadagni)—has linked Rāma's early years to sages from five of the eight 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.[93] 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 *upākhyānas.*

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 *āśrama* 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

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[91] See Goldman (1984, 60) endorsing, especially with reference to the Ṛśyaśṛṅga episode, long held views of the "purāṇic' quality of the *Bālakaṇḍa*, as contrasted with the more 'epic' quality of 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" (2000a, 299). Cf. Lefeber (1994, 346 and 349) on the Niśākara episode's "late" and "decidedly purāṇic type of story."

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

[93] See Hiltebeitel 2009 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.

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 *āśrama* and Rāma moves on to the *āśrama* of Atri, where Atri's wife Anasūyā tells Sītā the duties of a faithful wife and gives her apparel and jewels.[94] 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.

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 *āśrama*s, 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 *āśrama* 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 *āśrama* 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

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[94] 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 Sītā to wear over her silk (2.33.5–12; 34.15–18).

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 Jaṭayus'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" (*prahṛṣṭāḥ*) at the same sight (50.10–11).

Jaṭāyus, unwinged after his fight with Rāvaṇa, 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[95] 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" (*vayasva*). Kabandha then directs them to Sugrīva's haunt on Mount Ṛṣyamūka. This path takes them through Mataṅga's Wood to Mataṅga's *āśrama*, 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.

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[95] 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.

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.[96] 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 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*,[97] 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.[98]

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[96] 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 Vāmīki's unique development of Sugrīva's and Rāma's friendship around this "sentiment" (which is not to be found in the *Rāmopākhyana*) in Hiltebeitel 2010a.

[97] 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.

[98] 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 Tretā Yuga when all of south India was under the rule of Rāvaṇa and Brahmans had to perform ceremonies

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 vacated 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 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 8,000 years earlier (4.59.9), the Ṛṣi Niśākara ("Night-Maker") welcomed Jaṭāyus's vulture brother Sampāti, wingless after a misadventure, to his *āśrama* 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 think 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

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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 it 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 Gavaṅga 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 [1982b], 88–91 and 109 nn. 81–2). The *Rāmāyaṇa*'s Mataṅga is thus like the Potrāj a handler of the impurity of a buffalo sacrifice (see Hiltebeitel, 1980c, 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 Chandodeva, God of *chandas* verses, and of being adored by women (*Mbh* 13.30. 13–14).

to Laṅkā—a vulture-Ṛsi collaboration that thus cues Hanumān's leap to Laṅkā.[99]

In the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* (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 Ṛsis 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 Ṛsis 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 Ṛsis' 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 Rākṣasas included) heads toward Ayodhyā on the Puṣpaka chariot, stopping along the way at Bharadvāja's *āśrama* 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 Ṛsis. 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 Ṛsis 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

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[99] 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 (*parīvārya upagacchanti;* 5.59.15c) Niśākara's *āśrama* do not hint at the constellations. Cf. n. 57 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 1999a, 89–90 and nn. 5 and 6, 93–94 and n. 18.

Northern manuscripts call the *Vedavatī-Upākhyāna* (7.17) (see above n. 32). Rāma is repeatedly filled with 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.[100] At dawn he resumes his journey,[101] 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, Appendix 1, no. 9; Shah, 1975, 26–27). When Śatrughna 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,[102] 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

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

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

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

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.[103] 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 *sargas* 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 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" (*priti*) 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,

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[103] Amid these preparations, Rāma, with a smile, tells Lakṣmaṇa what some Northern manuscripts call the *Iḍa/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.

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.[104] Though the Critical edition rejects this *sarga*, it
does so only on the grounds that without it "the continuity of the nar-
ration…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 with-
out Sītā and again dismisses the kings, bears, monkeys, and Rākṣasas
(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" (94.2) tells Rāma
it is time to return to heaven as Viṣṇu. As the two converse, the con-
genitally ravenous "blessed Ṛṣi Durvāsas" (95.1b), familiar from the
Mahābhārata's *Mudgala-Upākhyāna*,[105] 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,

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[104] See above at nn. 20 and 39.
[105] And other *Mahābhārata* stories, as mentioned above (see n. 66).

is taken up to heaven. After Rāma divides Kosala into two kingdoms to be ruled by Kuśa and Lava, he enters the Sarayū and resumes his divine form, followed in this by Bharata and Śatrughna.

Upakhyāna *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 study's position is twofold. 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 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 Vālmīki, 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 *Rāmopākhyāna:* 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).[106] 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 himself in an otherwise unheard of Dvaipāyana Lake (9.29.53a): that is, a lake bearing the name of the author.[107]

About one third through the *Nārāyaṇīya,* itself an 18-chapter epitome of the *Mahābhārata* (although the Critical Edition splits a chapter

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[106] 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).

[107] 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).

and makes it nineteen [12.321–339]),[108] 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[109]—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…upākhyānaśa tani…dharmyāṇī*) 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. 141–15).

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 Bhīṣma, given his many heavenly and earthly sources,[110] would almost certainly know as well.

Still within the *Nārāyaṇiya*, just after its next major narrative on *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti,* Śaunaka[111] 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.[112]…Surely

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[108] On this point, which calls for a correction of the Critical Edition, see Hiltebeitel 2006a.

[109] 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. 47 above).

[110] 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.

[111] Again correcting the Critical Edition, which makes the speaker Vaiśampāyana; see Hiltebeitel 2006a.

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

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 nec-
tar 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,[113] 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 simi-
les. 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 *w*ill obtain lib-
eration before the *Mahābhārata*—despite Śuka's having heard it—can
have fully happened.[114] 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 (*ākhyāna*s) about dharma and all the narratives

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

[114] This point is developed in Hiltebeitel 2001a, chapter 8, especially pp. 284–285, 316.
Note that Fitzgerald (2003a) concedes that the Śuka story, like "Nala," is "suggestive of
'fiction'" (see n. 54). 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 men-
tion futurist fiction, strange things are possible. The *Mahābhārata* poets finesse this by
having both Vaiśampāyana and Ugraśravas relate Vyāsa's "entire thought."

about truth, as also the ten thousand *R̥c*s,[115] this nectar has been raised (*dharmākhyāneṣu sarveṣu satyākhyāneṣu yad vasu/daśedam r̥sahasrāṇi nirmathyāmr̥tam uddhr̥tam*)—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 samuddhr̥tam*) (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.[116] 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 like-wise imply that this "treatise" for his son epitomizes the *Mahābhārata* itself.[117] 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 the end of 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's 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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[115] Presumably R̥gvedic mantras.

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

[117] See n. 22 above.

II. MAJOR POSITION PIECES

THE *NĀRĀYAṆĪYA* AND EARLY READING COMMUNITIES OF THE *MAHĀBHĀRATA*

This chapter discusses a unit of the twelfth book of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Nārāyaṇīya*, for its bearing on the textual and religious history of post-Vedic and classical India. Although no portion of the *Mahābhārata* (henceforth *Mbh*) has been considered so axiomatically "Gupta" (at least in part) as the *Nārāyaṇīya*, the evidence for such dating—furthered most recently in the collaborative volume *Nārāyaṇīya Studien* (Schreiner 1997a) and in subsequent essays by two of its authors (Oberlies 1998; Grünendahl 2002)—is far from convincing.[1] Likewise, it has been argued in that volume and by others before it that no unit of the *Mbh* is so at odds with the rest of the text. It has become the axiomatic interpolation, and would have to be considered the ultimate test for any argument that the archetype recovered by the Poona Critical Edition, in which the *Nārāyaṇīya* is included, could provide access to the work as it was originally conceived. I have believed, however, for several years now that just such an argument is worth making (see Hiltebeitel 2001a: 28–29). For the moment, since no one has found anything in the *Nārāyaṇīya* that is inherently and demonstrably later than the dates I propose for the *Mbh*'s composition of at most two generations sometime between 150 B.C.E. and the year zero (*idem*), let me begin by urging an open mind on the possibility that there are reasons to reconsider the *Nārāyaṇīya*'s late posting.

Thanks mainly to the research of Thomas Oberlies, it is an accepted premise in *Nārāyaṇīya Studien* that the *Nārāyaṇīya* has two parts, one as a whole older than the other. It seems that such emphasis on their relative chronology is largely new to that 1997 volume.[2] According to Oberlies, the older Part A was itself inserted into the *Mbh* after

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[1] Space prevents discussion of most of the external and internal evidence for late dating introduced in *Nārāyaṇīya Studien*, which I presented in the conference version of this paper (Hiltebeitel 2003a) and must now hope to develop further in another publication.

[2] See Oberlies (1997: 75). A semi-precursor is Belvalkar (1954: 2,006), as discussed below.

its oldest components were revised to make it fit (1997: 84–86), and
what remains of that revision still allows the reconstruction of a semi-
coherent narrative based on those components. Part A's "construc-
tion resembles...many other sections of the *Mbh*: to a middle main
story others are attached and to varying degrees contribute explica-
tion or commentary. The main story has the following course: Upon
conversing with Nārāyaṇa (322.1–5) Nārada flies off to Mount Meru
(6), from which (7) he sees Śvetadvīpa situated in the NW and to its
north the Milky Ocean. He makes his way to Śvetadvīpa (325.1) and
recites a long stuti (3^{1-171})**,** whereby Nārāyaṇa is shown in a variegated
form (326.1–10). Nārada leaves Śvetadvīpa after a conversation with
Nārāyaṇa. To this ground-scaffolding further narratives are attached."
(Oberlies 1997: 87; my translation as throughout). Note that Ober-
lies is not concerned with Nārada's return from Śvetadvīpa (White
Island)—a highly important matter for the text.

    For present purposes, the main contention here, as I see it, is that
Part B is a later, separately constructed unit, and the work of different
hands. Whether or not one finally accepts this contention, and I will
not, two things must be conceded: there are gains from the two-part
perspective afforded, and the point is made in such thoroughgoing
fashion that it is difficult to see a way around it. Nonetheless, one can
already see the beginnings of a route in Oberlies's presentation of Part A
as constructed around an originally semi-coherent narrative, which he
holds up in contrast with a "nonsensical" whole that "lacks cohesion
and homogeneity to a high degree."[3] That the Śvetadvīpa narrative
begins and ends in Part A certainly does hold open the possibility that
Part A would be an originally separate unit with its own coherence.
But perhaps there is more cohesion in the relationship between Parts A
and B than Oberlies allows. Oberlies's three chapters in *Nārāyaṇīya
Studien* are devoted entirely to Part A, and mention Part B only in
passing. It is really the other three *Nārāyaṇīya Studien* authors who,
accepting his vision of the text, try to work out issues of the relation
between the parts: Peter Schreiner around the vision theme; Angelika
Malinar around the ways the *Bhagavad Gītā* is recalled; and Reinhold
Grünendahl in connection with the passages that mark the transition
between the two parts. John Brockington offers another way to han-
dle the relation that I find more persuasive. Having summarized the

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    [3] Paraphrasing and condensing from Oberlies (1997: 75).

Śvetadvīpa narrative with respect to its vision theme and teachings, he writes: "In fact this doctrine of *ekānta*, the worship of the One, seems to be summed up in the first…chapters; the later chapters appear to be glosses on the themes enunciated at the beginning, interspersed with legends, at first sight miscellaneous but actually carefully chosen to exalt the deity, to reveal his multiple forms and the activities to which they correspond."[4] This is a helpful note of caution before we run off the stratigraphic cliff. I believe, however, that it is more than a matter of themes.

Braided Frames

What has been missed by the German team of scholars who try to divide Part A from B is that the carryover from Part A to B is actually very interesting and revolves around what I have called the epic's three frame stories: the "outermost" authorial frame in which Vyāsa recites the *Mbh* to his five disciples, including his son Śuka;[5] the "inner" generational frame in which the Pāṇḍavas' great-grandson Janamejaya performs the snake sacrifice at which (in the presence of Vyāsa and Śuka) he hears the *Mbh* from Vaiśampāyana, one of the four disciples who initially learned it from Vyāsa along with Śuka in the first place; and the "outer" cosmological frame in which the Ṛṣis of the Naimiṣa Forest hear the *Mbh* from the bard Ugraśravas, who was also among those who heard it from Vaiśampāyana at Janamejaya's snake sacrifice. That is the sequence of the frames in the order of their transmission as the epic itself presents them.[6] With the second or inner frame being

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[4] I leave out, at the ellipsis, the words "six or rather seven" because it is unfortunately not clear what Brockington means by "the first six or rather seven chapters." The next sentence reads, "The idea that the first seven chapters form a unit is strengthened by the inclusion of a *phalaśruti* at the end of them (12.327.107). This should read 326.107 rather than 327.107.

[5] I view what I have introduced as this third "frame" to be indispensable to understanding the workings of the other two frames now mentioned (see Hiltebeitel 2001a: 34, 92, 279, 300, 317), which are in their own interrelationship so richly treated by Minkowski (1989, 1991).

[6] For the *Mbh* and other Indian texts, I restrict usages of "frame" to narrative-level frame stories such as the texts present themselves. Grünendahl has unnecessarily confused matters by using "Rahmen" and "frame" (1997: 237, 240; 2002: 236–237) for ascribed "coatings" or "rings" (to suggest better terms) of "late" "theological" material hypothetically interpolated in a systematic way. He was followed in this by Oberlies (1998: 138–140) without, it seems, proper acknowledgment (Grünendahl 2002:

central as the one to carry along the main story, there are certain differ-
ences in the way the other two frames are felt as presences throughout
it.[7] The outer Ugraśravas-Ṛṣis frame is felt by listeners/readers as an
overhearing of the inner frame as retold from afar,[8] whereas the out-
ermost Vyāsa-and-disciples frame is felt literally and with immediacy
in the course of the narration of the inner frame by the fact that Vyāsa
and Śuka are themselves listening and bodily present at Janamejaya's
snake sacrifice and thus at Vaiśaṃpāyana's inner-frame narration.

Heading the *Nārāyaṇīya Studien* scholars in these matters, Reinhold
Grünendahl approaches things differently. He calls the outer frame the
first dialogue level because it opens the *Mbh* (although as just noted
it is the third frame in the sequence of transmission), and he regards
it as a very late coating of the epic, superimposed or "stamped" on
the inner frame, which he calls the second dialogue level because one
gets to it second in the text. As to what I call the outermost frame,
Grünendahl simply folds it into the outer frame, since he regards the
whole story of Vyāsa's authorship to be part of the "profile of ideas"
(*Ideenprofil*) that gets stamped on the *Mbh* to promote the Nārāyaṇa
theology of the "epic Pañcarātrins."[9] Indeed, the outermost frame is
not, technically speaking, a dialogue level in the sense Grünendahl is
using: that is, a dialogue that sustains the *Mbh's* narration. Rather than
a dialogue, it is mainly a story: a story about how Vyāsa first recited
the *Mbh* to his five disciples as a communication of his creation—a

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337–340). More technically correct but equally ascriptional, Fitzgerald finds that the
Rāma Jāmadagnya story is "used to frame the Pāṇḍava narrative" (2002: 104–107).
Such a usage could apply to any twice told tale in the *Mbh*.

[7] See Minkowski (1989: 405), noting that the outer frame is always felt behind the
inner frame.

[8] Wherever Naimiṣa Forest is, and I argue that it is the twinkling night sky (Hiltebeitel
2001a: 95–96, 158), getting there has been a long trip for Ugraśravas.

[9] Grünendahl develops this notion to describe a nexus of themes and concepts—
including the "doctrine of identity" (*Identitätslehre*) of Nara and Nārāyaṇa—that was
not only "coined," "minted," or "stamped" (*geprägt, gemünzt*) in the *Nārāyaṇīya* but
systematically superimposed on the "general epic" (210) by late Pañcarātrin redactors,
first from the vantage point of Part A and then from that of Part B (1997: 222, 225,
229, 232, 235 and, in summary, 240; 2002: 311–312, 115, 336); see n. 6 above. Like
Oberlies' use of "parallels" or "element clusters" to connect the *Nārāyaṇīya's* "oldest"
Śvetadvīpa sources with textual traditions outside the *Mbh* (1997: 94–96, 108, 111),
and even to account for missing elements in stories (110) or separate out a *Nārāyaṇīya*
story based on a thematic similarity with a "late" puranic one (234–240, 296–378),
Grünendahl dates epic passages as late by the appearance of his profile of ideas in still
later texts (1997: 234–240, 296–378). Using "structure" for dating is of course fraught
with uncertainty.

teaching, a "fifth Veda." Yet there is dialogue between Vyāsa and his five disciples, including Śuka: in various exchanges between Vyāsa and Śuka sprinkled through the *Mokṣadharma* section of the *Śāntiparvan*; in the Śuka story itself that precedes the *Nārāyaṇīya*; and at three points in the latter. These are pieces of this outermost frame, which is by definition outside the two dialogical frames, the inner and outer ones. Beyond such actual dialogue passages, Vyāsa's exchange with his disciples is left tacit as an outermost frame behind the transmission of the *Mbh* through the other two frames. As to the outer frame, beyond the *Nārāyaṇīya* passages under investigation, there are only a few other places where it is dipped to or elicited.[10] Grünendahl nonetheless treats the *Nārāyaṇīya* dips as exceptional, speaking of its three dips via a generalization about the first of them as "the only one in the whole epic, seen from its 'beginning' and end"; yet he affixes to this a note adding that "the single further reference point, 15.42–43, can here remain not taken into account" (1997: 227 and n. 162; 2002: 335 n. 110; but see n. 10).

Grünendahl includes the change from Part A to B as "not least" (1997: 227) among a group of passages[11] that present the teaching of the identity (*Identitätslehre*) of Nara and Nārāyaṇa at "switch-places" or "junctures in the epic narrative"[12]—the latter being an idea that he applies to the "secondary" work of late redactors (see n. 9 above). More emphatically (and at the beginning of his summation), Grünendahl says that among such *Schaltstellen*, the *Nārāyaṇīya* "occupies a central place because of its relation to the first dialogue level: its close idea-historical connection with diverse 'junctures in the epic narrative'

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[10] At 1.1–54; by the briefest of dips at 2.46.4 (a reference I owe to an Emory University dissertation in progress by Emily Hudson); at 15.42–43; and at the epic's end with a wraparound (18.5).

[11] The others he mentions are Bhīṣma's words to "Vāsudeva (!)" (Grünendahl's emphasis) just before his death (13.153), Yudhiṣṭhira's words to Kṛṣṇa at Karṇa's death (8.69), and Vyāsa's explanation to Aśvatthāman of why his Nārāyaṇa weapon did not work (7.172)—all three coming at or near the ends of *parvan*s (1997: 210–212, 223–224.

[12] *Schaltstellen,* as per Schreiner (1997: 11–12); see Grünendahl (1997: 211–212, 223–224, 227–230, 233, 239). These are useful ideas, but they are not given their only, and to my thinking, best interpretation: that such hinges are self-conscious and even artful "joins." On the contrary, Oberlies (1997: 76–77 n. 9) and Grünendahl link their notions to the secondary work of redactors. Grünendahl says his notion of *Schaltstellen* applies to "a great number of passages eliminated as interpolations" in the *Nārāyaṇīya* Critical Edition. This makes it look like most hinge passages do not make it into the Critical Edition, but obviously they do.

strengthens the accompanying supposition that the frame [see n. 6 above] must be added in a comparatively late stage of the redaction history" (237). Going still further, he speaks of the dip as something inserted in the *Nārāyaṇīya* itself: "the interpolation (*Einschaltung*) of Sūta and Śaunaka here (326.860*…) *and at diverse other places in the Nārāyaṇīya,* especially at *adhyāya* 334…" (1997: 49). I italicize to emphasize that while the first passage cited is a star passage and thus by the Critical Edition's standards can legitimately (though as we shall now see, I think erroneously) be excised as an interpolation, the "diverse other places" where Sūta/Sauti (i.e., Ugraśravas) and Śaunaka speak to each other are not. For Grünendahl the dip is thus uniformly and, it seems, axiomatically late, even though it is he who shows that Shripad Krishna Belvalkar was unconvincing in his attempt to elimi-nate it as a whole from the Critical Edition.

We must now address this mistake made by Belvalkar as Critical Edition editor of the *Śāntiparvan*, one that Grünendahl has brought to light (1997: 33–40) with Oberlies' concurrence (1997: 79–83).[13] This is Belvalkar's attempt to maintain the *Nārāyaṇīya* at the first dialogue level or inner frame and to avoid a dip to the second dialogue level or outer frame. Drawing support from only a minority of manuscripts, Belvalkar staked his claim principally on what Grünendahl calls "the negative findings of the Malayālam manuscripts" (1997: 51), which are sometimes supported by the northern manuscripts K7, D4 and D9.[14] In what follows, I will use the abbreviation "M" for these Malayālam manuscripts, and "M group" for the group of M plus K7, D4,9 that shows this agreement. This was not Belvalkar's only mistake in treating the *Nārāyaṇīya*. Using the same manuscript criteria, he followed M in splitting one *adhyāya* in two at the point where it switches from prose to poetry (at Critical Edition 12.229–230). This resulted in changing the *Nārāyaṇīya* from an eighteen- to a nineteen-*adhyāya* unit and thus removed the possibility that the number eighteen could be significant as a kind of epitome of the eighteen-*parvan Mbh*, as it is, for instance,

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[13] On this point, Brockington seems to confuse matters, having Sauti speak to Nārada rather than Śaunaka (1998: 298), apparently due to a misreading of Esnoul (1979: 21), whom he cites here. Her point is that Sauti *also* speaks to Nārada, among others.

[14] For examples of correspondence between M and these three mss., see Grünendahl (1997, 51–53). According to Grünendahl, Belvalkar "underestimated" D4,9 and D9, regarding them as "minority readings" (1997: 33), and relegated K7 to a "secondary" Kaśmīrī group of mss. (37).

in the *Gitā*.[15] Now in considering these manuscripts, it is necessary to bear in mind Grünendahl's important reservations about V. S. Sukthankar's *Schriftartprämisse*: the latter's grounding premise as the first Critical Edition General Editor "that a kind of script constitutes a 'version'" (Grünendahl 1997: 30). Grünendahl shows that versions often overlap scripts, and that an "M version" in particular could not simply be characterized by its "purity" relative to other (Telugu and Grantha) Southern Recension scripts (33) akin to the again-alleged purity that Sukthankar attributed to the "Śāradā version" of the Northern recension (31). As Grünendahl indicates, the Śāradā manuscript tradition is incomplete for the *Nārāyaṇīya* and questionable as a version on its own as well as for its oft-alleged closeness to a "Kaśmīri" version" (33–38). Nonetheless, although Grünendahl questions Belvalkar's inclination to follow Sukthankar's emphasis on the "archaism" and "primitive character" of M and the Śāradā/Kaśmīrī manuscripts, and a "striking correspondence" between them (39), I believe there is a significant correspondence between M and these far Northern manuscripts, not least in their relative brevity, and that such significance can be appreciated not only on the level of verbal correspondences but also by the evidence that these shorter manuscript traditions provide toward reconstructing the textual archetype of the *Mbh* as a whole.

In what follows, I will thus argue that a certain redactorial agency, by changing the names and a few other touches (a few vocatives and other referential nouns; elimination of a couple of incorrigible passages), undertook to elide Sauti-Ugraśravas (henceforth Sauti) and Śaunaka, the speakers of the first dialogue level or outer frame, from the *Nārāyaṇīya* and replace them with Vaiśampāyana and Janamejaya, the speakers of the second dialogue level or inner frame. Keeping in mind Grünendahl's reservations about the *Schriftartprämisse*, it is not possible to say that a "Malayālam" redactorial agency was at the origin of this elision, only that such an agency is by far the likeliest suspect given that it is only in certain M manuscripts that there is a consistency in favor of the elision; that there are cases where M provides the only instances of the change; and, most important, the likelihood that the M tradition *is* old. These are all matters, however, that must emerge after further considerations.

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[15] Grünendahl (1997: 47); Oberlies (1997: 83; 1998, 127); and Brockington (1998: 293 and n. 142) all agree that this move of Belvalkar's was a failure.

Since this is one of those cases where a Critical Edition editor has made a quite significant mistake,[16] it should be corrected. For a fair appreciation of the *Nārāyaṇīya* and its place in the *Mbh* manuscript tradition, its dip to the outer frame must be restored. Yet what needs to be appreciated is not just that the carryover from Part A to B includes this dip to the outer frame; it also includes Vaiśampāyana's recollection of a dialogue with Vyāsa. For this transition is achieved by the narrative device of a double dip not only to the outer frame, but to the outermost one.[17] In terms of overall *Mbh* narration, these three frames are braided together from the immediate standpoint of the inner frame, with the main attention drawn to Vaiśampāyana's carrying along of the main narration. What is striking about the *Nārāyaṇīya*, once one reaches the carry-over from Part A to B, is that although there are, as we have observed, a few other dips to the outer frame (see n. 10 above), this marks the only place in the whole *Mbh* where one moves back and forth through all three frames—in fact three times. At each point where the narration dips to the outer frame, Śaunaka comes in and asks a question. But the point of each of these dips is to explore a question that is raised and addressed at each level. Each dip is centered on one multifaceted doubt, and in each case one is taken to a point where only the author, Vyāsa, can answer the question. For reasons that will become clear, it is necessary to set the three dips in the context of what precedes and follows them.

Dip to the Sauti-Śaunaka Dialogue

Prior to the move from Part A to Part B, Nārāyaṇa has made himself visible to Nārada at Śvetadvīpa. Coming to the end of a long revelatory speech, he gives Nārada leave to go. We begin just after this White Island Nārāyaṇa has told Nārada that not even Brahmā has had such a sight (*darśanam*) of him (326.96). Then, finishing his account of the "ancient and future mysteries" that include his various cosmic manifestations (*prādurbhāvas*; 96–97), he disappears. Now comes a "lead-

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ing question" by Yudhiṣṭhira to Bhīṣma that probably sets the first dip
in motion. It asks whether Brahmā is different from Nārāyaṇa, and,
if so, why Brahmā is uninformed about Nārāyaṇa even after having
heard Nārada's account of him: "This is a wondrous matter, surely, the
glorification of that intelligent one [Nārāyaṇa]: Since Brahmā heard
(it) from Nārada, how did he not know? Is the blessed lord grandfa-
ther without difference from that god? How was he not acquainted
with the power of that one of unlimited energy?" (12.326.102–103).
Bhīṣma tells Yudhiṣṭhira that Brahmā is merely the creator through
repeated creations and dissolutions, and that he recognizes the supe-
riority of Nārāyaṇa (104–105). He then concentrates on how he him-
self received Nārada's account through an *ārṣeya* transmission—that
is, via Ṛṣis (113)—and supplies the first occasion to refer to it as the
essence of all narratives: "Of those hundreds of other virtuous narra-
tives that are heard from me, O king, this is extracted as their essence.
Just as the ambrosial nectar was extracted by the gods and demons,
having churned (the ocean), even so this ambrosial nectar of story was
formerly extracted by the Brahmans" (114–115). Then, after a praise
of this narrative's merits, we come to the first passage that Belvalkar
rejects in which Sauti says to Śaunaka and the Naimiṣeya Ṛṣis, "All
this is told you that was told by Vaiśampāyana. Having heard which,
so it was done by Janamejaya according to rule. By you surely the
penances are all severe, and your vows carried out, all (of you being)
foremost knowers of Veda, dwellers in the Naimiṣa Forest, all best of
twice borns, having reached the great sacrificial session of Śaunaka.
May you sacrifice with well-offered sacrifices to the supreme self, the
lord" (12.860*).

   As Grünendahl observes, this is one of two rejected passages, the
other being 334.11–12, that "come to have special significance, since
Belvalkar's constituted text supports itself here exclusively on the M
manuscripts" (1997: 53).[18] Belvalkar justifies making this one of the "few
instances" in which "M readings are given preference not ordinarily
due to them" as follows: the whole of Part B must be late because of its
sectarian contents and stylistic features (*phalaśruti*s, *nāmanirvacana*s,
prose "interpositions," appendix-like continuation of Nārada's visit to

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[18] Earlier Grünendahl writes, "Of the 32 mss. that Belvalkar had at his disposal"
here, "only four Malayālam mss. (M1, 5–7) support the constituted text—mss. which
on other occasions…he acknowledges as having the least authority" (1997: 49).

Śvetadvīpa), and because its dip to the outer frame would be "under-standable…right at the very beginning of the Epic…or the conclusion of it," but not, as here, in the middle (Belvalkar 1954, Critical Notes: 2226). Grünendahl is not convinced by these arguments (1997: 51–52), and comments: "despite the editor's great intellectual effort…[19] in my opinion, the change executed to the first dialogue level places Belvalkar's argumentation and his text critical practice with respect to the change altogether in question" (53). I concur and would only add that here as elsewhere, it is much easier to explain how the dip would have been dropped than how it would have been so widely added. In rejecting these verses that mark the original beginning of the dip to the outer frame, the M mss. most likely deemed them incorrigible.

Belvalkar now follows up this first excision with his first change in speakers. Having removed Sauti along with what he has just said to Śaunaka, he can now have Janamejaya speak, again based only on M, as if he were still uninterruptedly addressing Vaiśampāyana. But as all other manuscripts attest, it is really Śaunaka speaking in response to the excised words of Sauti. And what Śaunaka seems to do is follow up the train of thought that arises from Yudhiṣṭhira's exchange with Bhīṣma as to the relationship between (the otherworldly) Nārāyaṇa and (the this worldly worlds of) Brahmā:

> How is the blessed lord god, the first in sacrifices, the remover,[20] lord, ever the bearer of sacrifices, and conversant with the Vedas and Vedāṅgas, established in *nivṛttidharma*, enjoying peace, beloved of Bhagavatas; (how does) he also institute *pravṛttidharma*,[21] this blessed lord? How are the gods made worthy of shares in the laws of *pravṛtti*? How are *nivṛtti* laws made for the wise who are turned aside? This is our doubt, O Sauti;[22] cut through this eternal secret. Stories of Nārāyaṇa have been heard by you that are connected with *dharma*. (12.327.1–4)

To which, in another passage dropped by M (and some other mss.) probably because it was incorrigible,[23] Sauti replies, "What the disciple

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[19] I elide here Grünendahl's qualification "at least in the passage named (334.11)," which indicates that he is more certain that Belvalkar is mistaken regarding 12.334.11 than the present case at 12.860*. Grünendahl tries, I believe unsuccessfully, to give Belvalkar some selective credence (see *"Mahābhārata* Reading Communities" below).

[20] 327.1b: *hara.* Cf. 12.330.71 (for Śiva).

[21] Thus "the law of the way that renounces acts" and "the law of the way of acts."

[22] With variants, for the Critical Edition's *vipra*, "O Brahman."

[23] Though according to Belvalkar Critical Edition notation, it was "inserted" in the many mss. where it appears.

of the intelligent Vyāsa[24] (said when) asked by Janamejaya, that old account I will relate to you, O excellent Śaunaka. Having heard that glorification of the embodied supreme self, Janamejaya of great wisdom addressed Vaiśampāyana" (12.861*). That is, Sauti says he will answer Śaunaka by recalling an "old account" (*paurāṇam*) of what Janamejaya once asked Vaiśampāyana,[25] thereby already tipping us off as to the next step that lies ahead by referring to Vaiśampāyana as the "disciple of the intelligent Vyāsa." Set in the context of a bafflement as to whether the lower gods up to Brahmā and Rudra, who have abandoned *mokṣa*, give shares to Nārāyaṇa in the fashion that they receive them from men (327.5–9, 12–13), the vexing thorn of doubt is about "attachment to rites" (characterized as *pravṛtti*) versus *mokṣa* (without mention of *nivṛtti*), with the puzzlement focused on the gods' involvement with the former and seeming neglect of the latter: "Those who give their attention to *pravṛtti* measured to the influence of time are fixed there. Meting out time, that is the great fault of those given to activity. That is my doubt, O Brahman, like a vexing thorn in my heart. Cut it by a story of history (*chindhītihāsakathanāt*). My curiosity is surely piqued" (327.10–11). What can Vaiśampāyana do on such a weighty matter but, as anticipated, quote his guru Vyāsa:

> Ah, most deeply secret is the question you have asked, lord of men. This is surely not known by one who is not wise and heated with austerity, who does not know about the *purāṇa*s. It cannot be answered quickly. Here, I will tell you what my former guru Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, the great Ṛṣi Vedavyāsa, was asked by me. Sumantu, Jaimini, and also Paila of very firm vows, I, the fourth disciple, and the fifth known as Śuka—to these five disciples, all come together, endowed with restraint, united together in pure conduct, wrath conquered, senses conquered, he taught the Vedas and the *Mahābhārata* as the fifth on Meru, the delightful best of mountains frequented by Siddhas and Cāraṇas. While they were studying the Vedas a certain doubt came up: the very one that was asked by you was explained to them by him. Since I heard it too, I will now tell you, O descendant of Bharata. (12.327.14–19)

Vaiśampayana thus provides us with one of most detailed passages on the outermost frame and, needless to say, warns us that the answer he

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[24] The Vulgate has *vyāsaś ca dhimataḥ* rather than *vyāsasya dhimataḥ*. This refers to Vaiśampāyana, which would provide reason for excising the passage by those who moved things to the inner frame, since he would not be referring to himself this way.

[25] Apparently "off the record" as regards the inner frame.

recalls from it will not be brief: he will now quote Vyāsa for seventy-eight verses (327.21–98). First, as regards the persistent doubt in question, Vyāsa indicates how he, like Nārada, comes to hold the answer: "I have practiced very great asceticism, the height of difficult asceticism, in order to know the past, present, and future, O excellent ones. When I had practiced this tapas and disciplined my senses along the shore of the Milky Ocean, by the grace of Nārāyaṇa (nārāyaṇaprasādena), this triple-timed knowledge became manifest[26] as I desired. Listen as to that knowledge; I will speak to that supreme doubt. As to what happens at the beginning of a kalpa, it was seen by my eye of knowledge" (327.21–23). Before addressing the topic of pravṛtti and nivṛtti directly, Vyāsa preambles it with three distinctions: first, that between the supreme self known as Mahāpuruṣa and the unmanifest as the primal foundation that springs from him; then, that between the still unmanifest lord and what becomes manifest for the sake of world creation; and then, within this second operation, that between the lord now in the manifest form of Aniruddha, the first of the four Vyūhas[27] and the one associated with ahaṃkāra, and Brahmā "the Grandfather" whom he fashions (nirmame) (327.24–27). Aniruddha creates the five elements and seven Ṛṣis plus Manu Svayambhuva called the "eight natural energies (prakṛtayo 'ṣṭau) in whom the worlds are established," and Brahmā creates the Vedas and Vedāṅgas for the world's success (28–30). All beings are thus created from Rudra on down, including the Divine Ṛṣis, and these, taking Brahmā as their immediate creator[28] and "the splendid Viṣṇu" as their creator beyond that and as "the one by whom and under whose authority (adhikāra) one must act," and who is "the uncontested authority, who knows the meaning," they ask Brahmā, "What is to be protected (paripālyaḥ) by him? He is the one with authority" (33–35). Brahmā admits this thought (cintā) has also occurred to him, and taking it as a question that raises the further issue of how the gods and Ṛṣis should perform activities "for the whole extension of the worlds" without the "destruction of their strength (balakṣayam)"—that is, their strength is something that they would

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[26] Note the use of prādurbhūtam here, which resonates with the prādurbhāvas, Nārāyaṇa's "manifestations," revealed to Nārada just before the dip to the outer frame.

[27] The four Vyūhas and the Nārāyaṇīya's treatment of them are too big a topic for this chapter. For the most useful discussion I know of, see Grünendahl (1997: 198–202, 206).

[28] 12.327.33. It is not so clear that they are right, since just before this it is said that the eight natural energies created "this whole universe" (viśvam idaṃ jagat; 30f).

have the right to think should be "protected" by the supreme god—he determines to lead the gods and sages to the northern shore of the Milky Ocean to ask "the Witness of the World, the Great Puruṣa, the Unmanifest" about this very matter (36–38).

After the gods and Ṛṣis do a thousand years of *tapas,* Nārāyaṇa finally speaks to them with a "sweet voice (*madhurāṃ vānīm*) adorned by Veda and Vedāṅga" (42) that addresses the key matter in stages. First, he says, 'Oho, you gods together with Brahmā, and you Ṛṣis who are treasures of *tapas*; welcoming you all, I would have you hear this important word. You know that what is done by me is a great welfare for the world. What you do in conformity with *pravṛtti* strengthens your vital breath. Well-done is the *tapas* undertaken, O gods, for the desire of my worship" (43–45). That is, a thousand years of *tapas* in conformity with *pravṛtti* has already been good for them. Urging that they should always count shares for him in every sacrifice, and that he will now explain their entitlement (*adhikāra* again), he recommends they now perform a "Vaiṣṇava sacrifice" according to Vedic precepts, a *sattra* (a sacrifice involving multiple sacrificers) in which Brahmā and the others will all give shares to Nārāyaṇa in accord with the law of the Kṛta yuga (46–50). Acknowledging that these shares have reached him, the bodiless Nārāyaṇa then blesses them standing in space (51):

> From *yuga* to *yuga*, be enjoyers of *pravṛtti*'s fruits. As to those who will also offer with sacrifices in every world, O gods, men will be made to accord you shares that are set forth in the Veda. Likewise, one who has offered a portion for me in this great sacrifice, he merits the portion of the sacrifice regulated by me in the *sūtra* of the Veda. Uphold the worlds, you to whom is assigned the fruit of sacrificial portions. In this world you are apt to direct, according to your specific entitlement, the rites that you execute perfectly to obtain *pravṛtti*'s fruits. Strong from receiving these, may you uphold the worlds. You will be furthered in the world by all the sacrifices done by humans. Then, further me; that is what l expect of you…. This is fashioned for you in accord with the qualities of *pravṛtti*. This is instituted by me, O best of gods, until the destruction of the aeon. Think of the welfare of the worlds, lords, as your entitlement. Marīci, Aṅgiras, Atri, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, and Vasiṣṭha, these seven are indeed fashioned by mind. These are considered the foremost Veda-knowers, preceptors of Veda. Following *pravṛtti* law, they are assigned to procreation. The path of those engaged in ritual action, having become manifest, is eternal. Aniruddha is called the lord who makes the creation of the world. Sana, Sanatsujāta, Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumāra, Kapila, and seventh Sanātana—these seven Ṛṣis are called mental sons of Brahmā. With knowledge that comes of itself, they are established in *nivṛtti* law.

They are the foremost of yoga-knowers, as also knowers of the Sāṃkhya teaching. They are preceptors in the scripture of *mokṣa* and are promulgators of *mokṣadharma*.[29]...Go to your entitlement, and consider what is according to custom. Let all the rites increase in all the worlds. Be not long. (12.327.53e–71)

Nārāyaṇa goes on to explain that in "this best of times," the Kṛta Yuga, "animals in sacrifice are for non-violence (*ahiṃysāḥ*)," but beginning in the next *yuga* their death in sacrifice will be appropriate (73–74). Then, once the gods and Ṛṣis have received Nārāyaṇa's reply to their question about the age-to-age decline of the *dharma* and are told they will not be touched by *adharma* if they "inhabit the region" "where the Vedas, sacrifices, penance, truth, restraint, *ahiṃsā*, and *dharma* are joined together," they all depart for their respective domains—all but Brahmā who "alone remained in place, desirous of seeing that blessed lord who takes on the body of Aniruddha" (77–80). Doing one better, "the god, having assumed the great Horse's Head, appeared to him reciting the Vedas with their limbs, bearing a water pot and rosary" (81).[30] For once there is no reiteration of the question about *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*; Brahmā seems to have gotten the point. But the Horse's Head, having embraced him, makes one further matter clear: that when the *yugas* decline there will also be a divine response: "With this burden appointed to you, I will quickly obtain constancy. But when it will be intolerable to bear the work of the gods, I will go into manifestation (*prādurbhāvaṃ gamiṣyāmi*) as guide according to my self-knowledge.' Having thus spoken, the Horse's Head withdrew into himself then and there" (327.84e–85). As Vyāsa now concludes (still, of course, as quoted by Vaiśampāyana), he brings matters back to the central doubt—now resolved:

Instructed by him, Brahmā also went to his own world without it taking long. So it is that this one of great share, the lotus-naveled eternal one (*padmanābha sanātana*), declared the one who receives first in sacrifices, the eternal upholder of sacrifices, has fixed the law of *nivṛtti*, which is the destination of those whose teaching is the imperishable. He has (also)

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[29] 327.66; or "teaching of deliverance;" cf. 327.93. This is the title of the *Mbh* section in which the *Nārāyaṇīya* appears, so these may be self-referential (but not on simply that account very late) passages.

[30] To handle a water pot suggests a hand and thus a human body for the Horse's Head; but see below. The Horse's Head "manifestation" or *prādurbhāva* is highlighted in Nārāyaṇa's long speech to Nārada at the end of Part A (326.56 and 94).

ordained the laws of *pravṛtti*, having made for the world's diversity....
At the end of the *yuga* he sleeps after having retracted the worlds; at the
beginning of the *yuga* he awakens and creates the universe. Homage to
the god beyond qualities...who is the peace of all beings, who imparts
mokṣadharma,...who is Kapardin,[31] the Boar, the Unicorn,...the Horse's
Head...always bearing a fourfold form, the hidden, who is seen through
knowledge, the imperishable and the perishable, this undecaying god goes
about everywhere, his way unalterable. Just so was this one formerly seen
by me with the eye of knowledge.[32] That is all told to you by me truly, as
you have asked. May you act, O disciples, according to my word. Serve
the lord Hari. Sing his praise with Vedic words. Worship him according
to rule. (327.86–98)

Vaiśampāyana thus recalls how Vyāsa enjoined his disciples to sing
praise of Hari (by extension, the epic) in Vedic words (*gīyatāṃ
vedaśabdaiḥ*). Further, in winding up with a *phalaśruti,* Vaiśampāyana
mentions the text's benefits not only to those of the three upper varṇas
but also to śūdras and women: hearing it, "a śūdra would obtain hap-
piness. Sonless, one obtains a son, and a maiden a desirable husband.
Should she be one whose womb is slow to deliver, a pregnant woman
will give birth to a son. A barren woman conceives and obtains a
wealth of sons and grandsons" (327.104e–5). There is more than meets
the eye here. Not only may a śūdra obtain happiness, which can be
viewed as something of a condescending cliché; he may do so hear-
ing this Fifth Veda through the *Nārāyaṇīya* that epitomizes the *Mbh.*
And so, likewise, can women hear this fifth Veda to obtain things they
desire. In these details, what is said here implying the *Mbh* is very
similar to what is said in the Śuka story (12.314–315) (see Hiltebeitel
2001a: 300).

   To summarize then, this first double or triple dip to Vyāsa is quite
quick,[33] and it is done in steps through which the questioning and
expression of doubt is quadrupled. But at all four levels—Yudhiṣṭhira
to Bhīṣma, Śaunaka to Sauti, Janamejaya to Vaiśampāyana, and the five
disciples to Vyāsa—the doubts ramify upon the opposition between
pravṛtti and *nivṛtti*, although they are raised explicitly on that subject

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[31] Or, the ascetic with matted locks (Esnoul 1979: 137). At 328.18, a name for Śiva.
So too 330.69.
[32] 327.97ab: Vyāsa thereby confirms that he has seen Nārāyaṇa's Horse's Head
prādurbhāva.
[33] See Oberlies (1997: 79), taking us through "den abrupten Wechsel der Gesprächse-
benen," including the star passages 859*, 860*, 861*, which he translates at 79, n. 24.

only from Śaunaka on, and it is left for Vyāsa's narrative to unfold them most fully in extended oppositions. Within the *Nārāyaṇīya, pravṛtti/ nivṛtti* is nearly a new topic, there being only one exception in Part A, but an informative one: "Bhagavān said, 'Excellent is this treatise (*śāstra*) you have composed consisting of 100,000 verses, from which proceeds *dharma* for the entire loom of the worlds. As regards both *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti,* this [text] will be the womb, in agreement with the Ṛg, Yajur, and Sāma, as also the Atharva-Agirasa [Vedas]" (322.36–37). The authors mentioned here are the seven Citraśikhaṇḍins, and the text is their primal "Treatise" (*śāstra*). Suffice it to note that it is presented to resemble and anticipate the 100,000-verse *Mbh* by its accord with the four Vedas and its teachings about *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti,* on which Vyāsa and his fifth Veda are now the current ultimate authority—a point Vyāsa brings home in closing when he lets his disciples know that, like Brahmā, he has seen the Horse's Head.

First Continuation of the Sauti-Śaunaka Dialogue

The *nivṛtti/pravṛtti* opposition is also at the heart of Nārada's move-ment from White Island, where he has seen Nārāyaṇa, to Badarī her-mitage and the company of Nara and Nārāyaṇa—the return journey that launches the movement from Part A to B and presents us with the conundrum of two Nārāyaṇas (see Biardeau 1991), a subject now picked up by a strange question of Śaunaka's in the first resumption of his conversation with Sauti. Since we left it at 12.327, the dip to the dialogue level of Sauti and Śaunaka has continued implicitly, with Vaiśampāyana being recalled as the ostensible speaker by an unmen-tioned Sauti. But now, once Vaiśampāyana, so quoted, has recounted a great standoff battle between Rudra and Nārāyaṇa (330.44–71), Śaunaka again breaks in: "O Sauti, very great is the narrative recited by you, having heard which, the Munis are all gone to the highest wonder" (331.1). Although Belvalkar makes his second name-change here, suppressing "O Sauti" in favor of "O Brahman" and "Śaunaka" in favor of "Janamejaya," we see clearly for once that M and the M group—Belvalkar's sole support in these changes—have left traces of their work; the "correction" does not make sense. Of the two pos-sible speakers, Śaunaka or Janamejaya, the verse could only come from Śaunaka. Unlike Janamejaya, who can have no business speaking for

"all the Munis,"[34] Śaunaka is surrounded by all the Ṛṣis or Munis[35] of the Naimiṣa Forest. Indeed, as the "master of the group" (*kulapati*) or "master of the house" (*gṛhapati*) of the Naimiṣa Forest sages, he is their spokesman (Hiltebeitel 2001a: 99, 102–104, 166). But more than just shuffling the names in this verse, the M group[36] now drops nineteen lines. This is its longest elision, and Belvalkar follows it. He demotes these lines to an Appendix, this time with some equivocal support from Grünendahl that I would call faulty.[37] The change in speakers is, of course, a reduction in scale, as becomes further evident in the long elision.

Indeed, we find that the Critical Edition scales back on what must have been a fuller and more meaningful text that M (followed, I believe, by the M group) has reduced. Let me put this as carefully as possible: such a reduction means that the outer Naimiṣa Forest frame began to lose meaning, or at least importance, to M and the M group for the maintenance of this portion of the *Mbh.* I shall return to this point in closing.

But back to the matter of reiterated questions and doubts, it is amid this suppressed material that Śaunaka, speaking on behalf of all the wonderstruck Munis, asks the question that runs through dip two: "The blessed god, adored by all worlds, is hard to see by all the gods including Brahmā, and by the great Ṛṣis and by others. That Nārada would have seen the lord Nārāyaṇa Hari, that is surely due to this god's permission, O Suta's son. When he had seen the lord of the universe stationed in the body of Aniruddha, if Nārada ran forth immedi-

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[34] The mss. M1, 5–7 have *yacchrutveme munivarā paraṃ vismayam āgatāḥ* for line 2, which makes it the "best of Munis" who are filled with wonder, thus not changing anything essential but perhaps showing an awareness of the problem.

[35] E.g., from the very beginning, upon his arrival at Naimiṣa Forest, Sauti "greeted all the Munis, his palms joined" (*abhivādya muniṃs tāṃs tu sarvān eva kṛtāñjaliḥ*; 1.1.4a).

[36] As Grünendahl observes, "another exclusive commonality of K7, D4,9, and M mss." (1997: 51).

[37] The main reason for the excision is clear enough: Sauti's description of Janamejaya's sacrifice (Appendix I, No. 32, lines 12–13) is incorrigible, since it could not be put in the mouth of Vaiśaṃpāyana who is in dialogue with Janamejaya at that very sacrifice. Yet Grünendahl (1997: 51) finds Belvalkar's editing "comparatively unproblematic" (*vergleichweise unproblematisch*) here, reasoning that the M group "constellation probably has much more importance than the 'M-Version' alone," and that this particular passage "shows…diverse connections with the idea-historical frame" as defined by his profile of ideas. The latter argument, at least, is circular and rests on his risky criterion of his "profile of ideas" (see n. 8 above).

ately again to see the two best of gods Nara and Nārāyaṇa, tell me the reason for that" (App. I, No. 32, lines 5–11). Still within this Appendix, Sauti now tells Śaunaka that Janamejaya also addressed Vyāsa with a variation of this question about Nārada's return to Badarī:

> Sauti said, "While the sacrifice of Parikṣit's royal son was going on, O Śaunaka, while the intervals of the rites were going on as per rule, the Indra among kings asked that Ṛṣi, that receptacle of Veda, the lord Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, his grandfather's grandfather."[38]
>   Janamejaya said, "When the divine Ṛṣi Nārada had returned from White Island, meditating on the word of the lord, what did he do further? Having arrived at Badarī hermitage, having approached the two Ṛṣis, how long a time did he dwell there, and what story did he ask about?" (lines 12–19)

But Janamejeya receives no reply from Vyāsa here. As the Critical Edition text now resumes, the reply will come from Vaiśampāyana, for this time, rather than quoting Vyāsa, Vaiśampāyana will speak for him by proxy.[39] Immediately upon the conclusion of the excised passage, Janamejaya remains the speaker, continuing with a second use of the churning simile, which now, seen in this context, carries extra force when we realize that it is addressed to Vaiśampāyana not only in Vyāsa's presence but also just before Janamejaya will readdress the question to Vaiśampāyana that he first asked to Vyāsa: "Surely having churned with the churning of your thought (*āmathya matim-anthena*) the supreme ocean of knowledge by this hundred thousand-extent narrative of the Bhāratas—as butter from milk, as sandal from Mt. Malaya, as Ārayaṇka from Veda, and as nectar from herbs—so, O Brahman, is this supreme nectar of story that rests on the story of Nārāyaṇa (*nārayaṇakathāśrayam*) extracted as spoken by you, O treasure of austerities" (12.331.2–4). Janamejaya is in fact simultaneously addressing both Vyāsa and Vaiśampāyana, their thought now churning together.

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[38] *Pitāmahapitāmaham*: "grandfather of his grandfather" (App. I, line 15b); Abhimanyu is grandfather of Janamejaya and Vyāsa is grandfather of the Pāṇḍavas, including Abhimanyu's father Arjuna. Presumably in one case "grandfather" has the extended sense of "great-grandfather." See 1.54.15b, where Vyāsa is Janamejaya's *prapitāmaha*, "great-grandfather."

[39] As Ganguli ([1884–96] 1970, vol. 10: 592 n. I) notes, at least seeing the problem, Janamejaya's questions seem to be addressed to Vyāsa, but "All the editions…make Vaishampayana answer."

Yet we find that Grünendahl considers these passages further support for his attempt to deproblematize Belvalkar's elisions of the second dip. Grünendahl argues that where there are doublets between the elided Appendix and what follows it in the Critical Edition text, one passage or the other must be the double, since he views doubling to be a sign of interpolation, with the first doublet often being the interpolated one.[40] But there is more to look at in these reiterations. They occur in three units, each with intervening material. First, as appropriate to a concern with the two sets of interlocutors, the initial doublets make the clearest differentiations:

> App. 32.3ab: *pāvitāṅgāḥ sma saṃsvṛttāḥ śrutvemām āditaḥ katham*
>
> Our limbs purified, we are fulfilled having heard from the beginning
>
> App. 32.4cd: *nārāyaṇāśrayam puṇyām sarvapāpapramocanīm*
>
> this meritorious story resting on Nārāyaṇa that offers deliverance from all our faults.
>
> 12.331.8ab: *sarvathā pāvitāḥ smeha śrutvemām āditaḥ kathām*
>
> Those here are indeed in every way purified having heard from the beginning
>
> 12.331.8cd: *harer viśveśvarasyeha sarvapāpapraṇaśanīm*
>
> this story of Hari the lord of all here, that offers destruction of all our faults.

The phrasing is a near-verbatim match in the second *pāda*s or halves of each line, but even there not without a subtle shift: whereas the Naimiṣeya Ṛṣis obtain *release from* all their faults, the attendees of Janamejaya's snake sacrifice obtain *destruction of* all their faults. As to the first *pāda*s in each line, the Naimiṣa Forest sages obtain this release by hearing "the meritorious story resting on Nārāyaṇa," while the attendees at Janamejaya's snake sacrifice reap destruction of their faults by hearing "the story of Hari the lord of all *here*," with *iha* ("here") emphasized twice. These are minor differences, but plausible in conveying a certain spatial intricacy amid a differentiation as to the soteriological versus ritual value of the "story" at these different locations—one "elsewhere" and the other "here."

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[40] Grünendahl (1997: 51); see Oberlies 1997: 75 on repetitions; 119 on doublings.

Before we get to the remaining doublets, Janamejaya recalls the good fortune of his ancestors, the Pāṇḍavas, to have had "Viṣṇu" as their "friend" (sakhā; 331.10),[41] and then he readdresses the question he asked Vyāsa (in the appended passage) to Vaiśampāyana, putting this "same" question now more elaborately:

> More fortunate than they (the Pāṇḍavas) was Parameṣṭhin's son Nārada. I know the undecaying Nārada to be a Ṛṣi of not just a little splendor, since he reached White Island and saw Hari himself. His viewing (darśana)[42] was manifested due to divine grace when he saw the god established there in the body of Aniruddha. When Nārada ran forth to Badarī hermitage to see Nara and Nārāyaṇa, what was the reason? Returned from White Island, Nārada, son of Parameṣṭhin, having reached Badarī hermitage, having approached the two Ṛṣis, how long did he dwell with them and what story did he ask for? When that one of very great self had come from White Island, what did those two high-souled Ṛṣis Nara and Nārāyaṇa say? You must relate all that to me truly. (12.331.13–18)

Within this rephrasing are the two doublets with verses in the elided Appendix, with Grünendahl viewing those in the Appendix as inter-polated. But here it is appropriate that the phrasing is very close, since the driving point is that they are iterations of the "same question." And there are still slight distinctions.[43]

Finally, beginning his reply, Vaiśampāyana lets us know how his speaking for Vyāsa by proxy works: "Homage to that blessed lord Vyāsa of unlimited splendor, by whose grace I speak (yasya prasādād vakṣyāmi) this story of Nārāyaṇa" (331.19). And indeed Vaiśampāyana now uses iha similarly to the double usage just cited above at 331.8a and 8c, but now with more precise spatial information: "Reaching White Island and seeing the undecaying Hari, Nārada left, O king, and quickly reached Mount Meru, bearing in his heart the weighty word

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[41] This is both a Vedic evocation of Viṣṇu as friend of Indra and a recollection of Kṛṣṇa's friendship with the Pāṇḍavas, especially Arjuna.

[42] Note that Janamejeya now realizes that Nārada's darśana of Nārāyaṇa-Hari in Śvetadvīpa is superior to his ancestors' "viewing" of Kṛṣṇa. On darśana now as "doctrine," see Schreiner 1997b: 191.

[43] The doublets are App. 32, lines 9–11 / 331.14c–15, and App. 32. lines 18–19 / 331.16c–17b. The first has two little points of emphasis that carry along a differentiation: the Naimiṣeya Ṛṣis' grander scale of vision in using the name Jagannātha, lord of the universe, rather than "the god"; and consistent with what has been said about locations "here" and anon, Janamejaya's greater interest than Śaunaka's in Nārada's arrival at Badarī. In the second doublet, there is only the slight continuing hint that whereas Śaunaka has Nārada "arrive" at Badarī from elsewhere, Janamejaya speaks of his "reaching" it here.

that was said by the supreme self. After that, O king, a great conster-
nation arose in him. When he had gone a long way, he got back *here*
safe (*kṣemī punar ihāgata*). Then he proceeded from Meru to Mount
Gandhamādana. Quickly he dropped from the sky toward the broad
Badarī" (331.20–22). This *iha* looks at first like it should refer to the
location of Janamajeya's snake sacrifice, said to have been Takṣaśīlā.
But that is made very unlikely by what follows, which suggests an
arrival somewhere "in this world" round about Meru on the way to
Mount Gandhamādana for a landing there at the Badarī hermitage of
Nara and Nārāyaṇa. From there, what Vaiśampāyana has to tell is of
course why Nārada made this fantastic run, which he does by telling
two things: first, that immediately upon his return Nārada saw the
bizarre physical similarities between the inhabitants of White Island
and the Ṛṣis Nara and Nārāyaṇa at Badarī (23–27), whom he calls "the
two Puruṣottamas" (29b); and second, Nārada's answer to a question
from Badarī Nārāyaṇa: "Is the blessed one, the eternal supreme self,
now seen by you in White Island, the ultimate original nature[44] of us
two?" (331.35).

For this second dip, in sum, it is less quick than staggered, and the
steps are less obvious than in the first. Once Śaunaka asks the ini-
tial question, there is only one clear step between the inner and outer
frame, while others are made by allusions, and one never quite reaches
the outermost frame except by acknowledging Vyāsa's presence and by
Vaiśampāyana's proxying for him. But the underlying question is less
diffuse. The theme of Nārada's strange running journey back to this
world—which should remind one of Śuka's journey "on foot" from
Meru to Mithilā (12.312.12–15; Hiltebeitel 2001a: 292)—preoccupies
the questioners at each dialogue level. Clearly, the force of the pas-
sage is to take the risk of shifting levels again as a means to marking
out the relation between the White Island Nārāyaṇa and the Nārāyaṇa
who with Nara at Badarī manifests himself "here." Devoted to both,
Nārada is thus one of those who can discuss this relation, as he con-
tinues to do, distinguishing between the (relatively) "unmanifest" form
of Nārāyaṇa and the "manifest" forms of Nara and Nārāyaṇa (331.36–
38)—Vyāsa is another, having covered the same itinerary but not with

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[44] Following Esnoul (1979: 173), for *prakṛtiḥ parā*. Their original nature seems to be
from White Island, not Nārāyaṇa (but White Island is *his* original nature; see 321.30,
323.26 especially, and 332.2–5, 12ab).

the same motive or urgency.[45] If Nārada's return from Śvetadvīpa is as important as his journey there,[46] as the text clearly considers it to be, and indeed as it must be if we in this world are to know about it, it would seem to be another case where one draws a certain value from considering Part A and Part B together.

Second Continuation of the Sauti-Śaunaka Dialogue

Nārada's conversation with Nara and Nārāyaṇa extends over *adhyāya*s 12.332–333, with their words strung ostensibly from the inner frame as recounted by Vaiśampāyana (who is mentioned at 333.1–3). It highlights further disclosures of the bewildering identity of the two Nārāyaṇas, and closes with Nārada asking Nara and Nārāyaṇa about the origin of the three *piṇḍa* balls or clods of earth used in ancestor rites, which prompts their joint reply: a story of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa's retrieval of the earth from the ocean as Varāha, the Boar (333.11–23). As Schreiner (1997b: 175) observes, this passage picks upon one of Yudhiṣṭhira's questions at the beginning of the *Nārāyaṇīya* (321.2 and 4)—that is, at the beginning of Part A—concerning what should be offered to gods and ancestors.

From that, the next *adhyāya* (334) leads into the second continuation of Sauti's dialogue with Śaunaka. Initially, Vaiśampāyana returns as speaker to make three points, or more precisely, to allow for three textual moves. First he describe Nārada's "intense devotion toward the god, dedicating himself to exclusivity (*ayantabhaktimān deve ekāntitvam upeyivān*)…in Nara and Nārāyaṇa's hermitage"[47] for a thousand years, whereafter "he promptly went to Himavat where his own hermitage is" (334.1–2). This is Nārada's exit from the *Nārāyaṇīya*. Henceforth he is mentioned five times, but only as a source for Vyāsa or as indirectly connected with him (334.12; 336.11–12 49–50, 60, 79). Nārada's departure makes way for Vyāsa to be the central Ṛṣi for the rest

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[45] See 326.123–124 and 327.21–23b, as cited above, though let us note that when Vyāsa obtains the "triple-timed knowledge" from Nārāyaṇa, we do not learn that he *saw* the Śvetadvīpa Nārāyaṇa. While Nārada's itinerary concerns spatial coordinates, Vyāsa obtains temporal ones.

[46] On which there is more to say that cannot be said here, other than that it occurs in Part A at 12.322.5–8, and that the coordinates aligning Meru and White Island are vertical: White Island is *above* Mount Meru. Other translators settle for "distance," but *ūrdhvam* (8) means "height."

[47] Note how this again juxtaposes the two and the one.

of the *Nārāyaṇīya*. Second, directly addressing himself to Janamejaya, Vaiśampāyana makes a point about enmity that looks like a complement to what Janamejaya had said earlier, just before addressing Vyāsa but hearing back only from Vaiśampāyana, about the good fortune of his Pāṇḍava ancestors in having had "Viṣṇu" as their "friend": "You (Janamejaya), even of unlimited energy, born in the Pāṇḍava family, are of purified soul now, having heard this story from the beginning. His is neither the other world nor this, best of kings, who by word, thought, or deed should hate the undecaying Viṣṇu. Whoever hates the best of gods, the god Nārāyaṇa Hari, his ancestors sink into hell for eternity. How may he be hated who is the self of the world? The self, O tiger among men, is to be known as Viṣṇu. That is affirmed" (334.4–7). Third, Vaiśampāyana now reveals something that must be meant to be a bit startling, since it has not been revealed prior to this point in the whole *Mbh:* "This one who is our guru, the Ṛṣi [Vyāsa], son of Gandhavatī, by him this is told, son, this glorification of the supreme self. From him it was heard by me, and it is told to you, sinless one. Know Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa as the lord Nārāyaṇa. Who else, indeed, could be the maker of the *Mahābhārata*, O tiger among men?" (334.8–9d). Telling Janamejaya now to perform a horse sacrifice, Vaiśampāyana tucks him textually aside, much as he just did with Nārada, to open the way for Sauti to begin the second continuation of the outer frame. Here again Belvalkar, in his editorial work for the Critical Edition, switches names. But with the dip restored, this is how Sauti opens (including a star passage set in brackets): "Sauti said, 'Having heard this great narrative, the king, Parikṣit's son, then began all the rites for the sake of accomplishing the sacrifice. This *Nārāyaṇīya* narrative is told to you by me [892⋆ as asked now, O Śaunaka, here among the residents of Naimiṣa Forest]. Formerly, indeed,[48] Nārada had revealed it to the guru[49]…'" (334.1 11–12d, with the one-line star passage between 12b and c). Belvalkar changes speakers from "Sauti" to "Vaiśampāyana," and eliminates the references to Śaunaka and the

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[48] Rather than *yad vai* here, the Critical Edition sustains the second dialogue level with *rājan*, "O king," as if this were addressed to Janamejaya rather than Śaunaka.

[49] The Critical Edition has *guruve me*, "to my guru," befitting Vaiśampāyana as speaker, but with the *me* wavy-lined as dubious, while most other mss. have *guruve tu*, "to the guru." As Grünendahl (1997: 52) says, it could only be Vyāsa. But Nīlakaṇṭha, with no explanation, has *guruve bhaspataye*; see Ganguli ([1884–96] 1970, vol. 10: 600 n. 2): he thinks it must mean Vyāsa or Vaiśampāyana. As long as it is not "my guru," we can lake the words as Sauti's and not have to explain how Vyāsa would be his guru.

Naimiṣa Forest Ṛṣis by excising the star passage. But this time he gets no support from Grünendahl. As the latter observes, Sauti must be the speaker here since Janamejaya's "having heard this great narrative" and his seeing to "all the rites for the sake of accomplishing the sacrifice" require Sauti's first dialogue level to report them (1997: 52). Grünendahl confirms "that the text refers to the first dialogue level in…12ab and in the additional line found in all mss. other than M, in which Śaunaka is addressed directly (892*)" (1997: 52). Obviously M deemed 892* both incorrigible and dispensable. For Grünendahl, it is the consideration that Belvalkar supports his reconstitution solely on M, with no support this time from other manuscripts in the M group (52–53), that "overturns the foundational decision he has set forth" (52).

So Sauti now has the podium, and, picking up it would seem on what Vaiśaṁpāyana has just told Janamejaya about Vyāsa, he begins to turn Śaunaka's attention as well to "the guru"—that is, Vyāsa—to whom, as we immediately learn in continuation, Nārada revealed the *Nārāyaṇīya* "in the hearing of the Ṛṣis, Pāṇḍavas, Kṛṣṇa, and Bhīṣma" (334.12ef). Here things have begun to get a bit obscure, since we don't know when this colloquy took place.[50] And they remain almost as obscure in the next verse, where, having just referred to Vyāsa as "the guru," Sauti begins to describe "the supreme guru (*paramagurur*)" (334.13a). Although it seems at first that he would still be talking about Vyāsa, the terms in which he continues (13h–17) indicate that he has moved on to a description of White Island Nārāyaṇa (see Ganguli [1884–96] 1970, vol. 10: 600). Yet considering that Sauti is adumbrating on what he would have just reported from Vaiśaṁpāyana, one might imagine—as a possibility—that he is playing on the latter's revelation that Vyāsa *is* Nārāyaṇa. In any case, the ground is prepared for Śaunaka to have his last questions in the three-dip series. Having briefly reviewed what he has heard about Nārāyaṇa's glorification of the supreme self and his having taken "birth in the house of Dharma in the person of Nara and Nārāyaṇa" (335.1), about the "ancient origin of the *piṇḍa*…and as to

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[50] On this group, see 336.11, with the phrase "when Kṛṣṇa and Bhīṣma were listening" to Nārada who was responding to "Pārtha." This "Pārtha" looks like it would be Arjuna, who is just mentioned, but see 336.60, where the same basic verse has "Dharmarājñe" ("to the king of Dharma," Yudhiṣṭhira) instead of "Pārtha," and 336.80, where Vyāsa told this explicitly to Dharmaputra. This setting thus recalls 334.12 and 822*, just cited. It does not seem that it could have been during the *Śāntiparvan*. The setting is also mentioned in a passage unattested by the Critical Edition but translated by Ganguli that would close the *Nārāyaṇīya* ([1884–96] 1970, vol. 10: 625).

what is ordained concerning *nivṛtti* and *pravṛtti*" (2)—that is, a nice recap of the substance of the two prior dips plus the reference to the *piṇḍa* story, which is after all also a matter of *pravṛtti*—Śaunaka gets to his bottom-line issue:

> And you formerly told about the great Horse's Head of Viṣṇu that consumes *havya-kavya*[51] in the great ocean in the northeast, that was seen by lord Brahmā Parameṣṭhin. Why has this form, this power without precedent among the great powers, been sustained by Hari, sustainer of the worlds, O best of the wise? Having not seen that best of gods before, of unlimited energy, that meritorious Horse's Head, what did Brahmā do, O Muni.[52] This is our doubt (*etat naḥ saṃśayam*), Sauti,[53] born from knowing the *Purāṇa*.[54] Tell, O one of foremost intelligence, what is fashioned by the great Puruṣa. Purified by you, Sauti,[55] tell this meritorious story. (335.3–6)

Sauti says he will do so by recalling how Janamejaya had a doubt about the same question:

> I shall tell you the whole *Purāṇa,* equal to the Veda, that the blessed Vyāsa sang for Parikṣit's[56] royal son.[57] Having heard about this form of the god Harimedha with the Horse's Head, the king had a doubt arise (*utpannasaṃśayo rājā*), and so he pressed him.

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[51] Probably rites to gods and ancestors, respectively. Oberlies 1997, 150–152 assigns them to a young but still middle stratum among the sacrificial conceptions treated in Part A.

[52] The additional M group mss. K7 and D4,9 have *muniḥ* for *mune*—"what did the Muni Brahmā do?" The vocative *mune* is puzzling, since it is not clear how Sauti would be a Muni. Usually, and I cannot cite an exception, it refers to a Brahman. Perhaps it acknowledges Sauti's wisdom.

[53] The Critical Edition has *brahman,* "O Brahman." "Our" doubt likely encapsules Śaunaka's speaking for Ṛṣis.

[54] Again, this would be most appropriate for Śaunaka, who knows all the ancient stories Sauti tells him in Book 1 (see *Mbh* 1.5.1–3 and Hiltebeitel 2001a: 104); it is doubtful that Janamejaya is, at least at this point (ie., before the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*), such a *Purāṇa* -knower.

[55] *Saute* occurs in K7 D4,5,9; *sūta* in T G1–3,6. The Critical Edition has *brahman,* "O Brahman."

[56] The Critical Edition has *dharmasutasya* (i.e., Yudhiṣṭhira's) wavy lined. *Pārikṣitasya,* with varied formations and spellings, occurs in both southern and northern mss. This would be something Sauti would report.

[57] The added M group mss. K7 and D4,9 go to the outer frame here, inserting after verse 7: "I will tell alt this to you. Listen, Śaunaka" (839*). M5, however, at the same point refers the exchange to one involving Yudhiṣṭhira and Vyāsa (894*).

Janamejaya[58] said, "That god bearing the Horse's Head whom Brahmā saw, what is the reason that the god took this form?" (335.7–8)

And so we come with this doubt not only to Śaunaka's bottom line question for the outer frame, but to the bottom line of what links the outermost and the inner frames. For this is the only time in the entire epic where Vyāsa, seated as an otherwise silent though not entirely inactive attendee at Janamejaya's snake sacrifice, gives Janamejaya a solely verbal reply.[59]

Vyāsa's *Purāṇa* is a long story (12.335.21–66) about how Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa awakens from his yogic sleep at creation and assumes the form of Hayaśiras, the Horse's Head, to rescue the creator Brahmā, freshly emerged in the primal lotus, from the two demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha, who interrupt him as he is in the process of creating the worlds by "first emitting the four Vedas" (25cd). "Having seen the Vedas, those two best of demons, bearing form themselves, then forcibly seized the Vedas in Brahmā's sight. Then those two best of Dānavas, having stolen the Vedas, quickly entered the Rasā[60] in the great ocean of the northeast" (26–27). The great ocean is the Milky Ocean, and its northeast is henceforth to be the location of this Horse's Head manifestation of Nārāyaṇa. With the Vedas stolen, Brahmā is stupefied, and heartrendingly deplores their loss. Then he thinks of Hari Nārāyaṇa, lauds him for his aid, recalls how they have cooperated through six prior creations, and implores him to wake up and help him. Nārāyaṇa awakens and by his lordly yoga assumes the vast cosmic form of the Horse's Head:

> Having taken on lunar splendor with a body that had a beautiful nose, having made the auspicious Horse's Head, receptacle of the Vedas, the lord, by his head, then became the sky with the stars and constellations. His long hairs[61] were of the same splendor as the rays of the sun. His two ears were in the hell of downward space (? *avākāśa*), his forehead was

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[58] Rather than the Critical Edition's "Yudhiṣṭhira," varied northern and southern mss. have Janamejaya speaking.

[59] The two other times Vyāsa responds to Janamejaya at the latter's snake sacrifice it is primarily through action: when Janamejaya asks him to tell about the "breach" between his ancestors and Vyāsa turns matters over to Vaiśampāyana (1.54.18–22); and when he asks Vyāsa to enable him to see his deceased father Parikṣit just after he has heard how Vyāsa enabled the warriors who died at Kurukṣetra to be seen risen at night from the Gaṅgā by their surviving loved ones (15.42–43).

[60] See 12.335.3, 54 on the Rasā in the ocean to the northeast as the location of the Horse's Head.

[61] Presumably his mane.

the earth as the bearer of beings, the meritorious great rivers Gaṅgā and Sarasvatī were his eyebrows.[62] Soma and Sūrya were his eyes, his nose recalled the twilight, the adornment[63] was the syllable Oṃ, his tongue was fashioned of lightning, the renowned soma-drinking ancestors became his teeth, O king; Goloka and Brahmaloka became the great-souled one's lips. The Night of Time that transcends the strands, O king, became his neck.[64] (44–48)

Thus self-manifested, the Head sets forth for the Vedas' retrieval:

Having entered the Rasā, he resorted to the highest yoga. Adopting the tone regulated by the rules, he emitted the sound Oṃ. And this sound resonated and was smooth everywhere it went…. Then the two Asuras, binding the Vedas together, having hurled them into the Rasātala ran to where that sound was. Meanwhile, king, the god bearing the [form of the] Horse's Head, Hari, grabbed all the Vedas that had gone to the Rasātala, gave them to Brahmā, and then returned to his own nature [of the sleeping Nārāyaṇa as Aniruddha]. After he had established the Horse's Head in the northeast of the great ocean, the Horse's Head then became the repository of the Vedas (*vedānām ālayas*). Thereupon the two Dānavas Madhu and Kaiṭabha, not seeing anything, again came there. The two speeders looked around where they had hurled the Vedas, but that place was absolutely empty. Then resorting to high speed, the two best of the powerful again quickly rose up from the abode of the Rasā. And they saw that Puruṣa, the lord, the maker of beginnings, white with a radiance of lunar purity, established in the body of Aniruddha; of immeasurable vigor, under the influence of the sleep of yoga, he was defined upon the waters on a bed abounding in serpent coils prepared to his own measure that was surrounded by a garland of flames…. The two Dānava lords released a great laugh. Pervaded by *rajas* and *tamas*, they said, "This white Puruṣa lies under the influence of sleep. It is he who has taken back the Vedas from the Rasā…." When the two had spoken so, they awakened Hari seeking to fight…. Gratifying Brahmā, Madhusūdana slew (them). (12.335.50–64)

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[62] 335.46cd: *gaṅgā sarasvatīpuṇyā bhruvāv āstām mahodadhi*. With *śroṇyau* for *puṇyā*, the Vulgate has "Gaṅgā and Sarasvati were his hips, the two oceans his brows" (12.347.50ab), but this would be the only mention of a bodily part below the neck. Otherwise, the passage suggests a Horse's Head with nothing below the neck. But cf. 327.81d, cited above, where he holds a water pot. In illustrating the current passage, the Citraśālā Press edition seems to fudge things, showing a full-bodied Hayaśiras, horse-headed from the neck up, necklaced, but otherwise a typical four-armed standing Viṣṇu bearing a lotus, conch, mace, and *cakra*, but no water pot. See Kinjawadekar 1929–33, vol. 5, facing page 731.

[63] 335.47c: *saṃskāra*, a guess; perhaps a forehead mark.

[64] The Horse's Head's neck is thus Kālarātrī, the "Night of Time"! Does this imply that he is a kind of ultimate Aśvamedha head equivalent to the doomsday Brahmaśiras? Cf. Grünendahl's observation that the horse is not slain in the *Nārāyaṇīya's* story of the Aśvamedha of King Vasu (2002: 327 n. 77.).

These two demons' opposition to Brahmā has thus led to their further opposition to Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu, recalling that the whole passage is prefaced by an evocation of the theme of enmity with this god, and in back of it the theme of friendship with him as well.[65] Meanwhile, Brahmā, having received back the Vedas, is able to fashion all the "mobile and stationary worlds" (12.335.65–66), and Hayaśiras is made the repository of the Vedas in the northeastern ocean where, even though they have so far seemed to be manuscripts,[66] their orality is now clearly primary. Indeed, soon enough Vyāsa emphasizes the Horse's Head as the source and inspiration of oral means of Vedic preservation: "Having praised with fierce *tapas* the god bearing (the form of) the Horse's Head, the sequence (of recitation, *kramaḥ*) was obtained by Pañcāla on the path pointed out by Rāma" (71).[67]

In sum, this third dip is fairly straightforward. Śaunaka is once again positioned to voice the pivotal doubt. And again we find a frame-crossing appeal by Janamejaya to the authority of Vyāsa, with the answer coming this time neither by quotation nor proxy but by Vyāsa himself. Clearly, all this dipping has led to a kind of revelation, in fact, a revelation about revelation: Veda. The three-part sequence is nice enough for us to congratulate the author, whom Vaiśampāyana sets up from the outset of dip three by telling Janamejaya, "Know Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa as the lord Nārāyaṇa. Who else, indeed, could be the maker of the *Mahābhārata?*" (334.9). Who else, indeed, would be so informed about the mysterious Horse's Head![68] With Nārada's *Nārāyaṇīya* exit

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[65] In Hiltebeitel 2002, I argue that these demons, at least in this version of the myth, provide a figuration of heterodoxy: probably of the Buddhists who oppose the idea of Brahmā as creator and reject the *Mahābhārata's* view of friendship and enmity.

[66] See Hiltebeitel 2005c discussing the theft, binding, tossing to hell, and retrieval of the four Vedas as implying manuscripts and writing.

[67] See also in the *Nārāyaṇīya* 12.330.31–39, especially 36–38, where it is indeed by Kṛṣṇa's grace as the Horse's Head that Gālava of the Bābhru *gotra,* evidently "the high-souled one from Pañcāla," was the first to master the "division of the sequence of syllables" (*kramākṣarabhāgavit*)—that is, the *krama-pāṭha* style of "ab bc cd etc." Vedic recitation—" by the path pointed out by Rāma" (330.36–38). This passage allows some possibilities for dating. According to T. P. Mahadevan, Babhru is mentioned in the *Ṛg Veda Prātiśākhyā*—dated around if not well before Pāṇini (ca. fourth century B.C.E.) at *paṭala* 10, with more on *krama* in *paṭala* 11. Earlier in this passage, the *RV* is said to have had twenty-one *śākha*s or branches (12.330.32ab), a number mentioned—after other traditions mention the number at five and seven, by Patañjali, usually dated at 150 B.C.E. I thank Frits Staal for this information, and both Staal and Mahadevan for discussions on these matters.

[68] I must reserve some points on this topic for development elsewhere; see now, in this book, chapter 9 §D.

leaving the focus on Vyāsa, one waits upon the author as a subject to be continued,[69] which he is, notably in *adhyāya* 337, where Vyāsa reveals his double birth, saying, "I am born of that god Harimedhas's grace and named Apāntaratamas, born by Hari's command. And again I am born the celebrated joy of the family of Vasiṣṭha. I have thus told of my former birth. So I am born of a portion of Nārāyaṇa by Nārāyaṇa's grace" (337.54–55). It seems this means that he is a "portion of Nārāyaṇa" in both births. In any case, the name Harimedhas, which surely connects the "sacrificial essence/sap (*medhas*) of Hari"[70] with the horse's head of the Aśvamedha,[71] cannot be innocent in the *Nārāyaṇīya*.[72] We have also met it when Janamejaya has his last doubt after he has "heard about the form of the god Harimedhas with the Horse's Head" (355.8ab). In terms of Vyāsa's final authority on this remarkable manifestation, which among other things speaks for Vedic orality, it seems that he speaks not only as a "portion of Nārāyaṇa" but from the "Hari-essence" of the Horse's mouth. The theme of appealing to Vyāsa's authority then has one last turn in the *Nārāyaṇīya*, in the next to last *adhyāya*, when Vaiśampāyana bows to him as having taught a single highest Person (Puruṣa) as the origin of all others, and as informed by the *Puruṣasūkta* (338.2–7; cf. Schreiner 1997b, 160)—a perfect example of the "churning" together of *Mahābhārata* and *Veda*.

Mahābhārata *Reading Communities*

Vyāsa thus tells Janamejaya a way to "read" all the stories in the epic—and more, since the *Mbh* famously includes "everything there is" (1.56.33; 18.5.38), it is a way to "read" any and all stories anywhere. It is a meta-statement about the *Mbh* and all it encompasses. Obviously

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[69] Grünendahl handles Vyāsa's authorship and links with Nārāyaṇa among the "coinages" of the epic's late coating in conjunction with Part B. For him, Vyāsa has three aspects: this very late author aspect; the proclaimer of the Nārāyaṇa theology, whom he connects with the older Part A; and an older Vyāsa who "appears in numerous places in the epic, at which the [other] two aspects generally are not addressed" (1997: 239–240). A lot hangs on that "generally." I do not think one can correlate such separations with strata of textual development; see Hiltebeitel 2001a: 32–91.

[70] Perhaps the "tawny/yellow/reddish (*hari*) sacrificial essence."

[71] I doubt that the name Harimedhas is related to Iranian *xvarena*, but see Brockington 1998: 144, 296.

[72] Along with the usage discussed, the name Harimedhas has suggestive uses at 323.12d and 336.28b.

it is also a *bhakti* statement[73] about the whole and a meta-statement of the point of view of at least the *Nārāyaṇīya* author. Its author may have made it one of the last contributions to the *Mbh*, but I think he was not working in isolation from the others who first composed the epic. In any case, to date the *Mbh* archetype disclosed by the Poona Critical Edition, it will help to date the *bhakti*-oriented reading communities for the epic that the *Nārāyaṇīya* helped to shape.[74] Suffice it to say that while there is plenty of evidence for the pre-Gupta date of *bhakti* ways to read the epic (not least in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Buddhacarita),* there is none that I know of for any earlier way of reading the *Mbh*.[75] M was certainly among these reading communities, since the *Nārāyaṇīya* was a *bhakti* reading of the epic that M had to consider. Clearly it was important enough for M to change it. But where, when, and why?

 In his treatment of Belvalkar's editorial choice to eliminate the outer frame throughout the *Nārāyaṇīya*, Grünendahl is clear that Belvalkar is unconvincing where he bases himself on M manuscripts alone, but he gives him wriggling room where it is a question of the M group, whose testimony has "much more importance" (1997: 51) and is "more convincing" (53). 1 do not follow Grünendahl in making such a discrimination. Beyond his view that the passages are interpolations and found in a late "surrounding field," I see him offering no other reasons why M group passages should be more weighted in the reconstituted text than those targeted by M alone. Yet Grünendahl extends the point: "On principle (*grundsätzlich*) it is well to agree with Belvalkar, since he holds such a change to the first dialogue level to be a late redaction-

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[73] It is gratifying to see Grünendahl now emphasize that *bhakti* (with *darśana* and *pūjā*) is the *Nārāyaṇīya's* main issue (2002: 319, 328–3 33), against Oberlies' stress on sacrifice (1998). But he pushes things too far and thus underestimates the integral thread of sacrifice, evident, just for instance, in the treatment of *pravṛtti*, the Horse's Head (see n. 64), and the name Harimedhas.

[74] In adapting this terminology so richly developed for the *Maṇimekakai* by Anne Monius (2001), I continue to think that the best way to envision the *Mbh's* "empirical author" (the "model author" being another story…) is to hypothesize that the *Mbh* is a written work of composite authorship (Hiltebeitel 2001a: 19–35, 169; 2002) that produces a text by which "professional literati" could engage and create "literate audiences" even among "illiterates" through oral performance (see Monius 2001: 35–36; Hiltebeitel 2001a, 21–22; chapter 1 above). Schreiner's notion (1997b) of the *Nārāyaṇīya* as a "dialogical text" provides a promising starting point for envisioning the *Nārāyaṇīya's* and the *Mbh's* early "model audience."

[75] Such as Fitzgerald (2001, 2003a) is yet to account for in proposing a pre-*bhakti* "main *MBh*."

historical appearance. He sees it as an index for the recentness of 'the whole piece' [Part B],[76] and not more. Meanwhile, the content-related/idea-historical indexes mentioned for a redactional connection between the *Nārāyaṇīya* and the *Ādiparvan* give this change a dimension wherein it leaves it to appear little rich in meaning to consider it isolated" (1997: 53; cf. 2002: 334). On the contrary, I believe that even if debate remains as to the dating of the *Nārāyaṇīya* "parts and whole" and its relation to other sections of the *Mbh*, I have shown that its change to the outer frame, considered in the isolation of its immediate context in and through Part B, *is in itself* "rich in meaning."

In assessing Belvalkar's work, Grünendahl gives a final sense of how he draws the line between Belvalkar's editorial shortcomings and his occasionally good results:

> Except for Sukthankar's *Schriftartprämisse*, there are not editorial principles to derive from the above examples. The editor works from case to case…. it is "higher criticism" speaking. And "plausibility" plays an underestimated role. When subjectivity adds up like this, it calls into question the compulsory text-critical exercises (classification of mss., etc.). Add to this that these foundations sometimes leave us to miss in consequence the excellent decisions made. So, for example, his note to 328.11 ff. (Belvalkar 1954, Critical Notes: 2227) that he would prefer not to include this passage in the constituted text, since Kṛṣṇa here refers to himself, etc. The fact alone that it finds itself in all mss. has stirred him to include it still, but nevertheless—and here again it is the higher criticism speaking as in the last instance—"provisionally closed in square brackets." He argues similarly with reference to the whole second section of the *Nārāyaṇīya* (12.327–339). (Grünendahl 1997: 53–54)

Evidently the combination of Kṛṣṇa and textual reflexivity provides an "excellent" criterion for dismissal. Belvalkar's lower critical work is affected by his higher critical views, but the latter are apparently commendable where they agree with those of their assessor.

This leads to a last point of disagreement—one more with Oberlies (1997: 140–142) than Grünendahl, though the latter shares the premise (1997: 204–221; 2002: 314 n. 19). It is clear in these Part B passages, including the one just mentioned (328.11 ff.) in which Kṛṣṇa

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tells Arjuna about his names, that there would be no possibility of
"fanning out" the text into separate units based on the varied names
of the deity.[77] From this perspective, it looks as if the long passages of
Part A that stress the names Nārāyaṇa and Hari—to the near—but not
total absence of Viṣṇu (324.30)—do so because they are telling stories
about Śvetadvīpa, a place in which these are simply the names most
pertinent to the deity *there.*

Finally, it was in thinking that everything could be "reverted" to
one level that Belvalkar made his big mistake—a simplifying miscon-
strual apparently based on M and still given credence "on principle"
by Grünendahl. One can only wonder that critics have never asked
why a decision to revert to the outer frame would have been made
here—at a point near the end of the *Mokṣadharma*, which treats ulti-
mate questions. In fact, the *Mokṣadharma's* last three units give shape
to the authors'[78] parting overview of at least the *Śāntiparvan.* The final
section is an allegorical story that takes place *in* the Naimiṣa Forest
(which we thus do not exactly leave) about the many doors to heaven
and the best duty of the four life stages (see Hiltebeitel 2001a: 19–20,
156): these being connecting themes with the two sections that pre-
cede it—the Śuka story[79] and the *Nārāyaṇīya*, both of which take us
back to the outermost frame.

Yet there may still be more to learn from what seems to have
begun with M. Here I would like to draw on the current work of
T. P. Mahadevan, who attempts to link the migrations of two Brah-
min groups—the Pūrvaśikhās (those with forelocks) and Aparaśikhās
(those with topknots to the back)—from north to south India with
the north-to-south migrations of the epics. Mahadevan argues that

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[77] See Oberlies (1997: 76), citing Hacker (1961). For a different approach of examin-
ing how specific names are used in context, see (most recently for her) Biardeau 2002,
2:317 and *passim.*

[78] I do not follow the author/ redactor differentiation that runs through *Nārāyaṇīya
Studien,* especially where Oberlies invokes Biblical Criticism (1997: 75–76) and Schreiner
describes the work of redactors (1997: 159 and *passim*) indistinguishably from that of
authors. Grünendahl (2002: 332 n. 97) seems to find Brockington's distinction (1998:
11) between *sūta* oral reciters and brahmin redactors useful here. But see Hiltebeitel
2001a: 13 n. 51, 101: for me, it is always simply Brahmin authors (usually as poets).

[79] The *Nārāyaṇīya* refers back to the Śuka story: when Vyāsa tells about his prior
birth from Nārāyaṇa as Apāntaratamas, he recalls Nārāyaṇa's prediction that he "will
not gain release from affection. And your son, free from affection, will be a supreme
soul by the grace of Maheśvara" (337.45c–46d). See 12.320.17–36 (just before the
Nārāyaṇīya) and Hiltebeitel (2001a: 310–312).

the Malayālam version—long recognized as the shortest version in the
Southern Recension, and similar in at least that regard to the shortest
Northern Recension versions (the Śāradā and Kaśmīrī)—is connected
with those who made the first migration, the Pūrvaśikhās, and that
the more inflated other manuscript groupings of the Southern Recen-
sion (the Telugu and Grantha manuscripts) reflect the overlay upon
the earlier M-sized Southern Recension that follows from the arrival
of the much later (mainly) Aparaśikhā migration.[80] If, as Mahadevan
makes to seem very likely, the changes in M are made after the arrival
in the south by Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins, who would have brought a
Mahābhārata probably close to the Kaśmiri-Śāradā recension which
they fashioned into the oldest Southern archetype and later developed
into M in Kerala after (or even during) the so-called Kaḷabhra inter-
regnum of the fourth to seventh centuries C.E. (Monius 2001: 3), that
would mean that the dip to the outer frame, which M *changed*,[81] would
be as old as the departure to the south: possibly as early as the second
century B.C.E., and certainly pre-Gupta. By Mahadevan's reckoning,
the southern archetype that M keeps close to[82] goes back to migra-
tions that took place before the Kaḷabhra interregnum, and probably
occurred in the Sangam period. A full study of the M manuscripts
is called for, but taking into account what is presently known, one
may conjecture that the M manuscript redactors were concerned to
make the epic as comprehensible as possible for a new and linguisti-
cally different milieu. This would at least provide a common explana-
tion for four things that have been observed so far. In one case noted
by Grünendahl, and also discussed by me, M manuscripts make a
nice editorial cut to avoid doubling a reference to Mount Kailāsa in

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[80] In introducing the phrase "earlier M-sized Southern Recension" in place of "M"
in the original article, I offer a correction. "M" is not the earliest evidence we have of
the Southern Recension archetype, as I thought it was when writing this article. Rather,
"M" has modified that archetype, which Sukthankar 1933 and 1942 simply calls "S"
for Southern Recension, differentiating this "S" from the attempt at a Southern Recen-
sion begun in Sastri 1931. "M's" contribution to the reconstruction of an all-Indian
Critical Edition archetype is that, unlike the southern manuscripts in Grantha and
Telugu, "M" kept its *Mbh* short. In the *Nārāyaṇīya*, however, we have been discussing
passages where "M" modified an older "S." For further discussion of this problem, see
Mahadevan 2010; Hiltebeitel 2010c.

[81] Probably in Kerala, since no non-M southern mss. are affected by the change,
or "retain" it.

[82] Again, for the same reasons as are discussed in n. 80, the foregoing phrase now
replaces "M mss."

accounting for the movements of Śuka. Here we could suspect that the M redactors try for force and clarity.[83] Second, it is a trait that M manuscripts share with the rest of the Southern Recension of supplying names for characters left in the Northern Recension without them as part of what Sukthankar calls its demonstration of a "thoroughly practical outlook" (1933: xxxv–xxxvi).[84] Finally, treating the *Nārāyaṇīya* as an especially significant text to modify, M decides, for what looks like simpler solutions, to divide prose and verse sections to create two *adhyāyas w*here there were one, and it tries to maintain everything at one familiar dialogue level to get to the bottom-line *bhakti* teachings of Vyāsa without the complications of a dip to the outer frame. If the *Nārāyaṇīya* was important enough to draw such practical solutions, it would be because it was deemed a valued text in shaping new *Mahābhārata* reading communities.

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[83] 12.318.63 and 798* See Grünendahl (1997: 49–50); Hiltebeitel (2001a: 301).

[84] I again correct here, in accord with the corrections made in nn. 80 and 82, by deleting a parenthesis in this sentence suggesting that "M probably thus originates this trait" of supplying names for bit characters. Clearly "M" just goes along with an earlier "S" in this; see Hiltebeitel 2010c.

AMONG FRIENDS: MARRIAGE, WOMEN,
AND SOME LITTLE BIRDS

> Draupadi, the heroic princess of the Hindu epic of Mahabharata is the
> epitome of feminism and feminity [*sic*]. Through out history Draupadi
> has remained an enigmatic woman of substance. Fragile, with a granite
> will, compassionate yet volcanic enough to reduce her enemies to ashes.
> Draupadi alone enjoyed the unique relationship of *sakhī* (female-friend)
> with her *sakha* (male-friend) Krishna. Krishna's divine presence was
> constant in her life, whenever life's obstacles seemed insurmountable,
> there was Krishna gently guiding her.

These words, 'compiled by: Anu Simlote' for a rendition of 'Drau-
padi' by Hema Malini in Washington DC on 25 September 2004,
comprise the opening paragraph of a two-page account of the themes
and episodes to be developed in a 'fusion stage' performance in
which the famous danseuse plays the part of Draupadī supported by
a well-choreographed troupe, with intervals for cinematic soliloquies
in which Draupadī meditates on the quandaries she faces. I found
Anu Simlote's description interesting for its opening insistence that
Draupadī, as 'the epitome' of feminism and femininity, has 'remained
an enigmatic woman of substance', for it reminded me of a passage I
highlighted in my book, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: 'bṛhatī śyāmā
buddhisattvaguṇānvitā/draupadī* (17.3.36)—a description whose phil-
osophical import I will return to in closing, but which we might, given
this opening, retranslate for the moment (and with an eye to further
consideration) as 'Draupadī, the great enigma endowed with intel-
lectual substance'.[1] I also found it interesting that before this play-
bill goes into anything specific about her story, it invokes the 'unique'
sakhī-sakhā friendship of Draupadī and Kṛṣṇa.[2] The 'uniqueness' of

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[1] See Hiltebeitel 2001a: 272–3, where I discuss some possible translations, beginning
with 'the great dark one rich in spirit, character, and virtue'.

[2] This chapter owes deep debts to Derrida 1997 regarding—amongst other things—
his discussions of friendship with and among women (pp. 101, 155–7, 164–86, 191
n. 6, 201, 239, 273–4, 281–3, 291, 293); friendship and love (pp. 20–1); self-friendship
and self-enmity (pp. 177 and 190 n. 5); how many friends may be too many, and
two the ideal (pp. 21–2, 101); the third friend as odd one out or mysterious presence

Draupadī and Kṛṣṇa's *sakhī-sakhā* relationship is well noted, and has important moments in the Sanskrit epic that I will also come to. But first, some differences between this performance and the classical text are also noteworthy.

Subtales and Soliloquies

On the fusion stage, Draupadī turns to Kṛṣṇa far more frequently than she does in the Sanskrit epic—and notably in her soliloquies. For instance, as regards the ticklish subject of her polyandry, Draupadī gets marital advice from Kṛṣṇa in soliloquized dialogues, whereas in the Sanskrit epic the only marital counsel on this matter is given not to her by Kṛṣṇa but to her father by Vyāsa and to her husbands by Nārada. First, Vyāsa tells Drupada the divine secret that makes his daughter's polyandry legal—that Draupadī is Śrī incarnate and the Pāṇḍavas five former Indras to whom she had already been serially wed (in the *Pañcendra-Upākhyāna* or 'Subtale of the Five Indras', 1.189); second, Nārada tells the Pāṇḍavas how and why they must regulate this marriage—by taking yearly turns with Draupadī to avoid such rivalries over a woman as led to the mutual destruction of the demon brothers Sunda and Upasunda (in the *Sunda-Upasunda-Upākhyāna*, 1.201–4). Instructively, this information is conveyed not through soliloquies but through two *upākhyāna*s or 'subtales'—in these two early cases, ones that Draupadī does not herself hear.

I would like to build on my recent research on the *Mahābhārata's* subtales or *upākhyāna*s (Hiltebeitel 2005a) to explore further how subtales are worked into the epic's textual weave, particularly in the ways they set off differences in the portrayal of male and female characters.[3] The *Mahābhārata* has sixty-seven *upākhyāna*s, or sixty-eight if one adds the story of Śvetadvīpa ('White Island'), which the *Nārāyaṇīya* seems to call the essence of them all:

(pp. 260, 276–7, 293); and the question of whether friendship is possible with God and/or animals (pp. 17, 19, 198, 206–7, 211, 222–4, 294). Derrida's book also opens many other paths into the *Mahābhārata* that I hope to explore in additional essays.

[3] See Adarkar 2001: 86 and n. 24 on different 'options' open to male and female characters, noting that, for the latter, 'exploring such options would be another study'. For some especially rich discussions of character in this work, see pp. 49–62, 145–8, 234–40.

> Of those hundreds of other virtuous subtales (*anyāni…upākhyānaśatāni…dharmyāṇi*) that are heard from me, king, this is raised up 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. (12.326.114–15)

The full sixty-seven includes sixty called *upākhyānas* in the colophons and/or running heads for units in the Critical Edition; six more (including the aforementioned *Pañcendra-* and *Sunda-Upasunda-Upākhyāna*s) are named in the epic's table of contents—the *Parvasaṃgraha*,[4] and one (the *Indra-Namuci-Upākhyāna*, 9.42) is mentioned additionally only in passing in the text (at 9.42.28a).[5] In treating this sample, it should be clear, as the *Nārāyaṇīya* passage suggests by mentioning *upākhyāna*s in the hundreds, that it would not be a boundaried group without overlap with other 'ancillary story' material (see Gombach 2000).

Most notably, some narratively well-developed 'tales' (*ākhyāna*s), 'dialogues' (*saṃvāda*s), 'adventures' (*carita*s), and 'birth/origin stories' (*utpatti*s) such as the 'Birth of Skanda' (*Skanda-Utpatti*), the 'Birth of Śuka' (*Śuka-Utpatti*); and the 'Origins of the Sword' (*Khaḍga-Utpatti*, 12.160) and 'Origins of the Daṇḍa' (*Daṇḍa-Utpatti*, 12.122) could and should be grouped with the *upākhyāna*s. Indeed, the colophons often reveal overlap in titling these narratives, as with the *Kapota-Upākhyāna* or 'Pigeon Subtale' (12.141–5), discussed briefly below, which Stephanie Jamison refers to as the *Kapota-Lubdhaka-Saṃvāda* or 'The Dialogue of the Pigeon and the Fowler' (1996: 163).[6]

In probing the main story through the subtales, let us note that the *upākhyāna*s in their 'hundreds' are said to be *dharmyāṇi*—'virtuous', that is, 'concerned with *dharma*'. In thinking through the relation

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[4] *Pañcendra-* and *Sunda-Upasunda-* are mentioned in the *Parvasaṃgraha* at 1.2.87c and 90cd respectively. Four others mentioned there are narrated in Book 3: the *Śyena-Kapotīya-Upākhyāna* (1.2.115ab, referring to 3.130–1), *Aṣṭāvakrīya-Upākhyāna* (1.2.126a = *Auddālakīya,* referring to 3.132–4), *Vainya-Upākhyāna* (1.2.126b, referring to 3.183), and '"The Fire-Sticks Subtale" in which Dharma instructs his son' (*āraṇeyam upākhyānaṃ yatra dharmo 'nvaśāt sutam*/1.2.127, referring to 3.295–9). The *Ambā-Upākhyāna* (5.170–93) is mentioned both in the *Parvasaṃgraha* (1.2.54a and 150f) and the colophons.

[5] Two others are mentioned both in passing in the text and in the colophons: the *Dhundhumāra-Upākhyāna* (3.192–5; see 3.195.37c) and the *Indravijaya-Upākhyāna* (5.9–18; see 5.18.16a).

[6] Jamison may follow Sörensen 1963: 383, who gives this title. The colophons for the tale's opening *adhyāya* 12.141 mentioned in the Critical Edition favour the *saṃvāda* title by 11 manuscripts to 9, but with representation only in the Northern Recension, whereas '*Kapota-Upākhyāna*' occurs in the three Malayalam manuscripts, M1–3.

between the main story and the *upākhyāna*s and the way they construct
gender together as it has to do with *dharma*, I believe it is fruitful to
invoke Masaji Chiba's 'three-level structure of law' (Chiba 1986: 5–7),
and Werner Menski's opening of Chiba's approach to a treatment of
'Hindu Law' (Menski 2005: 71 and *passim*), as involving official law,
unofficial law, and basic legal postulates. Although the *Mahābhārata*
skirts posing as a vehicle of official law like the Dharmasūtras and
Dharmaśāstras, it often invokes such official law in the main story,
as, for example, when Bhīṣma enumerates the eight modes of mar-
riage before abducting the Kāśi princesses (1.96.8–11),[7] when Kṛṣṇa
(5.138.1–9) and Kuntī (5.142.25)[8] tell Karṇa he is 'legally' a son of
Pāṇḍu, and fairly regularly during the *Rājadharmaparvan*. In con-
trast, I would suggest that the *upākhyāna*s are more often vehicles of
unofficial or informal law, posed for the heroes and heroines of the
main story to ponder grey areas as they set *dharma* as their lodestar.
Meanwhile, basic postulates,[9] like, for instance, the indissolubility of
marriage, are often unstated and implicit values by which we can read
back and forth between these two types of interwoven narrative. Here
I will take the sixty-seven *upākhyāna*s and the reverberations between
them only as an extendable base set from which to probe gender con-
struction in the epic's main story, principally as it concerns (or might
concern) Draupadī.

First, there are differences—at least in degree—in the ways male
and female characters are drawn into the story from prior existences.
Generally, this can occur in two ways: prior divine and demonic iden-
tities and the *karma* of previous human lives. While there are many
males with prior divine/demonic identities in the *Mahābhārata*, there

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[7] See Jamison's rich treatment of this passage amid discussion of the eight forms of
marriage and the *rākṣasa* mode among them (1996: 210–35, 296 n. 9).

[8] Kuntī says, 'Why should this *kānīna* (son of an unmarried girl), who has returned
to me as a son, not do my word that is so salutary for his brothers?' Kuntī is right that
Karṇa would be covered by the law's retrospective intent regarding unwed mothers. But
Mānava Dharmaśāstra 9.160 would not allow Karṇa to inherit the kingdom: a *kānīna*
is one of six types of sons 'who are *relatives but not heirs*'! But of course Yudhiṣṭhira
would 'give' the kingdom to him, as Karṇa has just said to Kṛṣṇa, and Karṇa would
give it to Duryodhana. Yet Kuntī is also drawing on a 'basic legal postulate' that
worked so well with her other sons when they followed the unintended outcome of
her telling them to 'share it all equally' (1.182.2) and jointly married Draupadī: sons
should listen to their mothers.

[9] 'A *legal postulate* is a value principle or value system specifically connected with
a particular official or unofficial law, which acts to found, justify, or orient the latter'
(Chiba 1986: 6).

are few females with them, and Draupadī as the incarnation of Śrī is the only one of any significance.[10] As far as I am aware, incarnations tend to occur mainly in the main story as part of the *aṃśāvatāraṇa* or 'partial descent' of gods, demons, and other supernaturals, and do not figure among characters developed in the *upākhyāna*s. The revelation that Draupadī is an incarnation of Śrī, amplified in the *Pañcendra-Upākhyāna*, is thus doubly exceptional.

On the other hand, main characters in the Sanskrit epics have little karmic depth from previous human lives, such as there is, for instance, in several *upākhyāna*s,[11] in the Buddhist Jātakas and many other Buddhist stories, and in the Tamil epics influenced by Buddhism and Jainism. Nonetheless, it is a trait especially of women characters[12] to exclaim that the sins they committed in previous lives must have been considerable to have brought them to their present impasse, as if their present life must have emerged out of some personal karmic morass

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[10] After three verses on Draupadī-Śrī (1.61.95–7), the epic's fullest list of partial incarnations concludes by accounting for the other three leading females as uneventful incarnations of post-Vedic abstractions: 'The Goddesses Success (Siddhi) and Endurance (Dhṛti) were the two mothers of the five, born as Kuntī and Mādrī; and Wisdom (Mati) became the daughter of Subala [Gāndhārī]' (tr. van Buitenen). See Dumézil 1968: 251 on prominent early Vedic goddesses *not* incarnated: 'Aditi, Uṣas, Pṛthivī, Sarasvatī, the Waters, etc.' Like Sörensen (1963: 599), Dumézil (1968: 252–3) mentions a verse identifying Rukmiṇī as an incarnation of Śrī and Draupadī as an incarnation of Śacī, but it is interpolated (1.*566) and the reference to Śrī is not recorded in the Critical Edition's apparatus.

[11] As especially informative on the karmic mechanisms of reincarnation as they have affected a worm and a virtuous *śūdra* hunter, see respectively the *Kīṭa-Upākhyāna* (13.118–20, discussed in Hiltebeitel 2001a: 198–9) and the *Pativratā-Upākhyāna* (3.196–206; Hiltebeitel 2001a: 204–5). Interestingly enough, where we do learn how karmic outcomes—overridden by curses or vows—have affected characters of the main story, it is still in *upākhyāna*s: Śaṃtanu in the *Mahābhiṣa-Upākhyāna* (1.91); Vidurā in the *Aṇīmāṇḍavya-Upākhyāna* (1.101); the Pāṇḍavas etc. in the *Pañcendra-Upākhyāna*; and Śikhaṇḍin in the *Ambā-Upākhyāna*.

[12] One exception was pointed out to me by Emily Hudson at the London *Epic Constructions* conference: a passage where Dhṛtarāṣṭra, like his wife Gāndhārī, wonders whether it is his past deeds from previous births that occasion his postwar grief: 'Saṃjaya, I do not recall doing anything wrong in the past that might have yielded as its fruit what I suffer here and now as a dazed fool. But obviously I did something wrong in earlier births, since the Disposer has joined me to such wretched deeds' (*na smarāmy ātmanaḥ kiṃ cit purā saṃjaya duṣkṛtam/yasyedaṃ phalam adyeha mayā mūdhena bhujyate//nūnaṃ hy apakṛtaṃ kiṃ cin mayā pūrveṣu janmasu/yena māṃ duḥkhabhāgeṣu dhātā karmasu yuktavān//*11.1.17–18; see Fitzgerald 2004a: 31; Hill 2001: 33). Hill 2001: 30–4 discusses this utterance as well as two of the other passages now cited, and likewise observes how few the instances are 'where any character, beset by misfortune, contemplates or expresses remorse at how the actions and desires of previous lives may have brought about their current lot' (*ibid.*: 31).

that they are now unaccountably accounting for. I have so far found five such instances, two of which are spoken by Gāndhārī. Blindfolded yet seeing the corpse-strewn battlefield with the divine eye given her by Vyāsa, she says to Kṛṣṇa:

> Obviously I did evil in earlier births, Keśava, since I behold my sons, grandsons, and brothers killed. (11.16.59, tr. Fitzgerald)[13]

And again, speaking not only of herself but also of her daughters-in-law:

> O you who are blameless, I guess the evil these women beyond criticism did in past lives—and I as well, so dim-witted am I—must not have been small. The King of Law [Yama] now repays us, Janārdana, O Vṛṣṇi, there is no erasing either good or bad deeds. (11.18.11–12, tr. Fitzgerald)[14]

But the other three occur in *upākhyānas*: In the *Śakuntalā-Upākhyāna* (1.62–9)—the very first *upākhyāna* in the Northern Recension and the second in the Southern Recension (where it swaps first and second positions with the *Yayāti-Upākhyāna*)—Śakuntalā presses her case that King Duḥṣanta has sired the son she has brought before him to his royal court, and asks him just before he tells her all women are liars:

> What evil deeds have I done before in another life that in my child-hood I was abandoned by my kin, and now by you? (1.68.70, tr. van Buitenen)[15]

In the *Vyuṣitāśva-Upākhyāna* (1.112), the only *upākhyāna* spoken by a woman, Kuntī tells Pāṇḍu how Bhadrā Kākṣīvatī addressed the corpse of her husband King Vyuṣitāśva, who had just died of 'consumption' from their sexual overindulgence:

> Surely, in previous bodies, my prince, I must have sundered faithful companions or separated those that were united! The misery that I have

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[13] *nūnam ācaritaṃ pāpaṃ mayā pūrveṣu janmasu/yā paśyāmi hatān putrān pautrān bhrātṝṃś ca keśava/*Fitzgerald has 'brother' rather than 'brothers'.

[14] *pūrvajātikṛtaṃ pāpaṃ manye nālpam ivānagha/etābhir anavadyābhir mayā caivālpamedhayā//tad idaṃ dharmarājena yātitaṃ no janārdana/na hi nāśo 'sti vārṣṇeya karmaṇoḥ śubhapāpayoḥ//*Brodbeck 2009b interprets Gāndhārī's words here as 'sub-versive, ironic, even sarcastic', which may be so, given her distrust of Kṛṣṇa; but I do not think the characterization applies to these usages generally.

[15] *kiṃ nu karmāśubhaṃ pūrvaṃ kṛtavaty asmi janmani/yad ahaṃ bāndhavais tyaktā bālye saṃprati ca tvayā//*

piled up with evil deeds in previous bodies has now come upon me in my separation from you. (1.112.25–26, tr. van Buitenen)[16]

—all this said before Vyuṣitāśva's voice announces that he can still impregnate her on certain days that lie ahead, from which she will have seven sons (all as quoted by Kuntī, preparing the impotent Pāṇḍu for her revelation that she could still bear him sons, which results in Pāṇḍu's choosing Dharma to sire his first son, Yudhiṣṭhira, and so on).

And finally in the *Ambā-Upākhyāna* (5.170–93), the estranged and embittered Ambā, preparing to seek a male reincarnation whereby she can avenge herself against Bhīṣma, tells the sympathetic hermit-sage Śaikhāvatya:

> I want to wander forth. I shall practice severe asceticism. Surely there must have been evil deeds that I foolishly committed in previous bodies, and this as surely is their fruit. (5.173.14–15, tr, van Buitenen)[17]

These passages express this anguished sentiment in varied and non-formulaic terms,[18] which suggests that it is more than a trope or a convention. I believe it finds its deepest analogue in the utterances of women about to become *satī*s who hold themselves at fault for their husbands' predeceasing them.[19]

I do not find a place in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* where Draupadī invokes her own or others' unknown past *karma* like this, although I recall her making such exclamations in Tamil Draupadī cult *terukkūttu* (street theatre) dramas.[20] But she is perhaps unique in the epic's main

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[16] *abhāgyayā mayā nūnaṃ viyuktaḥ sahacāriṇaḥ/saṃyogā viprayuktā vā pūrvadeheṣu, pārthiva//tad idaṃ, karmabhiḥ pāpaiḥ pūrvadeheṣu saṃcitaṃ/duḥkhaṃ mām anusaṃprāptaṃ rājaṃs tvadviprayogajam//*

[17] *pravrājitum ihecchāmi tapas tapsyāmi duścaram//mayaivaitāni karmāṇi pūrvadeheṣu mūḍhayā//kṛtāni nūnaṃ pāpāni teṣām etat phalaṃ dhruvam//*

[18] That is, there are no repeated lines, half-lines, or even phrases in these utterances; each is an 'original'. One line in the stanza following the two cited in n. 12 'feels' formulaic, where Dhṛtarāṣṭra goes on to say, 'Is there a man in the world more miserable than I?' *(ko 'nyo 'sti duḥkhatitaro mayā loke pumān iha//*11.1.19). This is reminiscent of three lines that introduce the *Nala-Upākhyāna*—the first one uttered by Yudhiṣṭhira describing himself (3.49.34ef) and the other two (36cd; 38cd) describing Nala. But in 11.1.19 Dhṛtarāṣṭra has stopped attributing his troubles to *karma* from previous lives and has turned to fate *(daiva)* as an explanation (Hill 2001: 33).

[19] See Weinberger-Thomas 1999: 26 (on *karmadoṣa*, 'the 'fault of *karma*'), 45, 86, 102, 106–8, 132, 143–51, 163–7; Hiltebeitel 1999c.

[20] I checked the likely Tamil chapbook dramas where I thought I recalled a line where Draupadī laments that she must be suffering on account of *karma* or sins from a past life, but could not find what I was looking for. Perundevi Srinivasan then kindly read several of them also at my request, and likewise found nothing so explicit. But

story in being not only the incarnation of a deity, but in having at least one known prior human life with antecedent *karma* that affects her in this one:[21] she was an overanxious maiden who pressed Śiva too insistently—five times—to grant her a husband, with the result that the god destined her to have five husbands. Vyāsa first tells this story to the Pāṇḍavas (1.157.6–13) to set them *en route* to Pañcāla to attend Draupadī's *svayaṃvara* (the 'self-choice' ceremony where she will obtain a husband), and he repeats it to Drupada in the *Pañcendra-Upākhyāna*.[22] Thus even though the early *upākhyānas* in Book 1—and also the *Ambā-Upākhyāna* which Bhīṣma tells Duryodhana in Book 5— are told out of Draupadī's earshot, they circumscribe what we know about her as the rare if not only woman whose *karma* from a previous life *is revealed*—again, in an *upākhyāna* whose importance is underscored by its being a double revelation from Vyāsa, the author.

What then of the *upākhyāna*s that Draupadī does hear? Let me interject a suggestive comment of Madeleine Biardeau's as to the primal scene of the epic's composition (see Hiltebeitel 2001a: 165).

> If it were necessary, I would imagine a father, a son, and a maternal uncle of the father or son working together, and, in a corner out of the way, just beyond voice range, a woman, wife of the father, mother of the son, and sister of the uncle. (Biardeau and Péterfalvi 1985: 27, my translation)

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she did find in 'Eighteenth-Day War' (*Patiṉeṭṭāmpōr Nāṭakam*) that after Aśvatthāman kills the Pāṇḍavas' and Draupadī's five children, Draupadī laments, 'Is it a lesson, or a curse, a curse, a curse expanded from the past?' (*pāṭamō, paṇṭai virittiṭṭa cāpamō, cāpamō, cāpamō*; Kiruṣṇappiḷḷai 1980: 79)—which no doubt contains something of the idea, again overridden by a presumed curse (see n. 11). Both Srinivasan and I recall a more explicit statement at least from oral performances.

[21] Her uniqueness would seem to be paralleled by that of Sītā in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, with her former life as Vedavatī (*Rāmāyaṇa* 7.17). In fact, considering the short list (see n. 11) of main characters having prior existences affected by vows or curses, the only other person in the main story to have had her or his life affected by known or unknown *karma* from a previous *human* life would be Śikhaṇḍin: likewise a woman reborn as a girl, but with the difference that she turns into a man. Of the others mentioned in n. 11, only Śaṃtanu had a prior human life as the former King Mahābhiṣa, but the act that led Mahābhiṣa to be reincarnated as Śaṃtanu occurred in heaven. The situation contrasts with that in numerous vernacular oral epics, where the Pāṇḍavas, Draupadī, and other epic figures are reincarnated due to the 'unfinished business' of their *Mahābhārata karma* (see Hiltebeitel 1999a).

[22] Indeed, the Southern Recension of the Sanskrit epic and Tamil (including Draupadī cult) variations on it identify this overanxious maiden to have been Nāḷāyaṉī, wife of the *ṛṣi* Mudgala. See Hiltebeitel 2001a: 237. Mudgala's own story is told as the *Mudgala-Upākhyāna* (3.246–7), which Draupadī does hear, along with her husbands.

At first sight this silently listening woman would hardly remind us of Draupadī, who is certainly the most active woman in the epic not only in deeds but also in words. On the reputation of her being a lady *paṇḍitā* (learned scholar),[23] she makes long speeches when debating with Yudhiṣṭhira early in their time in the forest, demanding Kṛṣṇa's reassurances of revenge against the Kauravas, revealing wifely duties to Kṛṣṇa's wife Satyabhāmā, and deriding Yudhiṣṭhira's wish to renounce the kingdom after the war. But she is also certainly the epic's most frequently present silent listener. This speaking/listening contrast is illuminating with regard to the modern stage's use of cutaway soliloquies and the epic's use of cutaway subtales. In the Sanskrit epic, women characters, at least,[24] do not have soliloquies. But they do listen to subtales. Kuntī, for instance, must have listened to *upākhyāna*s to be able to tell one.[25] Indeed, all of the *upākhyāna*s would have been heard by such missing characters from Sörensen's *Index* (1963) as Mrs. Janamejaya and Mrs. Śaunaka and the other wives of the ṛṣis of the Naimiṣa Forest, since performers of *satra* sacrifices—at which both of the epic's frame story recitals occur—cannot come without their wives (Jamison 1996: 31; Hiltebeitel 2001a: 166). But clearly Draupadī is the main female auditor of subtales within the main story. Once the fine points of her polyandry are sanctioned by Vyāsa's and Nārada's subtales that are meant privately for male ears only in Book 1, and after she has been abused in the public 'men's hall' of Book 2, from the time she is with her husbands in the forest to the epic's last subtale at the end of the *Āśvamedhikaparvan*, Draupadī hears all forty-four *upākhyāna*s that her husbands hear, including three told by Kṛṣṇa early in Book 12. Indeed, Draupadī offers a vignette on a female's listening position to tell Yudhiṣṭhira an 'old story' (*itihāsaṃ purātanam*, 3.31.20b), first propounded by the god Bṛhaspati, that she heard as a child when a learned Brahmin came to her father's house and spoke to her brothers

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[23] 3.28.2; see Hiltebeitel 2001a: 261 n. 58, 268.

[24] At 12.17, Yudhiṣṭhira responds to his family's urging to abandon his aspiration to renounce the just-won kingship with what James Fitzgerald takes as 'a kind of soliloquy' (2004a: 694) in which '[t]he inner battle that Bhīma predicted now takes place within Yudhiṣṭhira' (*ibid.*: 179). But I think this is unlikely; see Hiltebeitel 2005d: 252. In that one could soliloquize in others company, Dhṛtarāṣṭra could be the epic's main soliloquizer—and as Emily Hudson (2007) shows, from right near the start.

[25] See also Kuntī's narrative of the *Vidurā-Putra-Anuśāsana* (or *Vidurā-Putra-Saṃvāda*, 5.131–4). Cf. Dumézil 1968: 55: Kuntī 'sait sa théologie' when Pāṇḍu instructs her to invoke three gods for her impregnations.

while she listened in, doing errands and sitting on her father's lap
(3.33.56–58). The story is featured in Draupadī's 'puppet speech'
(Hiltebeitel 2001a: 214 n. 106, 269), in which she tells Yudhiṣṭhira that
God (Īśvara) as the Placer (Dhātṛ) assembles and manipulates beings
like a grand puppeteer. She thereby suggests something of her state of
mind at the beginning of her years in exile, shortly after the trauma
of her disrobing.

  Most prominently, and, I would argue, setting the tone for all the
*upākhyāna*s that the adult Draupadī hears, are three *upākhyāna*s in
Book 3 that Biardeau calls 'mirror stories' (2002, vol. 1: 412–13): tales
that mirror the listeners'—the Pāṇḍavas' and Draupadī's—current
tribulations. These are the *Nala-Upākhyāna* (3.50–78), the love story
about Nala and Damayantī told by the seer Bṛhadaśva while Arjuna
is visiting Śiva and Indra and Draupadī misses her favourite husband;
the *Rāma-Upākhyāna* (3.257–76), a *'Mahābhārata-sensitive'* version
of the Rāma story (see Hiltebeitel 2009) focused on Sītā's abduc-
tion and told to all five Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī by Mārkaṇḍeya just
after Draupadī's abduction by Jayadratha Saindhava; and the *Sāvitrī-
Upākhyāna* (3.277–83), the story of a heroine who saved her husband
from Yama, told also by Mārkaṇḍeya just after the *Rāma-Upākhyāna*
when Yudhiṣṭhira asks, having already heard about Sītā, if there ever
was a woman as devoted to her husband(s) as Draupadī. As the frames
of these three mirror stories show, Yudhiṣṭhira is very much aware of
Draupadī as listener.[26] So this implicit slighting of Sītā is rather curious,
and could be Yudhiṣṭhira's way of affirming that, unlike the Sītā of the
Rāma-Upākhyāna, to whom Rāma says, 'Whether you are innocent
or guilty, Maithilī, I can no more enjoy you than an oblation that has
been licked by a dog' (3.275.13), Draupadī's fidelity after her handling
by Jayadratha goes without question, and need not be affirmed by the
gods, as Sītā's has just been by a heavenly host including Brahmā,
Vāyu, Agni, Varuṇa, and Bhagavat, whoever that is (3.275.17–34).[27]
Indeed, when Jamison writes, 'The Brāhmaṇas and the Mahābhārata
present a series of female types, both positive and negative, but the
Adulterous Wife is not in this gallery of archetypes' (1996: 92), she

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[26] See Hiltebeitel 2006b for a discussion of the frame of the *Rāma-Upākhyāna*, and
Hiltebeitel 2001a: 216, 239 for the frame of the *Nala-Upākhyāna*.

[27] Bhagavat is mentioned at 3.275.18d, and is probably a coy allusion to Viṣṇu,
for which there is a parallel in the *Nala-Upākhyāna's* deployment of the charioteer
Vārṣṇeya.

would seem to have momentarily overlooked not only the innuendos of this scene but also the *Cirakāri-Upākhyāna* (12.258) and its tale of how Cirakārin took so long reflecting on his father Gautama's command to kill his mother Ahalyā for her adultery with Indra that finally Gautama changed his mind.[28] Moreover, this story, which Draupadī hears with her husbands in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* of Book 12, The Book of the Peace, seems to offer a peaceful resolution to a case of *real adultery* as an advance beyond the violent response to a woman's mere *thought of adultery* in the *Kārtavīrya-* (or *Jāmadagnya-) Upākhyāna* (3.115–17) in the pre-war Book 3, in which Rāma Jāmadagnya beheads his mother Reṇukā at the command of his father Jamadagni.

This brings me to a point I would now like to open up on a bit: while Draupadī endures virtually every imaginable strain on her marriage to five men in the *Mahābhārata's* main story, and yet remains unquestionably faithful to them, she hears *upākhyāna*s that probe 'fringe' matters bearing on female sexuality—mainly in response to questions asked by Yudhiṣṭhira. Indeed, she is there to hear Yudhiṣṭhira ask Bhīṣma, seemingly quite out of the blue, 'In the act of coition, who derives the greater pleasure—man or woman?' (13.12.1; Dandekar 1966: lix), whereby Yudhiṣṭhira gives his grandfather, the lifelong celibate, the opportunity to make his case that the luckier ones are women by telling the *Bhaṅgāśvana-Upākhyāna* (13.12). Or is Yudhiṣṭhira's question so out of the blue? With the turn from the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* of Book 12 to the *Dānadharmaparvan* of Book 13, he has just turned his mind from matters of ultimate liberation, which cannot be his if he is to rule as all require of him, to the householder life that he—and Draupadī, and his brothers—must accept for what lies ahead in the rest of their lives together. One could take this as a 'jolt of sexuality' like those centred on the wife that Jamison finds energizing the structures of Brahmanic rituals[29]—and as a timely reminder to Draupadī of the pleasures Yudhiṣṭhira would like to think she once enjoyed and,

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[28] Jamison does discuss the *Cirakāri-Upākhyāna* as a tale of 'adultery' slightly later (1996: 291 n. 2), but she focuses mainly on the *Rāmāyaṇa's* version of Ahalyā's seduction for its emphasis on the theme of hospitality (*ibid.*: 156–7).

[29] Jamison 1996: 96, 283 n. 221; cf. 95 ('sexual "kick"'), 98 ('frisson of forbidden sex'), and *passim*. If so, it would not be the only one in the sequence, as it is preceded by the *Sudarśana-Upākhyāna* (13.2) in which Sudarśana's wife Oghavatī performs hospitality by sleeping with a guest.

who knows, could enjoy again.[30] Indeed, it is just a short time later, when Bhīṣma has completed his main run of Book 13 *upākhyāna*s, that Draupadī jolts us with the one confirmation (13.57.42–4) that she has been silently listening all along to Bhīṣma's battlefield oration by voicing her approval when—as Vaiśaṃpāyana reports—Yudhiṣṭhira finally says he 'no longer longed to dwell in a hermitage'.

Birds and Friendship

Birds play in and out of numerous epic stories, as no one saw better than Julia Leslie, to whose memory I would like to dedicate this chapter.[31] Since I cannot detail all the *upākhyāna*s that bring birds to bear upon marital 'fringe matters', let me focus on little birds, and let it suffice to note two themes that run through a few *upākhyāna*s, and explore a few such matters from this double angle. The two themes are birds and friendship, and let us bear in mind that this combination has a well-known precedent in the relation of the two birds who nestle in the same tree (*dvā suparṇā sayújā sákhāyā samānáṃ vṛkṣáṃ pári ṣasvajāte*) in Ṛgveda 1.164.20—a line that gets reinterpreted in a *bhakti* parable about the soul and the Lord in the *Muṇḍaka* and *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣads*, to which I will return. As Biardeau has emphasized, birds are *dvija*s, 'twice-borns', especially as implying brahmins, and thus *upākhyāna*s featuring birds can work out norms and implications of *dharma* especially as they bear on brahmins—although clearly some birds are more brahmin than others. Now there are a number of stories that treat the themes of birds and/or friendship while bringing into focus deeper 'fringe matters' of marriage and sexuality. One that weaves in these themes is the aforementioned *Kapota-Upākhyāna* (12.141–5), which, in Book 12, entertains the theme of implied *satī* when the female pigeon joins her overly hospitable husband on his funeral pyre.[32] Also interesting, though without a couple, is the *Śuka-Vāsava-Saṃvāda* (13.5), where the friendship is not between birds or humans, but a bird and a tree. Here a parrot, out of 'devotion (*bhakti*)

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[30] At least in popular traditions, with some possibility that the Sanskrit epic is the basis for their depiction, Draupadī has been celibate since her violation at the dice match; see Hiltebeitel 1981.

[31] See Leslie 1998, and my discussion of her findings in relation to the *Śuka-Utpatti* in Hiltebeitel 2001a: 318–22.

[32] For discussion, see Leslie 1989: 306–7; Bowles 2004: 227–35.

to the tree' (*tasya bhaktyā vanaspateḥ*, 13.5.6), refuses to leave it withering from a poisoned arrow, and explains to Indra (in Brahmin guise), who cannot believe that a bird could demonstrate such 'non-cruelty' (*ānṛśaṃsya*), that because it received the tree's protection, it stays out of devotion to non-cruelty, and because compassion (*anukrośa*) is the great *dharma* and perennial happiness of the respectable (*sadhūnām*) and 'always extends kindness' (*sadā prītiṃ prayacchati*, 13.5.23d)—with *prīti* implying 'in a friendly way'. Indra then revives the tree (Hiltebeitel 2001a: 213). Though not an *upākhyāna*, it comes in the series of them that runs from the end of Book 12 through the beginning of Book 13. But here I would like to give fuller attention to two *upākhyāna*s which, taken together, allow us to explore what *Mahābhārata* subtales have to say about *dharma* or Law as it bears upon a tension between implied marital indissolubility and 'irretrievable marital breakdown'—terms I use advisedly, since in India the latter is not, even today, considered a legal ground for divorce.[33]

First of these is the *Śārṅgaka-Upākhyāna* (1.220–5), a tale about seven Śārṅgaka birds told to the Pāṇḍavas' great-grandson Janamejaya by Vaiśaṃpāyana at the end of Book 1, where it is notched into the episode of the Burning of the Khāṇḍava Forest. It thus occurs in the epic well before one gathers, in Book 3, that Draupadī is a frequent listener to subtales; and since it is told three generations after her life, she would not be alive to hear it anyway. But there are still things that Mrs Janamejaya and Mrs Śaunaka might connect at this juncture with Draupadī, whose favourite husband Arjuna has just returned with a second wife, and who will lose her sons in a great conflagration.

The *ṛṣi* Mandapāla, 'Slow-to-protect',[34] having learned from the gods who sit around Dharmarāja (i.e. Yama)[35] that he cannot enjoy the fruits of his acts in heaven without fulfilling his obligation to beget

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[33] See Menski 2005: 449–80. The closest the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* comes to even imagining divorce comes right after the famous verse denying women independence: 'As a child, she must remain under her father's control; as a young woman, under her husband's; and when her husband is dead, under her son's'. She must never seek to live independently. She must never want to separate herself from her father, husband, or sons; for by separating herself from them, a woman brings disgrace on both families' (5.148–9, tr. Olivelle).

[34] Cf. van Buitenen 1973: 467: 'the slow protector'.

[35] Who has the habit of appearing frequently in *upākhyāna*s; see Hiltebeitel 2005a: 480–4, 492.

sons (1.220.8–12), has the inspiration to fulfill this debt to his ancestors quickly by becoming a bird.

> So he became a Śārṅgaka bird and coupled with a female (śārṅgaka) named Jaritā, On her he begot four sons who were wise in the Veda (*brahmavādinaḥ*), deserted them on the spot (*tān apāsya sa tatraiva*), and ran after Lapitā. (1.220.16c–17)[36]

Now just as Agni is about to burn the Khāṇḍava Forest, the distraught Jaritā lovingly oversees the four's hatching. Mandapāla knows Agni's intention and lauds him with a Vedic-sounding hymn full of pralayic overtones by which he obtains the god's promise to spare the children, whose survival of this conflagration will in some manner—as Biardeau saw (1971–2: 141)—be reminiscent of the four Vedas.[37] But of course Jaritā and the children do not know of Mandapāla's intervention, since he is still flitting about the woods with Lapitā (1.220.20). Jaritā, now described for the first of three times as a *tapasvinī*,[38] a 'suffering woman' (used now and then for Draupadī, especially beginning with three usages describing her mistreatment in the gambling hall[39]), bewails her plight:

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[36] Here and below I generally follow van Buitenen's translation (and later Fitzgerald's) except for small changes, unless otherwise indicated.

[37] 'Jaritāri', one of the names of the four sons, recalls the Rigvedic *jaritṛ* as a term for Agni as a singer (Macdonell 1974: 97; Lubotsky 1997, vol. 1: 559–60). Another of the sons, Sārisṛkva, addresses Agni with the Vedic name Jātavedas. In Söhnen-Thieme's comparison (2005) of the *Śārṅgaka-Upākhyāna* with the *Vaṭṭaka Jātaka* (Jātaka 35; for translation, see Cowell 2005, vol. 1: 88–90), this name is noted as central to an 'act of truth' in a *gāthā* verse uttered by the Buddha in one of his previous lives as a baby quail, by which he called upon Agni to cease his approach in the form of a great forest fire. Söhnen-Thieme regards the *gāthā* and three other verses as the nucleus of a Buddhist 'transformation' of a presumably non-Buddhist story, but not of this *Mahābhārata* story, which she sees as an indirect amplification—all of which seems cautious, plausible, and curious in that both traditions build their stories around pseudo-Vedic idioms. But note that the Jātaka story also includes a pralayic theme: the baby quail's words create the 'aeon miracle' of protecting the spot from fire for an entire aeon (*kalpa*), and thus protect the Buddha and his monks who have found themselves there. In effect, the Buddha, by his former truth-act as a quail, now protects his disciple-sons as Mandapāla does.

[38] At 1.221.2. Cf. 1.224.4 and 6 (discussed on p. 120), where Mandapāla settles his thoughts on her as the one he is really worried about, and breaks with Lapitā.

[39] At 2.62.3; 2.71.2; 2.72.12; cf. also 4.12.10; 4.34.11; 14.68.12. See Hara 1977–8: 58: the word 'makes frequent appearance…when a pitiable heroine in distress is described by her lamenting friends, both male and female, showing their sympathy with her'. He cites Nala's description of Damayantī at *Mahābhārata* 3.64.10 as an example.

Here this dreadful Fire is coming, burning the underbrush, setting the universe aglow (*jagat saṃdīpayan*),[40] and terrifyingly he increases my miseries. And these children of little wit (*śiśavo mandacetasaḥ*) pull at me—still without feathers or feet, yet the final recourse of our ancestors (*pūrveṣāṃ naḥ parāyaṇam*). Here is the Fire coming, terrifying, licking the trees. (1.221.3–4)

Two things to note here: Jaritā underestimates the wit of these precocious sons, and she is raising them for 'our ancestors'. Despite the haste with which she and the kids have been abandoned, the indissoluble union conferred by her marriage has bought her surprisingly quickly into her husband's ancestral program. Indeed, we now learn that his abrupt departure was not without words on this point. As Jaritā begins to ponder her options, and first among them is covering her children with her limbs and 'dying with' (*maraṇaṃ saha*) them,[41] she tells them that Mandapāla's parting words included the prediction that their second son Sārisṛkva would 'beget offspring, increasing the lineage of the ancestors' (*prajāyeta pitṛṇāṃ kulavardhanaḥ*, 1.221.8). Immediately the children also buy into the ancestral program, telling her:

Cast off your love (*sneham utsṛjya*), and fly away to where there is no Fire (*havyavāṭ*). For when we have perished, you shall have other sons. But when you have died, the continuance of our line will be cut (*naḥ syāt kulasaṃtatiḥ*). Reflect on these two outcomes and do what is best for our family (*kṣamaṃ syād yat kulasya naḥ*)—the ultimate moment has arrived for you to do so, mother. Don't be misled by your love for us your sons (*snehaṃ kārṣīḥ; suteṣu naḥ*) into destroying the family (*kulavināśāya*); for this deed of our father, who wishes for his worlds (*lokakāmasya naḥ pituḥ*), must not be in vain. (1.221.12–14)

To follow the children's use of the first person plural pronoun *naḥ* is to realize that their concern for their mother is not her love (*sneha*) for them, which she should disregard,[42] but the 'desire for worlds (*lokakāma*) of our father', which—they are already shrewd enough to know—provides 'what is *best* for our family' as well as ultimate 'safety'

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[40] See 1.220.24c, 28b; 1.223.12b, 15b (Agni as *jagat-pati*) on Agni and the entire *jagat,* and 1.221.11ab and 224.3 on release from the cosmic blaze as *mokṣa* (on which see the discussion of *pralaya* themes below).

[41] The term is evocative of *satī* as *sahagamanam*. As Söhnen-Thieme nicely points out (2005), Jaritā is 'naturally not able to stop the fire with a hymn or a prayer.'

[42] Indeed, they offer her some typical *mokṣadharma* wisdom on this point: 'We have done you no favours, you do not know us at all. Who are you, so virtuous (*satī*) that you support us under much anxiety, and who are we to you?' (1.222.13).

(*kṣema*, 1.222.16) for their mother through her status as a joint sac-
rificer in the ancestral rites. For as the little ones soon clarify further,
Jaritā is beautiful and can win her husband back and have other 'beau-
tiful sons' (1.222.4).[43] As for themselves, the four fledglings tell Jaritā
they prefer a purifying death by fire to the uncertainties of being hid-
den in a rat hole, which is the best idea she has to offer; 'or, perchance,
Fire will not burn us, and you shall come back to us again' (1.222.15).
When she has flown off to a 'safe country (*deśaṃ*[44] *kṣemam*) devoid
of fire' (1.222.16), the fledglings ask Agni to 'protect us young *ṛṣis*'
(*ṛṣīn asmān bālakān pālayasva*; 1.223.11c) by lauding him one by one
themselves (1.223.7–19). Agni is gratified by their *stotra*, but has of
course already promised their safety to Maṇḍapāla, as he tells them
(1.223.22ab); but since their laud is also weighty to him, he asks what
else he can do for them, to which the little darlings' reply is, 'Burn
these cats!'—which Agni does while continuing on his eating binge
(1.223.20–5).

    Whereupon the scene shifts to Maṇḍapāla and Lapitā. Vaiśaṃpāyana
leads off by telling that Maṇḍapāla was anxious about his sons even
though he had spoken to Agni. But this is just indirection by which
we find direction:

> In his anxiety over his sons, he said to Lapitā, 'Why, my little sons are
> incapable of flying,[45] Lapitā! When the Fire spreads and the wind begins
> to blow hard, my sons will be unable to make their escape (*asamarthā
> vimokṣāya*). Why, their poor mother (*mātā teṣām tapasvinī*) is unable to
> save them; she must be anguished when she sees no way of saving her
> sons. Why, suffering (*saṃtapyamānā*) for my sons, who are still incapable
> of either running or flying, she must be screeching and fluttering about!
> How is my son Jaritāri, how my Sārisṛkva, how Stambamitra, how Droṇa,
> and how that poor woman (*kathaṃ sā ca tapasvinī*)?' (1.224.2–6)

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[43] I thank Simon Brodbeck (personal communication, February 2006) for the follow-
ing astute comment: 'In general, in this whole Śārṅgaka story the ones who face the fire
are males (Maṇḍapāla and the sons, because they must ensure the patriline survives),
whereas the females can just fly off "around somewhere" and have other children: it
is only the chicks who are so keen when Jaritā leaves them that her future sons might
be their father's sons too. But the gendering of this "ancestral-heavenly" salvation and
the gendering of the "freedom from future rebirth" *mokṣa* are slightly different'—the
former requiring 'cooperation with the female'; the latter, 'rejection of the female'.

[44] I translate *deśa* mainly as 'country' in this story and the next, as van Buitenen
does only at the end of this story.

[45] Van Buitenen has 'escape' for *plavane*.

As we have noted, the *tapasvinī* theme is set in motion when Jaritā starts bewailing the onset of Agni. Now, suddenly, it occurs twice from the beak of Mandapāla, which is too much for Lapitā, who sees correctly that Mandapāla cannot really be worried about his sons, whom he knows Agni has agreed to protect, and zeroes in, 'as if jealously' (*sāsūyam iva*, 1.224.7d):

> You do not care at all for your sons! You yourself said they were *ṛṣi*s of splendour and power, and had nothing to fear from Fire. Also, before my very eyes[46] you commended them to the Fire, and the great-spirited god gave you his promise. The World Guardian won't ever tell a lie! And they are eloquent speakers. Your mind (*mānasam*)[47] is not on them. You are suffering (*paritapyase*) because you are thinking about only her, my rival (*mamāmitrīṃ*)! Your love for me is not firm as it once was for her. Surely, it is not right for a bird (*pakṣavatā*) [to be] loveless to a friend, [and] able to overlook [her] when he himself is somehow pained. Go to your Jaritā, for whose sake you suffer (*paritapyase*) so! I shall wander alone, as [befits having attached myself] to a bad man.[48] (1.224.8–13)

Here the theme of friendship among birds takes on a double meaning, since when Lapitā says it is 'not right for a *bird* to be loveless to a friend', *pakṣavat*, 'one possessing wings', can also be translated 'one who has two causes' (van Buitenen) or '[one] that hath two parties dividing his attention' (Ganguli 1.235, p. 453). Moreover, Lapitā's word for 'rival' is *amitrī*, 'enemy, adversary'—literally 'non-friend'. Mandapāla has brought a very human mess into his life as a bird which he thought would be such a quick fix. But the point seems to be that he now realizes this and is deciding to do something about it: indeed, he is deciding to do 'the right thing'. When Lapitā twice tells him 'you suffer' (*paritapyase*) for Jaritā, she is matching his double reference to 'my poor wife' (*tapasvinī*). And that is where he is headed (1.224.14–16). Chagrined at the trouble his children are in, and realizing that the world despises a 'slow-witted' (*mandadhīḥ*) man who 'abandons the present (or past) for the sake of the future' (*bhūtam*

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[46] 1.224.9b: *mama saṃnidhau*. Van Buitenen somewhat over translates this phrase, which literally means no more than 'in my presence', but I have translated it as 'before my very eyes' to evoke the sense of being a witness since it might remind one of the story's bearing as 'unofficial law', and also since it might, with Lapitā as the *female* witness, be *slightly* suggestive in relation to the parable of the two birds in the one tree, discussed below.

[47] From here through to the end of this passage, I do not follow van Buitenen's translation.

[48] Cf. Ganguli 1.235, p. 453.

hitvā bhaviṣye 'rthe), he tells Lapitā, 'Do as you wish. For this blazing fire is licking the trees and brings a hateful malign sorrow to my heart (*dveṣyaṃ hi hṛdi saṃtāpaṃ janayaty aśivaṃ mama*)'.

Vaiśaṃpāyana now shifts to the site just left by Agni, to which Jaritā now dashes, 'screeching pitifully' (*rorūyamāṇā kṛpaṇā*), where she sees 'the most incredible sight' (*aśraddheyatamam . . . darśanam*) of her sons; she embraces them again and again and weeps (1.224.17–19).

> Then suddenly Mandapāla himself arrived there, Bhārata, and none of his sons welcomed him. Though he chattered at each of them time and again, and at Jaritā, they spoke not a word to the *ṛṣi*, good or bad. (1.224.20–1)

Not a word until he tells his sons, 'I made [you] over to the Oblation Eater, but from this I found no peace' (*kṛtavān asmi havyāse naiva śāntim ito labhe*; 1.224.23). Mandapāla's hesitation and ambiguity are important here.[49] He is not quite making it explicit that he obtained Agni's promise to protect them, which he does not know that they now already know from Agni. But more importantly, he would not be willing to make it explicit because Jaritā, who does *not* yet know that he got Agni's protection for the children, would realize that he did not get Agni's protection *for her.* In any case, Mandapāla's 'From this I found no peace' finally gets the parents talking:

> Jaritā said, 'What does your eldest son matter to you, or the second one? What does the middlemost matter, or this poor youngest? You left me completely destitute and went your way. Go back to your tender sweet-smiling Lapitā!' (1.224.24–5)

This sour reception is enough for Mandapāla to put a bad twist on her response and a good twist on his own actions:

> Mandapāla said, 'Apart from another man, nothing in the world is so fatal (*bhavitavyam*) to women as rivalry with another wife (*sāpatnakam*)! For even the faithful and good Arundhatī, famous in all the worlds, distrusted Vasiṣṭha, the eminent *ṛṣi.* He was always completely pure-hearted and devoted to her happiness and well-being, yet she despised that hermit among the Seven Ṛṣis, Because of this contempt she is now a tiny star like a red ember overlaid by smoke, not very lovely, sometimes visible sometimes not, which appears like a bad omen. You yourself obtained

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[49] Van Buitenen trims this to, 'I left you to the Fire, but I found no peace' (not translating the *'itas'*—'thence', 'from this'), which makes Mandapāla sound more as if he is simply exhibiting a regret.

me to get offspring, and giving up what you wanted,[50] now that it has come to this pass, you become like her. A man should never put trust (*viśvāsaḥ*) [in the word] 'wife' (*bhāryeti*), for a wife who has sons does not look to her duty.' (1.224.26–31)

Mandapāla thus passes off his relationship with Lapitā with a maxim about what is 'fatal' to women: another man, above all, but then rivalry among co-wives'—even as it is *he* who, not 'fatally' at all, has had another woman, and one with whom it is not so clear that he was actually married. For as would be typical of Brahmanical marriages, at least as they are viewed in post-Independence Indian courts, a public marriage to a first wife would be considered sacramentally 'irrevocable' through the 'seven-step' rite of *sapta-padī*, which makes a wife a 'friend' (*sakhā*), whereas marriage to a second wife or concubine would not.[51] Moreover, more outrageously, Mandapāla's comparison of Jaritā to Arundhatī lets him get away with his implicit comparison of himself with the ever-faithful Vasiṣṭha. Indeed, he seems to have made up this story about Arundhatī and Vasiṣṭha, the two stars that newlyweds look to as emblems of fidelity (see Hiltebeitel 1977: 345), just for the occasion.[52] And most outrageously, he tries to pass off a maxim that a wife cannot be trusted once she has sons when it is he, the husband, who was not to be trusted! But his poppycock is enough to have won over the children, who now 'waited on him properly (*samyag upāsire*)'

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[50] Van Buitenen has 'the man you wanted' for *iṣṭam* (1.224.30c), which seems gratuitous.

[51] See Menski 2005: 276–301, 317, 396–403, 433, 526–7 on *saptapadī* in Hindu marriage law; Nicholas 1995 on the invisibilization of divorce through emphasis on the marriage *saṃskāra* as a rite that leaves no mental room for marital dissolution; Jamison 1996: 121, citing *Sāṅkhāyana Gṛhryasūtra* 1.14.6 etc. (*sakhā saptapadī bhava*, 'Become a companion [friend] of the seventh step') and *Āpastamba Śrautasūtra* 10.23 (*sakhāyaḥ saptapadā abhūma*, 'We have become companions [friends] at the seventh step').

[52] Hopkins 1969: 182 cites no corroborating passage when he briefly mentions, 'Arundhatī, though a model of faithfulness, yet suspected Vasiṣṭha and became "smoky-red"'. One cannot, of course, prove that a story is intentionally mis-told for effect, and that alert audiences would raise their eyebrows, but that is what I suspect here. The *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* seems to rely on this *Mahābhārata* mis-telling when it relates both stories through the supposed low birth of Arundhatī to make the point that the cases of 'Śārṅgī' (= Jaritā) with Mandapāla and 'Akaṣmālā' (= Arundhatī) with Vasiṣṭha prove that 'women of low birth attained high status in this world by reason of the eminent qualities (*guṇa*s) of their respective husbands' (*Mānava Dharmaśāstra* 9.23–4, tr, Olivelle)! But whether or not the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* has the *Mahābhārata* story as precedent, its totally different emphasis and conclusion show the originality of the authors of both texts—as may also be said of the comparison between this story and the *Vaṭṭaka Jātaka* (see n. 37 above).

as he began 'to reassure' (*āśvāsayitum*) them, telling them, with a few choice words also tucked in for their mother, what they already know but she up till now does not:

> I had commended you [boys] to the Fire, so that he might spare you; and he promised to me he would do so. Thus, knowing the Fire's promise, and your mother's piety in the Law (*dharmajñatām*), and your own great power, I did not come sooner. You had no need to worry about your death, sons. Even the Bearer of Oblations knew you were *ṛṣi*s, and the *brahman* is known to you. (1.225.1–3)

Somehow Mandapāla leaves out that another reason he did not come sooner is that he was having a good time with Lapitā. Jaritā too is now silent on this point and others as well, and Lapitā is still flying around somewhere. But the good news is that despite male infidelity and wife- and child-desertion this marital reconciliation is complete, without anyone having had to go to counseling or to court—like, say, Śakuntalā, or Draupadī. For so Vaiśaṃpāyana now ends the tale: 'Having thus reasurred (*āśvāsya*) his sons, Mandapāla took them and his wife, O Bhārata, and went from that country to another country (*deśād anyaṃ deśaṃ jagāma ha*)' (1.225:4).

Now somewhere along the line, I think probably when Mandapāla had his change of heart and left Lapitā, but certainly by now, attentive readers and listeners like Mrs Janamejaya and Mrs Śaunaka, who, as noted, might be alert to the pertinence to Draupadī of a wayward yet returning husband and the nearly slaughtered children, would realize that Mandapāla's name 'Slow-to-protect' would refer not to his children, whom he protects from the very beginning, but to his 'poor wife' to whom he returns. And who would not wish the avian couple and their children well as they depart for another country? But as they fly off, leaving us poised to enter the *Sabhāparvan*, such listeners might also reflect that they are coming to the scene in the main story in which a husband will be all too horribly 'slow-to-protect' his 'poor wife'—as Draupadī is called for the first time, and then repeatedly, when she is dragged into the *sabhā* (see n. 39).

This bring us to our second story, not an *upākhyāna* but a *saṃvāda*, the *Brahmadatta-Pūjanī-Saṃvāda* (12.137),[53] which occurs amid several animal tales in the *Āpaddharmaparvan* of Book 12 that precede

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[53] Belvalkar (1954: 737) calls attention to parallels in the *Harivaṃśa* (now appendix 5 in its Critical Edition) and the *Kuntanī Jātaka* (Jātaka 343), as Gombach notes (2000, vol. 1: 274). For further discussion, see Bowles 2004: 199–202.

the *Kapota-Upākhyāna*, which, as mentioned, ends in a female bird's implied *satī*. The bird Pūjanī—nicely translated as 'Adorable' by James Fitzgerald—would seem to experience a surprising number of the *Śārṅgaka-Upākhyāna's* main issues, but, with contrary results. When Adorable tells King Brahmadatta that she rejects his offer to restore their friendship because her 'trust' (*viśvāsa*) is broken, she says, "A fool is trapped by trust (*viśvāsād badhyate bālas*)…Some who cannot be captured easily, not even with well-sharpened weapons, get captured with conciliation, the way elephants are trapped by other elephants" (12.137.34c–35). Adorable thus says that she would be a fool to restore a friendship on the basis of coinciding interests, for, as with forest elephants, such interests lead into traps.[54]

Adorable had lived for a long time in the women's quarters (*antaḥpura*) of Brahmadatta's capital of Kāmpilya (12.137.5). Each had a son, but one day at the beach the king's son killed the bird's son. Reflecting upon this turn of events, Adorable says,

> There is no association (*saṃgatam*) in a *kṣatriya*—neither affection (*prītir*) nor goodheartedness (*sauhṛdam*). They participate with others to get something done and then, when their interests have been accomplished, they abandon them. There is no trust (*viśvāsaḥ*) among *kṣatriya*s. They harm everyone. And after wronging someone they are always conciliatory, but uselessly. I will now wreak fitting vengeance upon this horribly cruel ingrate who has slain my trust (*viśvāsaghātinaḥ*). Triple is his sin, because he killed someone born and raised with him, one who ate with him, and who depended upon him for protection. (12.137.13–16)

Adorable then puts out the little prince's eyes. This case of Adorable and King Brahmadatta is interesting for having been a *sakhya* friendship before their falling out. When Brahmadatta tries to coax Adorable back, she says to him:

> Friendship (*sakhyam*) can *not* be forged again between one who does injury and the victim. The perpetrator knows that in his heart (*hṛdayaṃ tatra jānāti*), and so does the victim. (12.137.32)

Brahmadatta disagrees:

> Friendship (*sakhyam*) *can* be forged again between one who does injury and the victim. Cessations of hostilities have been seen to happen (*vairasyopaśamo dṛṣṭaḥ*); neither meets with evil again. (12.137.33)

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[54] This explains a statement in the previous story, the *Māñjāra-Mūṣaka-Saṃvāda*, in which a mouse tells a cat, 'no one is really anyone's friend—interests just coincide with other interests like elephants in the forests' (12.136.104).

But, recalling the elephants, Adorable says, in effect, forget it. It is suggestive that while *sakhya* describes the baseline of their friendship, Adorable reviews her impasse in other friendship terms as well. She gears up for her revenge against the little prince with the thought that Kṣatriyas lack affection (*prīti*) and goodheartedness (*sauhṛdam*), and says to Brahmadatta that both perpetrator and victim know how injuries linger in the heart (*hṛdayam*). And with regard to *mitra* ('alliance') friendship, she tells Brahmadatta that the only friends one can truly trust are one's innate friends (*mitrāṇi sahajāni*), the friends one is born with—that is, one's own good qualities:

> Knowledge, bravery, initiative, strength, and fortitude the fifth—these they say are one's innate friends by which the wise make things happen here (*vidyā śauryaṃ ca dākṣyaṃ ca balaṃ dhairyaṃ* ca *pañcakam / mitrāṇi sahajāny āhur vartayantīha yair budhāḥ*). (12.137.81)

K.M. Ganguli, in his translation of the *Mahābhārata*, once takes *mitra* and *suhṛd* to imply a juxtaposition between 'interested' (*mitra*) friendship and 'disinterested' (*suhṛd*) friendship.[55] This nice contrast presents *suhṛd* in what could be taken as its ideal form, while, as regards *mitra*, Adorable says the only truly dependable 'allies' would be one's innate good qualities. Perhaps she echoes a Buddhist emphasis: that one must begin by being a friend to oneself as the opening to the beneficial practice of 'unlimited' mindfulness on 'friendship' (*maitrī* or *mettā*).[56] In any case, contradicting the axiomatic 'non-independence' (*asvatantratva*) one is supposed to expect from a real woman in the

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[55] Ganguli 13.10, p. 25, translating Critical Edition 13.10.1: 'Yudhiṣṭhira said, "I wish to know, O royal sage, whether any fault is incurred by one who from interested or disinterested friendship [*mitrasauhṛdabhāvena*] imparts instructions unto a person belonging to a low order of birth…"'.

[56] The practice is the first of the four 'unlimited mental states' (*apramāṇacittas*), also known as the four *brahmavihāra*s or 'stations of Brahmā': friendliness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and impartiality (see Conze 1967: 80–91). Buddhaghosa says the purpose of developing 'friendliness is…to seclude the mind from hate' (*Visuddhimagga* 9.3; see Ñāṇamoli 1975); first and foremost, friendliness 'should be developed…towards oneself' (9.8), on which the Buddha said, 'I visited all quarters with my mind/Nor found I any dearer than myself/Self is likewise to every other dear/Who loves himself will never harm another' (9.10). Some statements that the self (*Bhagavadgītā* 6.5–6) or one's *dharma* (merits, virtue, *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* 4.239) is one's true friend occur elsewhere in classical brahmanical sources, and are also, I think, varied ripostes to such Buddhist teachings. The *Gītā* citation, for instance, refers to *anātman* as an inimical outlook (6.6c) and occurs amid references to (*brahma-*)*nirvāṇa* (5.24–5; 6.15) and the friendship of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa as two aspects of the self. See Sukthankar 1957: 94–102 on these verses and matters.

epic and in the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*,[57] Adorable is gearing up to be an 'independent woman'.

Ultimately, and with further unpacking of these and further friendship and kinship terms, Adorable concludes with an intriguing commentary on marriage, kinship, and the state:

> One should keep away from a bad wife (*kubhāryām*), a bad son (*kuputram*), a bad kingdom (*kurājānam*), a bad friend (*kusauhṛdam*), a bad relative (*kusaṃbandham*), a bad country (*kudeśam*). There is no trust in a bad friend (*kumitre nāsti viśvāsaḥ*). How could there be pleasure in a bad wife? There is no satisfaction in a bad kingdom. No one can make a living in a bad country. There is never any association (*saṃgatam*) with a bad friend (*kumitre*), whose friendship (*sauhṛde*) is always inconstant. A bad relative becomes contemptuous when one loses one's wealth. She is a real wife who says what is dear (*sā bhāryā yā priyaṃ brūte*);[58] he is a real son in whom one takes satisfaction. He is a friend (*mitram*) where there is trust; a real country is a place where one can survive. When there is no oppression with violence, then the king rules with properly strict governance. When he seeks to support the poor, it is not just some personal tie of his own. Wife, country, friends (*mitrāṇi*), sons, kinsmen (*saṃbandhi*), relatives (*bāndhavāḥ*)—all of these are excellent when the king looks with the eye of Law (*etat sarvaṃ guṇavati dharmanetre mahīpatau*). (12.137.89–94)

Adorable actually concludes the first verse of this passage, 'One should keep *far* away (*dūrataḥ*) from a bad country.' Presumably, unlike Lapitā who is left where she is, or Jaritā who flies off to another country with her husband and children, Adorable flies off to a distant country alone. Nor does she even have to say, like Lapitā, that she will be better off without a 'bad man' (*kupuruṣa*). Gender is constructed to show that these three *pajarita*s—or as Jamison puts it, 'little (female) birdikins' (1996: 70)—hold the stories together, and that each in her

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[57] See *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* 5.147–8 (as partially cited in n. 33 above); 9.3. For the epic, see Jamison 1996: 236–7 and 305 n. 98, citing also the *Tapatī-Upākhyāna* (1.161.14), and noting contradictions of Manu's dictum. The issue and the key terms *svatantrā/asvatantrā* return in other substory material: the *Vyuṣitāśva-Upākhyāna* (1.113.4, 26); the *Sulabhā-Janaka-Saṃvāda* (with five references between 12.308.64 and 140); and the *Aṣṭāvakra-Dik-Saṃvada* ('The Dialogue Between Aṣṭāvakra and Lady North', with seven references between 13.21.11 and 18). Meanwhile, the main story brings the terms to the fore when Sūrya is seducing Kuntī and telling her she is free to follow her desires (3.291.13), and at Karṇa's lowest moment when he tells Draupadī, now wagered, that she is not only *asvatantrā* but also the wife of a slave (2.63.1). See also the *Vivāha-Dharmaḥ* or 'The Laws Governing Marriage' at 13.46.13.

[58] 12.137.92a; for the translation 'dear', cf. the *Yājñavalkya-Maitreyī-Saṃvāda* at *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.4.1–13; 4.5.1–15.

own way is more virtuous than her male partner. Unlike female char-
acters in general, who, as we have seen, are prone to fault themselves
with unknown sins even from previous lives, Mandapāla has the tenu-
ous no-fault clause that comes with being a man—a clause, no doubt
'soteriologically'[59] nuanced, that finds elegant and precise expression
in the *Pativratā-Upākhyāna* (3.196–206) when the virtuous hunter of
Mithilā proclaims, 'Having committed a sin, a man (*puruṣa*) should
think, "Not I!"'.[60] No doubt alert to such dodges, Jaritā knows how
to weigh what she hears from her husband and the boys to keep her
family together. Meanwhile, Lapitā reads things truly when she sends
Mandapāla home to her. And Adorable knows the bottom-line basic
legal postulate that, deeper than her own revenge against the king's
son, for which she is ostensibly exonerated, a king is responsible for
protection that does not occur.

But what are we to make of this baseline *sakhya* friendship between
a male king and this 'adorable' female bird, one based on a trust
(*viśvāsa*) that both admit has been broken, one that, with the breach,
calls so many friendship terms and ties under such thorough review
and ultimate forsaking? As we have noted, *sakhya* friendship can
imply marriage, and marriage itself can forge such friendship in the
seventh step. Indeed, in so far as Adorable calls her relation to the king
a *sakhya* friendship, one *could* take her to be implying that she is King
Brahmadatta's *first* wife, the one with whom his bond would be made
truly indissoluble by the sacramental seven steps. Here a number of
species-crossing unimaginables could reflect deeper logics of the text,
which I thank Simon Brodbeck for suggesting that I consider. Were
Adorable to regard her own slain son to be Brahmadatta's true heir,
she would now have put a blind half-brother in his place, which could
remind listeners of the blind Dhṛtarāṣṭra whose rule, like Brahmadat-
ta's, was untrustworthy; and of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī's sons, who
by the time this story is told have been both disinherited and killed.
But a bird's story must keep to certain bounds.

This little bird from the king's 'women's quarters' makes an analogy
between good friendship, good marriage, and a peaceable kingdom
and country. It seems that with Adorable and Brahmadatta's parallel

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[59] Neither *puruṣa* nor *ātman* can commit *karma*, whether good or bad, so a 'man'
(both terms are of masculine gender) is really saved no matter what he has done.

[60] *pāpaṃ kṛtvā hi manyeta nāham asmīti puruṣaḥ*/3.198.51. See similarly Nala's
disclaimer about abandoning Damayantī: 'It was not my own fault' (*nāhaṃ tat kṛtavān
svayam*, 3.74.16b, tr. van Buitenen). On both passages, see Hiltebeitel 2001a: 235.

relationship as parents with sons but with no mention of their spouses, Adorable's story involves an implicit reflection on the unthinkable grounds of 'irretrievable marital breakdown' that would, after all, even if only in theory, justify a wife who leaves her husband—as must have happened more often than we are told. For given the prior presumption of marital indissolubility, irretrievable marital breakdown cannot actually be admitted for creatures of the same species—or at least, should a rare exception be found, it is easier to say it about creatures of different ones. And where would trust or its breach finally have to lie? In both cases, in the treatment of sons, for, in contrast to the story of the Śārṅgaka birds where reconciliation can begin from the mother's and father's mutual if uncoordinated care for the children, here we have the opposite outcome of one son killed and the other maimed in revenge—by Adorable herself. Indeed, what she seems to be really saying, as so often by displacement, is that she can no longer be 'a real wife who says what is dear'. Don't forget who is listening directly to all this: not just Draupadī and her husbands, but also Kṛṣṇa.

Friends among Friends

Coming now to Draupadī's 'unique' *sakhā-sakhī* relationship with Kṛṣṇa, I will discuss the few occurrences that play out this relationship explicitly in the text, and some of those that do so implicitly, and conclude with some speculation on Yudhiṣṭhira's closing description of Draupadī mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

In relationships with individual males, a woman's husband could consider her to be an exemplary 'intimate friend', as Yudhiṣṭhira does in answering the *yakṣa*'s questions in the *Āraṇeyam Upākhyāna* or 'Firesticks Subtale' (so called at 1.2.1 27c):

> …What is the friend made by fate (*kiṃ svid daivakṛtaḥ sakhā*)?…The wife is the friend made by fate (*bhāryā daivakṛtaḥ sakhā*). (3.297.50b, 51b)

Note that *sakhā*, for the wife, is in the masculine. But for a woman to have a *sakhā* outside of marriage is something rare. The *Gautama Dharmasūtra*, one of the earliest texts on *dharma*, introduces such a relationship probably before the *Mahābhārata*,[61] but fleetingly, with the following rules:

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[61] Olivelle 1999: xxviii–xxxiv places *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* in the early third century B.C.E. and *Gautama Dharmasūtra* in the mid-third century B.C.E. as the two earliest Dharmasūtras.

Sex with a female friend (*sakhī*) or uterine sister,[62] a woman belonging to one's lineage, the wife of one's pupil, one's daughter-in-law, and a cow is equal to sex with the wife of an elder. According to some, it is equal to a student's breaking the vow of chastity.[63] (*Gautama Dharmasūtra* 23.12–13, tr. Olivelle)

But Gautama does not develop the idea of the sakhī in any other rule, and when one gets to the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*, the rule is sanitized so that it no longer concerns the delicate matter of sex with a female friend (or a cow) but only with the wives of male friends or their sons: 'Sexual intercourse with uterine sisters, unmarried girls, lowest-born women, and the wives of a friend or son, they say, is equal to sex with an elder's wife' (*Mānava Dharmaśāstra* 11.59; tr. Olivelle).[64] In the epics, as far as I know, the only case of such a relationship is that of Kṛṣṇa and Draupadī, which confirms not only its uniqueness but also the singularity with which the *Mahābhārata* brings it to life. I find it mentioned explicitly in only two contexts: first, three times with reference to Draupadī's disrobing; and then, much later, in an ostensibly lighter scene.

Its first mention is thus in a scene of evident great intensity. Dragged into the men's gambling hall by her hair, dashed to the ground in a single bloodstained garment, wretched with misery, hearing her question about *dharma* only ducked and bandied about by the men, Draupadī calls for the last time for it to be answered, mentioning for the first time in the epic that she is the *sakhī*-friend of Kṛṣṇa:

From of old, we have heard, they do not bring virtuous women into the hall (*dharmyāḥ striyaḥ sabhāṃ pūrvaṃ na nayantīti naḥ śruta*). This ancient eternal law (*pūrvo dharmaḥ sanātanaḥ*) is lost (*naṣṭaḥ*) among the Kauravas. How can I, wife of the Pāṇḍus, sister of Pārṣata, a good woman (*satī*), and friend of Vāsudeva (*vāsudevasya ca sakhī*), enter the hall of kings? Is the wife of Dharmarāja, whose birth matches his, a slave or not a slave (*dāsīm adāsīṃ vā*)? (2.62.9–11)

It is shortly after this that she prays to Kṛṣṇa, who, in conjunction with Dharma (her *dharma*?), multiplies her sarees to prevent her disrobing—

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[62] I have added 'uterine', as Olivelle himself does when translating the parallel at *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* 11.59.

[63] *Gautama Dharmasūtra* 23.17–20 lists penances for this and comparable sins, as do *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* 2.2.12–14 and *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* 20.16 for comparable sins.

[64] The expiation is provided at *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* 11.171.

at least so it is in all Sanskrit texts prior to the Critical Edition. As I see it, the Critical Edition, in taking stock of a kind of Genghis Khan effect in which a rampant breeding of variants has made it impossible to trace earlier 'generations' (Stokes 2004), has taken Kṛṣṇa's part in this intervention to suggest that there would once have been an original in which he did not intervene and it was Draupadī's own *dharma* that saved her.[65] Indeed, as the war approaches in Book 5, Draupadī specifically connects her being Kṛṣṇa's *sakhī* with her having called upon him to 'save' her in the *sabhā*:

> It has been said often enough, but I repeat it confidently, Janārdana: has there been a woman like me on earth…risen from the middle of the altar…your dear friend (*tava…priyā sakhī*), Kṛṣṇa?…Yet I…was molested in the men's hall…The Pāṇḍavas watched it without showing anger or doing anything, so it was you I desired in my heart, Govinda, crying 'Save me!' (*trāhi mām iti govinda manasā kāṅkṣito 'si me*). (5.80.21–6)

There is the suggestion here that only an 'intimate friend' (*sakhā*) could touch her sarees in her husbands' presence. But the main thing about the intimacy of their *sakhā-sakhī* relationship in this episode is that it is steeped in *bhakti*; as Draupadī herself also makes evident earlier in the Forest Book when she questions how, as Kṛṣṇa's *sakhī*, she could have suffered such insults. Seeking Kṛṣṇa's refuge (*śaraṇyaṃ śaraṇaiṣiṇī*) and acknowledging at length that he is the supreme deity (3.13.42–50), she asks:

> And here am I, about to tell you of my grief, out of love (*praṇayāt*), Madhusūdana—for are you not the lord of all beings, both divine and

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[65] James Hegarty (2004: 202 n. 298), speaking of 'the shifting identification of the being responsible for the replenishing of Draupadī's skirts', cites 2.*544.1–4 as yielding 'alternately, Dharma's intervention'. But he omits to mention that in the first two lines of this passage Draupadī invoked Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu, Hari, and Nara to make this happen. Nearly all manuscripts have Draupadī make some prayer to Kṛṣṇa, while the four that do not are in agreement with the rest that Duḥśāsana taunted her that she would do so (2.60.26). Given that Kṛṣṇa (5.58.21) and Draupadī (5.80.23–6) both agree later that he did so, it would seem that she made some private prayer even in the manuscripts where it is not so stated and where it is left, rather delicately (and perhaps originally), for one to piece things together from these other attestations. The epic has many ways of saying, 'Where Kṛṣṇa is, there is *dharma*.' For discussion of these matters, which continue to cause a lot of wishful readings, see Hiltebeitel 2001a: 250–7. See now Bhattacharya 2009 (I had only seen an email version in 2005), which, despite recognizing evidence to the contrary at *Mbh* 9.58.10, for some reason wishes to argue that Draupadī was never disrobed at all.

human? Then how was it that a woman like me, wife to the Pārthas, sister
of Dhṛṣṭadyumna, your friend (*tava . . . sakhī*), Kṛṣṇa, came to be dragged
into the hall, Lord? (3.13.52–3)

If, as I have argued elsewhere, Draupadī's question about *dharma* ques-
tions the 'ownership' of women,[66] it would seem that being Kṛṣṇa's
sakhī simply nullifies such ownership at a higher plane. But on a more
down-to-earth plane, Draupadī's *sakhī* relation with Kṛṣṇa is, at least
in these scenes, one of the main things that keeps her marriage to five
men going, and with it the *dharma* that they are all born to protect
and restore.

  And now, much later into the epic, that seemingly lighter moment.
Kṛṣṇa has just told Yudhiṣṭhira what he has learned from spies: Arjuna
is returning, quite emaciated after many fights, from his mission of
guarding the horse for Yudhiṣṭhira's postwar Aśvamedha; prepara-
tions for the rite should begin. Yudhiṣṭhira is very glad to hear of
Arjuna's imminent return, but he is troubled by the report of his
brother's gaunt look and asks Kṛṣṇa whether Arjuna bears some
'unfavourable[67] mark by which he experiences such miseries' (*aniṣṭaṃ
lakṣaṇaṃ kṛṣṇa yena duḥkhāny upāsnute*; 14.89.4). 'Reflecting for a
very long interlude' (*dhyātvā sumahad antaram*; 14.89.6b)—and let
me mention that Vaiśaṃpāyana sometimes likes to cue us that Kṛṣṇa
is an entertainer[68]—Kṛṣṇa replies:[69]

  O king, I surely do not detect this one's having anything unfavourable
  except that this lion among men's cheekbones[70] are overly developed (*na*

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[66] And it is most notably, and ironically, Karṇa—the *sakhā* of Duryodhana—who
rises to defend the husband's ownership of the wife after the attempted disrobing
(2.63.1); see Hiltebeitel 2001a: 259 and n. 57 above.

[67] For *an-iṣṭa*: 'unwished, undesirable, disadvantageous, unfavourable; bad, wrong,
evil, ominous' (Monier-Williams).

[68] See 12.29.6, where Kṛṣṇa, speaking to Yudhiṣṭhira 'disarmingly' (*abhivinodayan*,
Fitzgerald 2004a: 228) or 'entertainingly', launches into amusing stories, among them
that of Svarṇaṣṭhīvin, 'Excretor of Gold', in the *Nārada-Parvata-Upākhyāna* (12.30), to
begin to dissolve some of Yudhiṣṭhira's postwar grief. See Hiltebeitel 2005d: 254–5 on
this passage; on the generally gloomy and depressed character of Yudhiṣṭhira during
the Aśvamedha, see Jamison 1996: 76, to which p. 277 n. 151 adds, with only slight
but, as I am trying to suggest, significant exaggeration, 'This, of course, is true for all
of the postwar Mahābhārata. The Pāṇḍavas seem to live in a state of clinical depression
for parvan after parvan.'

[69] Note that at 14.89.6 he is called Hṛṣīkesa, Viṣṇu, and 'increaser of the Bhoja
princes'.

[70] Dumézil 1970: 164 n. 9: '*Piṇḍikā*, which designates "a globular swelling or pro-
tuberance," here certainly has the meaning "cheekbone."'

hy asya nṛpate kiṃ cid aniṣṭaṃ[71] upalakṣaye/ṛte puruṣasiṃhasya piṇḍike 'syātikāyataḥ). On account of these two, this tiger among men is always hitched to the roads (*nityam adhvasu yujyate*). I do not see anything else by which this Jaya has a share of misery. (14.89.7–8)

His curiosity satisfied, Yudhiṣṭhira says, 'So it is, Lord' (*evam etad iti prabho*; 14.89.9d).

> But Kṛṣṇa Draupadī indignantly[72] glanced askance at Kṛṣṇa (*kṛṣṇā tu draupadī kṛṣṇaṃ tiryak sāsūyam aikṣata*). The Slayer of Keśin, Hṛṣīkeśa, approved that showing of her affection (*pratijagrāha tasyās taṃ praṇayam*)[73] as if he were Dhanaṃjaya in person (*sākṣād iva*),[74] a friend of a friend (*sakhyuḥ sakhā*). Having heard, Bhīma and the other Kurus and Yādavas[75] there took pleasure in this story about Dhanaṃjaya whose manner was amusing,[76] O lord (*remuḥ śrutvā vicitrārthā dhanaṃjayakathā vibho*). (14.89.10–11)

Now if Kṛṣṇa's remark and his approval of Draupadī's show of affection were all we had to go on, we might begin by noting that he seems to be teasing his friend Draupadī. Vaiśaṃpāyana's initial cues would reinforce this: Kṛṣṇa took a very long time to come up with this *vicitrārthā…kathā*— this 'amusing', 'entertaining', or 'colourful' *tale* about Arjuna.

But what do we have here in this *sakhyuḥ sakhā*, 'friend of a friend'? Who is whose friend? Let us return to the last line of the three-line verse where this phrase occurs: 'Hṛṣīkeśa [approved that showing of her affection], as if he were Dhanaṃjaya in person, a friend of a friend (*sakhyuḥ sakhā*)' (14.89.10ef). The commentator Nīlakaṇṭha is silent. Georges Dumézil, while trying to make a comparative point about the facial distortions of Indo-European warriors, seems to take *sakhyuḥ sakhā* as referring to Kṛṣṇa as the friend of Arjuna: 'Draupadī,…who

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[71] Instead of *aniṣṭam*, the Vulgate (14.87.8b; see Kinjawadekar 1929–36) reads *saṃśliṣṭam*, on which Nīlakaṇṭha suggests something confounded, bristling, fleshy, and extending broadly and from behind.

[72] I translate *sāsūyam* here as 'indignantly', noting that I have followed van Buitenen's 'jealously' in the response of Lapitā to Mandapāla's newfound concern for his 'poor wife' (1.224.7d). In fact, 'indignantly' would do for both usages, whereas 'jealously' would not fit the present one. For the adjectival *sāsūya*, Monier-Williams gives 'having envy, envious; disdainful, scornful, angry at or with'. Ganguli 14.87, p. 149, has 'angrily', which I would regard as the next best thing in this context.

[73] Again, *praṇayam*; cf. the early Forest Book passage just cited.

[74] 'Visibly, really, actually' (Monier-Williams); with his own eyes.

[75] The Vulgate reads *yājakā*s, 'sacrificers' (14.87.12d) rather than *yādavā*s.

[76] Whose goal was varied; whose concern, manner, or meaning was charming, entertaining, amusing, colourful.

has a preference for Arjuna,…takes strong exception to a challenge of this kind to the hero's perfect beauty; she throws an angry glance at Kṛṣṇa, who, in his own affection for Arjuna, enjoys her feminine reaction' (1970: 164 n. 9).[77] This is certainly grammatically plausible, since the genitive *sakhyuḥ*, 'of the friend', is in the masculine. But Ganguli takes *sakhyuḥ sakhā* as referring to Kṛṣṇa and Draupadī, translating, 'The slayer of Kesi, *viz.*, Hrishikesa, approved of that indication of love (for his friend) which the princess of Panchala, who also was his friend, displayed'—to which he adds in a note: 'It is worthy of note that Draupadī was always styled by Krishna as his *sakhī* or "friend". Krishna was highly chivalrous to the other sex at an age when women were universally regarded as the inferiors of men' (Ganguli 14.87, p. 149).[78] That is, Ganguli takes 'friend of a friend' to refer to Kṛṣṇa (the *sakhā*) as the friend of Draupadī (*sakhyuḥ*, even though it is in the masculine), while reminding us in parentheses that Arjuna, for whom Draupadī makes her show of affection, is also Kṛṣṇa's friend. Somewhat in favour of this reading, the genitive *tasyās*, 'of her', in 'that showing *of her* affection' which precedes *sakhyuḥ sakhā*, could be taken as pointing to Draupadī in the genitive masculine 'of the friend', and it is instructive that three Malayalam manuscripts[79] replace *sakhyuḥ* with the feminine genitive *sakhyāḥ* to make this explicit: that 'friend of a friend' means 'friend of a female friend'. Actually, it is perfectly ambiguous. The masculine genitive *sakhyuḥ* could refer to either Draupadī or Arjuna as 'friend' of Kṛṣṇa, for as William Dwight Whitney observes, 'forms of [the masculine] *sakhī* are sometimes found used with feminine value' (1960: 342)—we have noticed such a usage when Yudhiṣṭhira describes the wife as the 'friend (*sakhā*) made by fate'. Moreover, since Kṛṣṇa sees Draupadī 'as if he were Dhanaṃjaya in person (*sākṣād iva*)', it could even be saying that *he* is sympathetically seeing what Arjuna would be seeing as the friend in the nominative, leaving the genitive—the friend whose friend is Arjuna—to be either Draupadī or Kṛṣṇa.

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[77] Dumézil would probably have in mind behind this the Vedic precedent of Viṣṇu's being the 'intimate friend of Indra' (*indrasya yújyaḥ sákhā, Ṛgveda* 1.22.19).

[78] Note, however, that Ganguli turns matters around to make this point for Kṛṣṇa who, as far as I can see, leaves it entirely to Draupadī to affirm their friendship in *sakhā-sakhī* terms.

[79] Those called M1–3 in the apparatus of the Critical Edition.

But there are other clues in Vaiśaṃpāyana's narration, for we are actually in the midst of another highly charged ritual situation involving not only Draupadī and Arjuna but also the returning horse. In this regard, Draupadī could have more on her mind to be indignant about than just this slight of Arjuna, whose return with the horse after its year of wandering signals that Draupadī must now ramp herself up for a ritual highlight of the Aśvamedha. For if one were following the old ritual texts, as the queen or chief wife (*mahiṣī*) of the king, she would soon be lying down and exposing herself sexually to the horse after it has been suffocated. Even though it is certainly selective in describing other details of the Aśvamedha, the *Mahābhārata* does not omit this 'sexually jolting' ritual scene, which it soon describes with manifest restraint:

> When the bulls among priests (*yājakarṣabhāḥ*) had made the horse agree [i.e., when they had killed it] according to rule, they caused the wise (*manasvinīm*) daughter of Drupada to lie down beside it for three minutes (*kalābhis tisṛbhī*) according to rule, O king. (14.91.2)[80]

Let us note that Vyāsa plays a supervisory priestly role at both Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya* and his Aśvamedha, and would thus be one of the chief 'bulls among priests (*yājaka*s)' mentioned here.[81] But what is most noteworthy is that Kṛṣṇa's friendship with Draupadī comes explicitly into play around these two ritually defined scenes: one in a development from the dice match as an extended narrative sequel to the Rājasūya,[82] and the other in an underplayed portrayal of the role of the *mahiṣī* in exposing herself sexually to the sacrificed horse in the Aśvamedha. I suspect that in each case Kṛṣṇa intervenes to lighten Draupadī's sexual humiliation. As the epic wife takes her role as victim[83] within the arena of the great Vedic royal sacrifices, she has a new

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[80] With little change from Jamison, who comments, 'Three minutes sounds about right. For whatever reason, at the Aśvamedha depicted in the Rāmāyaṇa a whole night is required' (1996: 66), and describes in detail what the traditional ritual would expect of Draupadī (*ibid*.: 68–9).

[81] See Sullivan 1990: 31–4; Hiltebeitel 2001a: 50–1, 77–9.

[82] As van Buitenen demonstrated (1972), the *Mahābhārata*'s second book transposes the dice match that should end a Rājasūya from Yudhiṣṭhira's ceremony at the Pāṇḍava capital, which ends without a dice match, to the ostensibly independent sequel that occurs when Yudhiṣṭhira is invited to play dice at the Kaurava capital.

[83] See Jamison 1996: 256 on the 'sacrificed' sacrificer's wife playing the role of mediator between men and gods. I would suggest that this is the Vedic ground from which this aspect of Draupadī's relation to Kṛṣṇa is developed by the epic poets.

friend to turn to in the text's *bhakti* theology: God. But really, he is not a new friend but an old one, for as the earlier Vedic Brāhmaṇa texts are fond of repeating, *yajño vai viṣṇus*, 'Viṣṇu is the sacrifice'.[84]

Further, I believe that Vaiśaṃpāyana offers hints that the Yādavas, among others, or, even more interestingly, the *yājaka*s or 'sacrificial priests' (see n. 75), among others, would have found even more to be amused about in Kṛṣṇa's 'colourful' tale about Arjuna. This would be that Kṛṣṇa seems to be referring not only to Arjuna but to the horse; or, more exactly, that if Kṛṣṇa were reading, or perhaps better, reading *into*, his 'intimate friend' Draupadī's mind, he would be hinting that Arjuna and the horse would have a somewhat fused or interchangeable profile as they approach together. While *piṇḍikā* can indeed designate 'a globular swelling or protuberance' on a man's cheeks, it could also describe the same on a horse.[85] Kṛṣṇa's *bon mot* would thus be a *śleṣa* or *double entendre*: one that would be especially amusing to the *yājaka*s, who are thinking not only of Arjuna but also—or perhaps more so—of the horse he is bringing for them to sacrifice. Indeed, the *yājaka*s, as we have seen, are headed by Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, the author, who would be the first to understand double meanings. Or alternatively, the Yādavas know their kinsman Kṛṣṇa better than most.

The narration and Kṛṣṇa's own words offer further clues in this direction. That Kṛṣṇa approves Draupadī's show of affection under his name Slayer of Keśin is more than curious, since Keśin is a horse Kṛṣṇa slew in his childhood.[86] Even the name Hṛṣīkeśa is worth noting here, since it can mean 'Master of the Senses' (Biardeau 2002, vol. 1: 595) and, with that, convey the familiar Upanishadic image of 'yoking' the senses, with the senses evoking horses.[87] But most tellingly, these meanings apply when Kṛṣṇa says in his own words that Arjuna's facial protuberances come from his being 'always hitched to the roads' (*nityam adhvasu yujyate*), like a family workhorse. If so, no wonder Draupadī looks at him askance. She would understand this play on words just as well as the *yājaka*s or Yādavas do.

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[84] See Hiltebeitel 1976: 105, 293–4, 333, 356.

[85] Cf. Monier-Williams: '*Piṇḍika,* n. the penis, *LiṅgaP.*; (*ā*), f., see *piṇḍaka*'; *piṇḍaka*, '…a round protuberance (esp. on an elephant's temples)…(*ikā*), f. a globular fleshy swelling (in the shoulders, arms, legs, &c., esp. the calf of the leg)'. Similar meanings also apply to *piṇḍa*. I will not press the late attestation of 'penis'.

[86] On the principle that names of multiply named characters are often used selectively for their contextual fit, see Biardeau 2002: *passim*.

[87] See *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 3.3–9 and other *Mahābhārata* ramifications in Hiltebeitel 1984.

In short, when Vaiśaṃpāyana tells us that Kṛṣṇa responded to Draupadī's indignation as a friend of a friend (*sakhyuḥ sakhā*), the *sakhā* could be either Kṛṣṇa or Arjuna, and the *sakhyuḥ* could be either Arjuna, Draupadī, or Kṛṣṇa. If Vaiśaṃpāyana is cuing us to take Kṛṣṇa's 'story' about Arjuna's cheekbones to be 'amusing', he is probably also leaving us with at least some of these ambiguities as to the triple intimacies of the *sakhā-sakhī* friendship of Draupadī, Kṛṣṇa, and Arjuna. One could probably say that it is the relation of these principal characters—the leading man, leading woman, and their friend God—as they act, wink, and listen, that provides the epic's armature of gender throughout. I have in mind principally Draupadī's colloquy with Kṛṣṇa's wife Satyabhāmā in The Book of the Forest (3.222–4), Arjuna's disguise in The Book of Virāṭa (see Hiltebeitel 1980b), and above all the persona of Kṛṣṇa, a devious divinity (Matilal 1991) of whom it can be said that part of his charm is that you don't have to believe a word he says.

The *Mahābhārata* does not really tell us where these friendships start. Perhaps Arjuna's with Kṛṣṇa is among the friendships and rivalries the Pāṇḍavas form with others—notably Aśvatthāman and Karṇa—who receive Droṇa's martial training, since the Vṛṣṇis and Andhakas are mentioned among that lot (1.122.46), but without Kṛṣṇa being personally identified there. But by the time of Draupadī's *svayaṃvara*, Kṛṣṇa is there with Balarāma to recognize Arjuna, restrain the vying suitors, and seal the deal as 'lawful' (*dharmeṇa*, 1.181.32)—before it becomes a matter of polyandry (which calls for the additional interventions, mentioned above, of Kṛṣṇa's congeners Vyāsa and Nārada). Draupadī does not much appreciate Kṛṣṇa's next entanglement: encouraging Arjuna to marry Subhadrā, his (Kṛṣṇa's) sister (1.211–12). Indeed, when Kṛṣṇa uses the phrase 'always hitched to the roads' to explain Arjuna's high cheekbones, Draupadī could also be reminded of this tour (provoked by Nārada's intervention) that brought Arjuna home with this new bride. In any case, the Burning of the Khāṇḍava Forest is framed by these now developed friendships. Before the fire starts, Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa decide to go, as each puts it, 'surrounded by [our] friends' (*suhṛj-janavṛta*)—including Draupadī and Subhadrā[88]—for water sports and a picnic with liquor and music on a bank of the

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[88] Friendships between women in classical sources deserve further study, for which Pintchman's ethnography (2007) of women's friendships in Benares has important pointers.

Yamunā (1.214.14–25). And when the conflagration is over, Agni grants Kṛṣṇa the boon of 'eternal friendship with Arjuna' (*prītiṃ pārthena śāśvatīm*, 1.225.13)[89]—like marital friendship, friendship between males can be sanctioned by circling around fire.[90] Moreover, in the grisly scene between these two bookmarks of confirmed amity, the Burning of the Khāṇḍava Forest reveals Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa for the first time as 'the two Kṛṣṇas' (1.214.27, 32; 1.219.3) riding together on one chariot, as they will do in the war (see Hiltebeitel 1984). By that point one also knows that Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna, and Draupadī are three enigmatic 'Kṛṣṇas' along with a fourth, the author Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa. As we have now seen, all this has been further developed when Draupadī and Kṛṣṇa are mentioned as two Kṛṣṇas at the beginning of the passage about Arjuna's return with the horse, where Vyāsa not only stands behind everything Vaiśaṃpāyana says, but also is the chief of the priests overseeing the whole Aśvamedha when Draupadī and the dead horse take their three minutes to cohabit.

Now with regard to *sakhī*[91] as 'intimate friend', we have seen that there is an Upanishadic usage of that term in describing two birds who as 'companions and friends' nestle in the same tree:[92]

> Two birds, who are companions and friends (*sayujā sakhāyā*), nestle on the very same tree. One of them eats a tasty fig; the other, not eating, looks on. Stuck on the very same tree, one person grieves, deluded by her who is not the Lord (*anīśayā*). But when he sees the other, the contented Lord (*īśam*)—and the Lord's majesty—his grief disappears. (*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 4.6–7, tr. Olivelle 1996; also *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 3.1.1–2)

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[89] Curiously, these are the same terms Drupada uses when he disingenuously asks Droṇa for 'eternal friendship' (1.128.13d) after the latter has returned to him half of the kingdom he conquered from him with the help of his just mentioned martial trainees.

[90] As with the friendship forged between Rāma and Sugrīva (*Rāmāyaṇa* 3.68.13; 4.5.16).

[91] Henceforth I use the stem form *sakhī* of the masculine noun generically rather than the nominative singulars *sakhā* and *sakhī*. I will not treat in this chapter the alternate meaning of *sakhī* as 'pact friend' or *socius*, on which see Hiltebeitel 1976: 25–66; Dumézil 1970: 20, 30.

[92] Biardeau sees the parable of the two birds standing behind Kṛṣṇa's story (*Mahābhārata* 2.13.36–42) of the two allies of Jarāsaṃdha: Haṃsa (whose name 'Gander' evokes the supreme self or *ātman*) and Ḍimbhaka ('Sot', 'Fool'); see Biardeau 2002, vol. 2: 756.

It would seem that the *Muṇḍaka* and *Śvetāśvatara*[93] *Upaniṣads* put a *bhakti* twist on the first of these two verses—which is originally the first in a sequence of three Rigvedic riddle verses[94] about two male birds without a female birdikins to complement them—by introducing the feminine as 'her who is not the Lord',[95] the 'tasty fig' that deludes the one friend who eats while 'the other, the contented Lord', 'not eating, looks on'. Indeed, given the preceding verse that contextualizes this parable at *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 4.5, 'she', as one of the three 'unborns' or *aja/ajās,* is none other than tri-colored primal matter whom the one unborn male 'burning with passion, covers' while the other 'unborn male leaves her after he has finished enjoying her pleasures' (tr. Olivelle 1996).[96] To put it briefly, the exemplary *sakhī* friendship of the two male birds passes entirely over 'her' head.

I have been suggesting in this chapter that the *Mahābhārata* has done something to correct this in Kṛṣṇa's *sakhī* friendship with Draupadī. But we must finally see this not from within this 'dark' circle of *sakhī* friends named Kṛṣṇa/ā ('black'), but from the dying consciousness of the almost infinitely educable Yudhiṣṭhira, who is always slightly outside that circle (that is, one barely finds him mentioned as Kṛṣṇa's *sakhī* friend—see for example 5.70.91ab; Arjuna is after all his brother, and although Yudhiṣṭhira does speak of the wife as *sakhā,* he knows that among his brothers this relation to Draupadī would belong above all to Arjuna).

Yudhiṣṭhira knows that Draupadī has died on the path up into the Himālaya that he and his brothers take on their final great setting forth (*mahāprasthāna*) accompanied by a dog who is Dharma in disguise. Draupadī is the first to fall, leaving Yudhiṣṭhira to explain to Bhīma that she fell as the result of her one fault in life: that she had a partiality for Arjuna (17.2.6). Without looking back he climbs ahead. But he continues to think about her, and once the dog has revealed himself

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[93] I would not go as far as Oberlies, who argues that the *Śvetāśvatara* is from around 0–200 C.E. (1997: 86; 1988: 57–9), though he may be right (even if I doubt it) that it is younger than the *Gītā*. Cf. Olivelle 1996: 252: 'Its thought and vocabulary are close to those of the other famous theistic document, the Bhagavad Gītā.'

[94] *Ṛgveda* 1.164.20–2; see most recently Houben 2000: 520–2.

[95] *Anīśayā* is the instrumental of the feminine *anīśa,* 'not-lord', which Olivelle translates by this whole phrase.

[96] See also Olivelle 1996: 399: the 'expression' *anīśa* 'probably refers to the female cosmic power, that is, *prakṛti*, which is distinct from the Lord and which is the cause of human ignorance. The opposition between the two principles is more pronounced in the SU [*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*] [than it is in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*].'

to be Dharma, Yudhiṣṭhira is taken in a chariot to heaven in his own body, with all his human feelings still intact; and once there, desiring to be wherever his brothers and Draupadī are, he brings Book 17 to a resounding close by asking where *bṛhatī śyāmā buddhisattvaguṇānvitā/ draupadī* is (17.3.36). Then, as Book 18 begins, finding Duryodhana rather than his loved ones there, he soon finds Draupadī (and the rest) at the end of her post-mortem but still 'human' path in Hell (18.2.11–41). There he dramatically curses the gods, *dharma*, and Dharma as his father (*devaṃś ca garhayāṃ āsa dharmaṃ caiva yudhiṣṭhiraḥ*; 18.2.50) for all the awful tests they have made him and his loved ones endure. And having reentered heaven himself, just as he has his last longing to question Draupadī (18.4.8), Indra breaks in to tell him he cannot do so because she has already returned to her divine identity:

> O Yudhiṣṭhira, she is Śrī, who took the form of Draupadī for your sake, becoming human though not born of a womb, beloved of the world, she who smells good (*śrīr eṣā draupadīrūpā tvadarthe mānuṣaṃ gatā / ayonijā lokakāntā puṇyagandhā yudhiṣṭhira*). (18.4.9)

In questioning where Draupadī is in this interval between death and what is next for her, I would speculate that Yudhiṣṭhira may be evoking an even deeper identity of Draupadī than Śrī,[97] whose 'good smell' is surely but also merely that of the earth, which Yudhiṣṭhira must now leave behind. If so, this would call for us to think that the epic's concatenation of friends named Kṛṣṇa/ā would be co-configured (by the epic's author, another Kṛṣṇa, no less) against the full background of what Madeleine Biardeau nearly forty years ago[98] introduced as the epico-puranic 'universe of *bhakti*', a cosmology in which on the grandest scale—on top, that is, of the 'occasional dissolutions' in which the earth is periodically dissolved into the single ocean—there are the 'great dissolutions' in which all the elements are dissolved into primal matter, the third *ajā*. If so, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, 'the two Kṛṣṇas

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[97] This paragraph, and indeed this whole chapter, carries along a meditation on this description of Draupadī in Hiltebeitel 2001a: 271–7, especially 272–3 and nn. 88–90, the latter on the '"darkly illuminating" sattvic quality' that the 'three Kṛṣṇas' Draupadī, Kṛṣṇa, and Vyāsa share. I would suggest that the identity of the Goddess as Yoganidrā in the *Devī Māhātmya* (1.54–71) and elsewhere would emerge from this range of ideas. As Viṣṇu's 'yogic sleep', it is she who, at Brahmā's behest, awakens Viṣṇu to defeat the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha, thereby securing the continuance of creation.

[98] Principally in the 1967, 1968 and 1971 articles reprinted in Biardeau 1981a.

on one chariot'[99] as images of the soul and the Lord, would be *sakhīs* with a 'great enigmatic dark Lady' (*bṛhatī śyāmā*) indeed. The *sakhī* relation that connects the three of them would apply not only to the two males as Lord and soul, but also to the three as Lord, soul, and primal matter—that is, primal matter in her highest sattvic aspect as *pradhāna*, which reveals itself / who reveals herself, or is revealed, at eschatological moments of both individual and cosmic illumination. If so, Yudhiṣṭhira would be not only asking after the woman of substance and intellect, the lady *paṇḍitā* (or learned scholar) he knew in life, but also giving homage to the deepest nature she could possibly have in this more than occasionally philosophical text: the great enigmatic dark one (*bṛhatī śyāmā*) who is *buddhisattvaguṇānvitā*, primal substance as intellect. The 'great enigmatic dark one' who is *buddhisattvaguṇānvitā* would then be that tasty fig come to life in parity, the mysterious third friend who is, precisely for Yudhiṣṭhira, the friend of the friend of the friend.

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[99] Whose friendship also recalls their identity as Nara and Nārāyaṇa: '…the two dear friends who were the seers Nara and Nārāyaṇa' (*āstāṃ priyasakhāyau tau naranārāyaṇāv ṛṣi*; 1.210.5).

EPIC *AŚVAMEDHAS*

My goal is to convince readers that the impregnations of the Kuru queens Ambikā and Ambālikā's by the *Mahābhārata* author Vyāsa allude to the Aśvamedha scene where the chief queen or *mahiṣī* lies with the sacrificial horse. To put it bluntly, Vyāsa should come out smelling something like a horse.

The case calls for four quick moves. The first is to recognize that the Aśvamedha scene most susceptible to veiled allusion is this very one. The second is to explore a suspicion that one way to allude knowingly to it would be to shift planes from the Aśvamedha to other rites where a woman is called upon to secure offspring outside marriage: especially via *niyoga*, with a live man rather than a dead horse. The main move is to note a symmetry where the two epics treat four episodes: three where Aśvamedhas occur in the main narratives, and the fourth, our target: ostensibly a *niyoga* or "levirate" story with an anti-*niyoga* sequel. In all cases, we must keep track of the horse, the *mahiṣī*, and three or so other queens. The four episodes are quadrangulated in the following table:

Table 1

Rāmāyaṇa	
Book 1 Aśvamedha: Daśaratha's Aśvamedha supplemented by a Putrīya Iṣṭi performed by Ṛśyaśṛṅga, which enables the births of Rāma and his three brothers (*Rām* 1.8–17)	Book 7 Postwar Aśvamedha of Rāma (*Rām* 7.75–89)

Mahābhārata	
Book 1 Crypto-Aśvamedha scenes: Vyāsa's *niyoga* with the two Kāśi princesses that enables the births of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu (*Mbh* 1.99–100). (Sequel) Kuntī's anti-*niyoga* tale of King Vyuṣitāśva told before she reveals her mantra, which enables the births of the five Pāṇḍavas (*Mbh* 1.112)	Book 14 Postwar Aśvamedha of Yudhiṣṭhira (*Mbh* 4.87–91)

Finally, a fourth move is to ask, Who would these knowing allusions
be known *to*? Here, my first and only necessary candidates are the epic
poets, who could, moreover, be familiar with the way that Ṛgvedic
poets handled similar things—if, as I do, we may believe Stephanie
Jamison (1996, 74–88) that the potent monkey Vṛṣākapi is a veiled
Aśvamedha horse in *ṚV* 10.86, and Joel Brereton (2002) that the race
of Mudgala and Mudgalānī is a veiled complement to a *niyoga* ritual in
ṚV 10.102. Moreover, since I believe the *Mahābhārata* is a little earlier
than the *Rāmāyaṇa*, I think we may suspect that in squaring off our
symmetry, Vālmīki would have understood the Aśvamedha overtones
of our main episode and its sequel. He seems to make economy of a
number of the vaster epic's structural features to tell a far less ambigu-
ous tale about a perfect man and woman.[1] Granted, these four moves
will be a little *too* quick. But considering the alternatives, better to be
brief than labored. I will first treat the two postwar Aśvamedhas and
then the two Book 1 scenes.

A. *Postwar Aśvamedha of* Rām *7.75–89*

Rāma chooses a postwar Aśvamedha because Bharata, one of his broth-
ers, says it is less destructive than a Rājasūya, and Lakṣmana, another
of his brothers, says that it removes all sins (*Rām* 7.75.2).[2] Lakṣmana's
point recalls the rationale for Yudhiṣṭhira's postwar Aśvamedha.[3]
But in Rāma's case no explicit sins are mentioned, other than that
Lakṣmana tells how Indra's Aśvamedha removed his Brahmanicide of
killing Vṛtra.[4] Rāma orders Bharata to lead a procession trailed by all

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[1] See Hiltebeitel 2005a, 460–61 on the two epics' similar structural features, and
further discussion in Hiltebeitel, forthcoming, chapter 8.

[2] It is curious that Rāma considers a postwar Rājasūya, having never, of course, per-
formed one. Bharata's point recalls the conversation in *Mbh* Book 2 where Yudhiṣṭhira
chooses the Rājasūya over the Aśvamedha, despite Nārada's warning of its greater
danger. See Gehrts 1975; Hiltebeitel 1977b.

[3] Yudhiṣṭhira seeks benefit from the Aśvamedha's sin-cleansing property because
he suffers from massive war-guilt, *Mbh* 14.70.15–16; see Hiltebeitel [1976] 1990, 292;
Jamison 1996, 76.

[4] This *could*, however, like the threat of the Brahman carrying his dead son brought
about by the *tapas* of Śambūka (7.64), allude to Rāma's Brahmanicide in killing Rāvaṇa,
a Brahman descendent of the sage Pulastya. Rāma now tells Lakṣmana to gather Vasiṣṭha
and other court Brahmans to officiate, to invite all their monkey and Rākṣasa friends,
and the great Ṛṣis together with their wives, and to prepare a vast sacrificial enclosure
at Naimiṣa Forest (7.82.14).

their mothers (who come from the inner quarters) and "my golden wife (*kāñcanīm mama patnīm*) worthy of *dīkṣā* in sacrificial rites" (82.19ab). "All the mothers" must include Kausalyā, Kaikeyī, and Sumitrā. These three widows seem extraneous to Rāma's Aśvamedha. But since Rāma is monogamous, they come in handy as shadow figures of the three subordinate Aśvamedha queens who would accompany the *mahiṣī*, who has been replaced by the golden statue. Even while Sītā is still alive in Vālmīki's hermitage, Rāma has had this statue of her prepared, it seems, for this very rite.

Rāma then assigns Lakṣmaṇa to follow the horse,[5] and the last we hear of them is that Lakṣmaṇa protected it while it wandered (83.9). With the spotlight on Rāma's hearing the *Rāmāyaṇa*,[6] one never hears that Lakṣmaṇa or the horse returns![7] Further horse news comes only after Sītā vanishes into the earth.[8] During Rāma's ten thousand year reign, "in sacrifice after sacrifice there was a golden Janakī for the sake of a wife" (89.4cd). He performed at least one more horse sacrifice, ten Vājapeyas, and other Śrauta rites while dedicating himself to *dharma* (89.1–7)—presumably using the same golden Sītā.

Clearly, having replaced Sītā with a statue and forgotten the horse, Vālmīki has no interest in having Sītā lie down with a dead horse. Rāma's continued use of a golden Sītā also seems to help him get over his despair at her loss. And from Sītā's point of view, vanishing was no doubt better than this one more indignity that an Aśvamedha would have required. Her mind on Rāma, her last words ask the earth to engulf her (88.10) with no thought about a horse.

B. *Postwar Aśvamedha of* Mbh *14.87–91*

Unlike Lakṣmaṇa's disappearance with the horse, Arjuna's return with one is "marked"; unlike Sītā, Draupadī *does* seem to think about the

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[5] He goes with his other two brothers to the sacrificial site (83.1–2).

[6] And his eventual realization that the two boys reciting it are his sons. For now they are called "sons of the Muni." The phrase *munidārakau* (*dāraka* meaning "boy, child, son") is used thrice rapidly (7.85.9d, 17d, and 19b) just after Vālmīki has told the boys, "If Kakutstha [Rāma] should ask, Whose two children (*dārakau*) are you?' you may tell the lord of men so: 'Just the disciples of Vālmīki'" (*vālmīker atha śiṣyau hi brūtām evaṃ narādhipam*).

[7] It is Bharata whom Rāma addresses at 7.85.12–13, telling him to pay the twin singers, and not Lakṣmaṇa, as the Shastri translation has it (1970, vol. 3, 612).

[8] It does say here that "the sacrifice was concluded" (*avasāne*).

horse;[9] and unlike Rāma, Yudhiṣṭhira has explicit sins.[10] As we enter the proceedings, Kṛṣṇa has just told Yudhiṣṭhira that Arjuna is returning, emaciated after many fights. Yudhiṣṭhira is glad to hear of Arjuna's imminent return. But troubled by the report of his gaunt look, he asks Kṛṣṇa whether Arjuna bears some "unfavorable—*aniṣṭa*—mark by which he experiences such miseries (*aniṣṭaṃ lakṣaṇaṃ kṛṣṇa yena duḥkhāny upāśnute*)" (14.89.4ef). Ever the entertainer, Kṛṣṇa replies:[11]

> O king, I surely do not detect this one's having anything unfavorable except that this lion among men's cheekbones are overly developed (*na hyasya nrpate kiṃcid aniṣṭam upalakṣaye/ṛte puruṣasiṃhasya piṇḍike 'syātikāyatah*). On account of these two, this tiger among men is always hitched to the roads (*nityam adhvasu yujyate*). I do not see anything else by which this Jaya has a share of misery. (14.89.7–8)

Yudhiṣṭhira is satisfied.

> But Kṛṣṇa Draupadī indignantly glanced askance at Kṛṣṇa (*krsnā tu draupadī kṛṣṇam tiryak sāsūyam aikṣata*). The Slayer of Keśin, Hṛṣīkeśa, approved that showing of her affection (*pratijagrāha tasyās tam praṇayam*) as if he were Dhanaṃjaya in person (*sākṣād iva*),[12] a friend of a friend (*sakhyuḥ sakhā*). Having heard, Bhīma and the other Kurus and Yādavas there took pleasure in this story about Dhanaṃjaya whose manner was amusing[13] (*remuḥ śrutvā vicitrārthā dhanaṃjayakathā vibho*). (14.89.10–11)

Note that the Vulgate reads *yājakā*s, "sacrificial priests,"[14] rather than *yādavā*s, which would give us,"…the *yājaka*s there took pleasure" in Kṛṣṇa's story.

What about this *sakhyuḥ sakhā*, "friend of a friend"? Who is whose friend? Georges Dumézil, discussing the facial contortions of Indo-European warriors, takes it as referring to Kṛṣṇa as the friend of Arjuna (1970, 164). This is plausible, since *sakhyuḥ* is masculine. But K.M.

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[9] For an earlier treatment of his section, see Hiltebeitel 2007a, 126–35 (toward the end of chapter 8 above). For notes on linguistic points, see that chapter.

[10] See *Mbh* 12.27.4–22, where he mentions his part in the slayings of his grandfather Bhīṣma, his guru Droṇa, his brother Karṇa, and the Pāṇḍavas' princely children. See discussions in Hiltebeitel 1976 [1990], 240–41; 2001a, 66–69; forthcoming, chapter 8.

[11] See chapter 8, n. 65. Biardeau 2002, 2: 631–32, begins her discussion of this exchange noting that Kṛṣṇa is "le grand illusioniste," and takes it as an ironic reference to the *daiva* (fate as divinely ordained) and to Kṛṣṇa's relation to Arjuna as Nara.

[12] "Visibly, really, actually; with his own eyes."

[13] 'Whose goal was varied; whose concern, manner, or meaning was charming, entertaining, amusing, colorful.'

[14] *Mbh* 14.87.12d; Kinjawadekar 1929–33, vol. 6, *Āśvamedhikaparvan*, p. 119.

Ganguli takes it to refer to Kṛṣṇa (the *sakhā*) as the friend of Draupadī. Somewhat in favor of this reading, the preceding genitive *tasyās*, in "showing *of her* affection," could point to Draupadī in the genitive masculine *sakhyuḥ*, which three Malāyalam manuscripts[15] replace with *sakhyāḥ* to make it explicit that it means "of a female friend." Actually, it is ambiguous, for as Whitney observes, "forms of *sakhi* are sometimes found used with feminine value" ([1889] 1960, 342).

But Draupadī could have more to be indignant about than just this slight of Arjuna, whose return with the horse signals that she must now ramp herself up for this Aśvamedha highlight:

> When the bulls among *yājakas* had made the horse agree [i.e., killed it], they caused Drupada's wise daughter to lie down beside it for three minutes (*kalābhis tisṛbhis*) according to rule. (14.91.2)

Vyāsa is a supervising priest at both Yudhiṣṭhira's Rajasūya and his Aśvamedha, and would thus be one of the chief "bulls among *yājakas*" present.[16] It is also striking that Kṛṣṇa's friendship with Draupadī comes into play explicitly only through two scenes of royal ritual: one, his response to her calling on him at her disrobing, itself an outcome of the dice match as a Rājasūya sequel; and this one where she is the *mahiṣī* exposing herself to the horse. I suspect that in each case Kṛṣṇa intervenes to lighten Draupadī's sexual humiliation and attenuate her role as mediatrix and victim within the arena of the great Vedic royal sacrifices. For as Jamison (1996, 256) demonstrates, the "sacrificed" sacrificer's wife plays the role of mediator between men and gods. This may be the Vedic ground of Draupadī and Kṛṣṇa's friendship. As we have seen, Vālmīki spares Sītā such complications, for which Rāma is ill-equipped to intervene like Kṛṣṇa.

But what about the horse? Kṛṣṇa seems to be referring not only to Arjuna but to the horse. If he is reading into his "friend" Draupadī's mind, he would be hinting that Arjuna and the horse have a somewhat fused profile as they approach together. While *piṇḍikā* can designate 'a globular swelling or protuberance' on a man's cheeks, I dare say it could also describe the same on a horse. Kṛṣṇa's wit would thus be appreciated by the Yādavas who, as Kṛṣṇa's kinsmen, would know him better than most. Or alternatively, it would be especially amusing to

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15 Those called M 1–3 in the apparatus of the Pune Critical Edition.
16 See Sullivan 1990, 31–34; Hiltebeitel 2001a, 50–51, 77–79.

the Yājakas, who are thinking not only of Arjuna but moreso of the
horse he is bringing to be sacrificed. Indeed, the bull among Yājakas
Vyāsa would be the first to understand such doubletalk. As "author,"
Vyāsa oversees the whole Aśvamedha. It is curious that this especially
"knowing" variant is found only in Nīlakaṇṭha's Vulgate.

The narration and Kṛṣṇa's own words offer further equine clues.
Kṛṣṇa's name Slayer of Keśin is curious here, since Keśin is a horse
Kṛṣṇa slew in his childhood. The name Hṛṣīkeśa can mean "Master of
the Senses" (Biardeau 2002: 1, 595) and, with that, convey the familiar
Upaniṣadic image of "yoking" the senses like horses. But most tell-
ingly, Kṛṣṇa says that Arjuna's facial protuberances come from his
being "always hitched to the roads (*nityam adhvasu yujyate*)" like a
family workhorse. If so, no wonder Draupadī looks at him askance.

Note that Draupadī goes it alone with no co-wives slapping their
thighs, etc. She has some, but her main *co-queens* are Arjuna's wives.
Arjuna's other three wives are important in Book 14: Subhadrā sees
her grandson revived by Kṛṣṇa while the Pāṇḍavas are getting the
wealth to perform this costly rite; Citrāṅgadā's son nearly kills Arjuna
while he is guarding the horse in her domain; and Ulūpī resuscitates
Arjuna in that episode. These three even appear for the horse sacrifice
(14.89.25–90.2) to welcome back the weary Arjuna, and can be related,
as Madeleine Biardeau observes, to Arjuna's having four wives as the
"ideal king" and "real sacrificer" among the Pāṇḍavas (2002, 2: 615,
636). Indeed, their earlier Book 14 roles could be Aśvamedha-related:
Subhadrā as Arjuna's Vāvātā; the estranged Citrāṅgadā his "discarded"
Parivṛktī; and the *nāgī* Ulūpī his lower class Pālāgalī.[17] But Yudhiṣṭhira
is the *real* king for whom Draupadī has ritual duties.[18] Draupadī is
thus as narratively exposed as Sītā, but at least she gets to stay alive.

Let us also note how both epics connect their postwar Aśvamedhas
with the continuity of their chief royal lines. Kṛṣṇa revives Parikṣit,
and Rāma discovers Kuśa and Lava as his recovered heirs. When Sītā
attests to her purity so that the earth engulfs her, she also ratifies the
legitimacy of Rāma's sons.

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[17] According to Bhatt, "the lowest wife of the king" and "daughter of a messenger
or a courier" (1960, 445); "the fourth and least respected wife of a prince" (Monier-
Williams).

[18] These others would not have Aśvamedha obligations where Yudhiṣṭhira is the
yajamāna, and may have been excused co-wife roles for that reason.

C. Rām *1.8–17*

Securing royal progeny is thus implied in these Aśvamedha scenes, and may also be inferred from the ritual texts. Several texts say the king should remain chaste sleeping between the Vāvātā's thighs during the horse's year of wandering, while the horse itself is to be kept away from mares.[19] Daśaratha makes this inference explicitly. After sixteen thousand years of sonlessness, he thinks, "Why don't I offer worship by a horse sacrifice for the sake of a son (*sūtārthaṃ vājimedhena kim arthaṃ na yajāmy aham*)?" (1.8.2).[20] Promised *four* sons if he brings the sage Ṛśyaśṛṅga, he sets out with his wives (10.8–13). Returning,

> After showing Ṛśyaśṛṅga honor as per the *śāstras*, the king had him enter the women's quarters. (10.10ab)

—where his queens would be (10.28–29).[21] When spring comes, Ṛśyaśṛṅga says it is time to release the horse,[22] and Daśaratha orders

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[19] See Jamison 1996, 84: there is a penance if the horse impregnates a mare. See *ibid.* 66, 76 on our Episode B and 242–43 on fertility parallels between thigh-slapping rites involving the four Aśvamedha queens and those done on the Mahāvrata day in the Gavāmayana sacrifice. Jamison interprets Ṛgveda 10.86 about Indra's monkey-companion Vṛṣākapi "as a veiled Horse Sacrifice" that describes among the benefits brought by "Indraṇī's mating with Vṛṣākapi" the restoration of Indra's worship with bulls and soma, the reaffirmation of his power, his recovery of good erections, and his attainment of sons (74–88 quoting 81, 82–83). As preeminent victim, the Aśvamedha horse, identified with both the royal yajamāna and Prajāpati, imparts through the queens, and the mahiṣī in particular, a mysterious embryo that takes the form of "progeny and cattle" for the king and the kingdom; see Dumont 1927, 17; Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 13,2.8.5; Hiltebeitel 1991a, 378. Goldman 1984, 74–75, 292, 298–99, makes a difficulty over the association of Daśaratha's Aśvamedha with fertility and offspring, but his hesitation accompanies an argument that the whole episode is an interpolation.

[20] Sumantra then tells him of a prophesy he has heard that Daśaratha would one day call upon Ṛśyaśṛṅga to perform a sacrifice (unspecified) that would bring him four illustrious sons and heaven, and relates what Robert Goldman calls a "generally prudish" Ṛśyaśṛṅga tale that may be bowdlerized from a more colorful Mahābhārata version. Ṛśyaśṛṅga had stored up great chastity as a young innocent performing *tapas* until King Romapāda sought him to end a twelve-year drought in Aṅga, where Ṛśyaśṛṅga married Romapāda's daughter after doing so.

[21] The three are also there at *Rām* 1.15.23–25 when Daśaratha brings them the pregnancy potion.

[22] Once Daśaratha sets his heart on beginning the rite "for the sake of the continuity of the dynasty (*saṃtānārthaṃ kulasya*)," Ṛśyaśṛṅga says, "You may gather all the necessary articles and release the horse (*sambhārāḥ sambhriyantāṃ te turagaś ca vimucyatām*)" (11.3cd). Daśaratha summons Brahman experts in the Vedas—Kāśyapa (presumably Ṛśyaśṛṅga, who is from that *gotra*), Vasiṣṭha, and others (4–6)—and directs them to perform the horse sacrifice he has resolved on for the sake of a son 'according to the rite prescribed in the *śāstras* (*śāstradṛṣṭena karmaṇā*)" (8–9). Again he is

an escort.[23] After about a year (12.1), all the earth's law-abiding
(*dhārmikāḥ*; 17) friendly (*snigdhāḥ*) kings arrive from the four direc-
tions.[24] But nothing is said of the horse's wandering, much less its
having met any resistance.[25] When the horse has been returned, the
Veda-wise priests led by Ṛśyaśṛṅga see correctly to the Vedic prescrip-
tions in the king's "great Aśvamedha sacrifice" (*aśvamedhe mahāyajne*;
13.2–3).[26] Great detail is then given to the preparation of the twenty-
one sacrificial posts (*yūpa*s) for the three-hundred animals to be
sacrificed. Indeed, as Goldman points out, one reaches the total of
twenty-one *yūpa*s, the usual number prescribed in Vedic texts, only
by counting the posts mentioned (1984, 305; Bhatt 1960, 444). As at

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promised he well get four sons. Putting Ṛśyaśṛṅga in charge, the experts repeat, "You
may gather all the necessary articles and release the horse (*sambhārāḥ sambhriyantāṃ
te turagaś ca vimucyatām*)" (11.11cd), and tell Daśaratha that since he has made this
law-abiding resolution to obtain a son (*dhārmikī buddhir iyam putrārtham*)" (11.12cd),
he is sure to have four of them, confirming the prophesy.

[23] Daśaratha orders the horse set free to be "guarded by strong men and attended
by our preceptor"—apparently Ṛśyaśṛṅga. He also directs that the sacrificial terrain
(*yajñabhūmi*) should be carefully set out on the northern bank of the Sarayū, and every
caution be taken to perform the rite unerringly (1.11.14–18).

[24] They all arrive from the four directions by the time craftsmen have prepared the
site. This is one of the few places where Vālmīki mentions a cohort of kings contem-
porary with his story. Other than Janaka, Romapāda, and the as yet unnamed Kaikeya
king with his son (already Daśaratha's father-in-law, with his son Yudhājit [Goldman
1984, 301]), the rest are irrelevant to the Rām story.

[25] Goldman 1984, 301 makes the interesting observation "that none of the famous
kings of the lunar dynasty, the central royal house of the *MBh*, are mentioned. This
tends to support the notion that even the later strata of the *Rām* are ignorant of the
longer epic." But Goldman also suggests that Vālmīki's bowdlerized version of the *Mbh's*
Ṛśyaśṛṅga story is part of the same "later strata." I think that Vālmīkī produces such
effects intentionally, knowing that the *Mbh* itself mentions few other kings and makes the
Rāma story more ancient. Moreover, only "friendly kings" are mentioned. The kings stay
through the horse sacrifice and its sequel, the Putrīya Iṣṭi or *putrakāmeṣṭi* (1.17.3).

[26] The same locative phrase occurs at 37c and at *Mbh* 1.113.12a. On the *mahāyajña*
as a technical term describing both great Śrauta rites and the five daily offerings of a
Brahman, and not only in Brahmanical but Pāli Buddhist texts, see Tsuchida 1991, 72,
88–89. The *Rām* indicates familiarity here with the *kalpasūtra*s, Brāhmaṇas, and *śāstra*s,
and mentions that additional rites were included: a Pravargya and Upasad (4) and a
Morning Pressing (*prātaḥ-savana*) (5) are mentioned at the beginning. And after the
horse is sacrificed, with an account or the treatment of its remains (28–32.), there is
a summary indicating that this phase took three days of prescribed rites (Catuṣṭoma,
Ukthya, and Atirātra), plus rites 'prescribed in the view of some authors of ritual texts"
(Jyotiṣṭhoma, Āyus rites, two Atirātras, Abhijit, Viśvajit, and Aptoryāma [33–35]), fol-
lowed by a conversation about the appropriate compensation (*niṣkraya*), i.e., *dakṣiṇā*
(36–44). For days there is munificent giving, and in the intervals numerous philosophi-
cal debates or perhaps *brahmodya*s (*hetuvādān bahūn*; 14), as would better befit an
Aśvamedha (Goldman 1984, 305).

the *Mahābhārata's* postwar Aśvamedha, an Agnicayana-like fire altar is also built with eighteen layers of bricks in the shape of a golden-winged Garuḍa three times the usual height (17–24).[27] Finally, the three queens go into action:

> Kausalyā walked reverently around the horse and then with the greatest joy cut it with three knives.[28] Her mind unswerving, with her love of *dharma* (*dharmakāmyayā*) Kausalyā passed one night with the horse. The hotṛ, adhvaryu, and udgātṛ saw to it that the *mahiṣī* as well as the *parivṛtti* and *vāvātā* were united with the horse (*hayena samayojayan*). (13, 26-28)

Since *vāvātā* fits Kaikeyī,[29] Sumitrā would be the *parivṛtti*. This term has no clear meaning, but it probably replaces *parivṛktī*, the "disliked or despised one" (from *patri-√vṛj*; MW), and Vālmīki may use it to spare Sumitrā this probably undeserved Aśvamedha title.[30] Kausalyā's "love of *dharma*" seems to be Vālmīki's way of giving her "Vedic" motivation, and anticipates that her son will be the paragon of *dharma*. Yet her aggression toward the horse before uniting with it is surprising.[31] Her wielding of three knives may condense a rite called *asi-pantha* or "paths of the knife," yet this should come *after* the *mahiṣī* lies with the horse.[32] Most striking is how the priests of the three older Vedas have

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[27] Cf. *Mbh* 14.90.30–31: *iṣṭakaḥ kāñcaniś cātra cayanārthaṃ kṛtābhavan/śuśubhe cayanaṃ tatra dakṣasyaiva prajāpateḥ//catuā cityaḥ sa tasyāsīd aṣṭādaśa karātmakaḥ/ sa rukmapakṣo nicitas triguṇo garuḍākṛtiḥ.*

[28] *Rām* 1.13.26cd: *kṛpāṇair viśaśāsa enaṃ tribhiḥ paramayā mundā*. A *kṛpāṇa* is a sword or sacrificial knife.

[29] Even if it is the only usage of this term for anyone in either epic.

[30] As Goldman points out, there are difficulties with this solution (1984, 306–8). Cf. Bhatt 1960, 445 and Jamison 1996, 66, 87, 274 n. 104, favoring an amendment to *parivṛktī*. There is of course no fourth wife or Pālāgalī.

[31] C.V. Vaidya took an interesting slant on this moment: "And what should we think when we are told that Kausalyā killed by her own hands the sacrificial horse with three sword strokes....She must have been very strong and a true Rajput lady indeed" ([1906] 1972, 9; cf. Hiltebeitel 1998a, 398–99). But I think some kind of sexual aggression would be more plausible. Or perhaps she was possessed. See Rāma's last image of his mother as he departs for exile. "Kausalyā came weeping after the chariot, crying 'Rāma, Rāma! Oh Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa!' He glanced back often at his mother, who seemed to be dancing (*nṛtyantīm iva mātaram*)" (*Rām* 2.35.32).

[32] This rite, which, according to the ritual texts makes the bridge to heaven, is, however, performed not by one queen with three knives but by three queens using needles: the *mahiṣī* uses gold needles, the *vāvātā* silver ones, and the *parivṛktī* copper or lead ones to trace the path that the carver (*śamitṛ*) should follow with *his* knife in cutting up the victim (see Bhatt 1960, 445; Malamoud 1996, 173–74; Hiltebeitel 1991a, 377). If so, the sequencing is anomalous, since Kausalyā cuts the horse herself using the three knives before she lies with it. Moreover, since Vālmīki supplies no other

the other two queens unite with the horse *after* the *mahiṣī*. This would
have no Vedic precedent, and must be preliminary to the impregna-
tion of all three by what turns out to be an Atharvanic rite, the Putrīya
Iṣṭi that generates the celestial *pāyasam* that Viṣṇu infuses for the three
queens to eat.[33] As Ṛśyaśṛṅga soon says,

> To procure sons for you, I must perform the son-producing sacrifice.
> It must be done in accord with the instructions of the ritual texts and
> rendered efficacious by potent verses proclaimed in the *Atharvaśiras*
> (*atharvaśirasi proktair*). (14.2)

Rounding off with the *fourth* Veda indicates that the two rites form a
whole. But the best proof of an elision comes when Ṛśyaśṛṅga says a
single Aśvamedha *dīkṣa* has carried Daśaratha through both of them.
Daśaratha also transitions to the Putrīya Iṣṭi by smelling the smoke from
the horse's fat (*vapā*) to free himself from sin (29–30). Goldman trans-
lates *vapā*, "omentum," as "fat" since a horse does not have an omen-
tum (Goldman 1984, 151, 308; Bhatt 1960, 445). It is expertly extracted
from the horse by the chief *ṛtvij*. Daśaratha is now *svakulavardhanaḥ*,
"an increaser of his lineage" (36b). Wrapping up by going through the
motions of giving away the earth to the priests (*ṛtvija*s) and settling
on the more appropriate compensation (*niṣkraya*) of "a million cows,
a hundred million gold pieces and four times that amount in silver,"
which the priests hand over to Ṛśyaśṛṅga and Vasiṣṭha to apportion
among them (41–43), he is "content at heart at having obtained that
greatest of sacrifices (*prāpya yajñam uttamam*)" (44)—which I take to
mean "having obtained" or "reached" *the results* of this rite in prepar-
ing for the impregnation of his wives. The poet now makes an elision
between the Aśvamedha proper and the Putrīya Iṣṭi that will complete
what has all along been the stated purpose of this Aśvamedha. When
the Iṣṭi is finished Ṛśyaśṛṅga says the Aśvamedha is now finished
(*nirvṛtte tu kratau*; 17.1ab), and indicates that Daśaratha's *dīkṣā* has
ended (*samāptadīkṣāniyamaḥ*; 17.2a); everyone, the kings included,
can go home (17.2–5). Daśaratha also makes this elision himself after
he has "obtained" the Aśvamedha: King Daśaratha then spoke to

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account of the horse's killing (which the same carver should do by suffocation), it
would seem that Kausalyā actually kills the horse, perhaps right at the sacrificial stake
where it was last mentioned.

[33] 1.14.18gh–19ab: *viṣṇo putratvam āgaccha kṛtvātmānaṃ catur vidham//tatra tvaṃ
mānuṣo bhūtva pravṛddham lokakaṇṭakam.*

Ṛśyaśṛṅga, "You are true to your vows. Please act so that my line may be extended (*kulasya vardhanam*)" (45).

Now as Bob Goldman says, Ṛśyaśṛṅga "is perhaps viewed as serving the purpose of Vyāsa or the other *Mahābhārata* practitioners of *niyojana*, or levirate, only through an act of sacrifice in place of direct sexual liaison with the king's wives" (Goldman 1984, 77; see n. 42). I would extend this point to say that just as Ṛśyaśṛṅga's Aśvamedha has a hidden *niyoga* agenda, Vyāsa's *niyoga* has a hidden Aśvamedha agenda. Moreover, if a *niyoga* agenda is hidden with regard to Ṛśyaśṛṅga, it is less so with regard to Viṣṇu, who is twice said to have been "appointed" (*ni-√yuj*) to intervene:

> "O Viṣṇu, we shall appoint you (*niyokṣyāmahe*) out of a desire for the welfare of the worlds" (1.14.17cd); After Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa was appointed (*niyuktaḥ*) by the best of gods, he asked them about the means.... (1.15.11ab)

The Putrīya Iṣṭi effected by Ṛśyaśṛṅga is thus a *quasi-niyoga* through Viṣṇu,[34] and calls for no genetic intervention by a smelly author.

D. Mbh *99–100*

On to our main event, Ambikā and Ambālikā are, of course, the younger of three sisters, their elder being the accursed Ambā. When Bhīṣma abducts them, his intention and that of the queen dowager Satyavatī is to bring three "Mothers" into the lineage. As both Jamison and Biardeau have recognized, these three names in combination must be related to their use in the Aśvamedha, where they are invoked in

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[34] If Vālmīki picks up on an Aśvamedha innuendo in *Mbh* Book 1, it could be on this point. If we allow that Vālmīki makes economy by having the four brothers born in one generation rather than two, we can see that Ṛśyaśṛṅga and Viṣṇu supply much the same requisites as Vyāsa and Durvāsas, who supplies the mantra that empowers Kuntī and Mādrī to get pregnant by gods in another quasi-*niyoga*. Ṛśyaśṛṅga has a reputation for *tapas* that seems not only to enhance his fertilizing powers to bring a drought-ending rain (1.9.28–29), but, at least in the *Rām*, to be able to extend this fertilizing power to the area of sexuality—even though, unlike Vyāsa, he deploys this power ritually rather than by sleeping with anyone. Moreover, if Vyāsa is about to remind us of a horse, Ṛśyaśṛṅga's name means "Having deer antlers." See Goldman 1984, 296, supplying a commentarial legend of his birth from a doe who imbibed some of his father, the sage Vībhāṇḍaka's, semen, as told also in *Mbh* 3.110.11–116. With a bemused look, he bears a single antelope horn on his forehead in a nice old bust at the Mathura Museum.

a special formula that is uttered while the *mahiṣī* lies with the horse.
A clean version is used when the *mahiṣī* is led up to the dead horse
accompanied by her cowives: "O Ambā, Ambālī, Ambikā [var. Ambā,
Ambikā, Ambālikā]. No one is leading me. The horsikins is sleeping."[35]
Then, before the Adhvaryu covers the *mahiṣī* and the horse with a
linen blanket, she "lies down beside the horse and invites it to stretch
out its forefeet along with hers,"[36] and either the Adhvaryu or the king
(her husband) utters the most erotic of all the rite's mantras, focusing
on her sexual pleasure. Covered by the blanket,[37] the *mahiṣī*, having
"manipulate[d] the dead horse into some sort of copulatory position,"
in some texts modifies her mantra with *yabhati* ("is fucking") instead
of *nayati* ("is leading"). With or without these words, which "mock"
or "scold" the horse, the rite clearly invites the dead horse to regain
its sexual stamina (Jamison 1996, 66–69, 76; cf. 242). Meanwhile, the
cowives and their attendants circulate back and forth around the horse
and the *mahiṣī* slapping their thighs and fanning with their hems, and
then exchange "slangy and crude" riddling mantras with the priests
(65–66, 69–70).

   In importing these three names into a dynastic crises, the *Mahābhārata*
thus draws on the Aśvamedha's reputation for assuring lineage conti-
nuity. This overlaps with what Bhīṣma and Satyavatī continue to wish
from the two *younger* sisters even after they have become widows. But
as Jamison and Biardeau recognize, the link is obscure, in part because
with Vicitravīrya dead there is no king to perform an Aśvamedha.
Jamison proposes that the usage can be illumined by a "husband-find-
ing" (*pati-vedana*) rite linked with the autumn Sākamedha, in which
a Traiyambaka Homa to Rudra can remove a woman's lack of mari-

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[35] Jamison 1996, 67, trans. *TS* 7.4.19.1ab; the usual opening line *ambe ambāly ambike*
has, as Jamison observes (1996, 274 n. 107; 304 n. 87), a precise *Mbh* nomenclature and
sequence in *VS* 23.18: *ámbe ámbike 'mbālike*, with the same but for the initial vocative
in *MS* 3.12.20. According to Jamison (243), the three vocatives are taken as variants on
affectionate terms for 'mother,' but together they also add up to the 'three Ambikās'
of Rudra Tryambaka and its *vṛddhi* derivative, the Traiyambakahoma." "Leading"
(*nayati*), according to Jamison (67, 274 n. 108), probably suggests the *mahiṣī* is being
led, as it were, into matrimony.
[36] See Jamison 1996, 67. How that would help achieve a position for sexual contact
is not made clear.
[37] Biardeau says, "It seems that the queen complains at being looked at in the sexual
act" (2002, 1: 220).

tal success and secure her first unborn descendant.[38] Biardeau proposes that the rite's triple name would evoke one woman, the *mahiṣī*, "transformed into three" as the Kāśi sisters, and that the one would be Ambikā not only as the *mahiṣī*, but in anticipation of her name's becoming "one of the most frequent names of the Goddess."[39]

I believe these are pieces to a puzzle that our epic poets have intentionally left incomplete, and that three more pieces crop up from the text.[40] First, Vyāsa stipulates that the two widows undergo a year-long vow before he lies with them; second, he will then give his dead brother sons like Mitra and Varuna.[41] The year-long vow replicates the Aśvamedha requirement that the queens remain abstinent during the year the horse wanders.[42] And the pair Mitra and Varuṇa certainly has a Vedic ring. Vedavyāsa[43] could be alluding to ways that the Aśvamedha identifies the king with *dharma*,[44] and also that the Rājasūya invokes Mitra as "lord of truth" and Varuṇa as "lord of *dharma* in announcing

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[38] See Jamison 1996, 242–46: it uses a mantra to Tryambaka found in *ṚV* 7.59.12 that the girl modifies to request a husband. As Jamison points out, both rites resemble the movements of fire-circling servant maids on the Mahāvrata day of the Gavāmayana. There is also more thigh-slapping.

[39] Biardeau calls Ambikā here "the mother of Pāṇḍu," but must mean the mother of Dhṛtarāṣṭra (2002, 1: 220).

[40] Jamison 1996, 304 n.94 "assumes that some version of the epic story of Ambā and her sisters already existed in early Vedic and that these girls were associated with the three Ambikās belonging to Rudra. Despite the difficulties....I think this is more likely than assuming that a later epic poet simply made up the story of the abduction and its aftermath and named the female protagonists by plucking some designations out of the onomastic repository of Vedic ritual."

[41] Vyāsa tells his mother, "Satyavatī, you know both the higher and lower *dharma*. And since your mind is set on *dharma* and is beneficent to the living, I shall indeed do what is needed with respect to *dharma*, and by your appointment (*tvam niyogāt*) do what you desire. For this is found to be the ancient practice. I shall give my brother sons the likes of Mitra and Varuna. Both ladies must punctiliously submit to a vow, which I shall describe, for the space of a year, so that they become sanctified. For no woman may lie with me without carrying out the vow (*saṃvatsaraṃ yathā nyayaṃ tataḥ śuddhe bhaviṣyataḥ/na hi mām avratopetā upeyāt kācid aṅganā*)" (Mbh 1.99.36–39).

[42] See Jamison 1996, 84: "During the year when the horse is journeying, the king lies nightly with his favorite wife (Vāvātā) but does not have sex." In ŚB 13.4.1.9, he thinks, "May I, by this austerity (*anena tapasā*), reach the end of the year successfully."

[43] It is important to remember who is speaking here and what he has been doing. The last we heard of Vyāsa before Satyavatī recalled him as needed was that he had gone off to the Himalayas to divide the Vedas and impart the *Mahābhārata* as the fifth Veda to his five disciples, who were to proclaim it as the *Bhārata* (1.57.73–75).

[44] Bowles 2007, 93 n. 47 cites the Taittirīya Saṃhitā version of a formula that equates the Aśvamedha king with *dharma*: "with my two shins and my two feet I am dharma (*dhármo 'smi*), the king fixed firmly on his people."

the newly consecrated Bharata king (*MS* 2.6.6; *TS* 1.8.10.1–2).[45] As with its postwar Aśvamedha, where the *Mahābhārata* also gives an enigmatic shape to the horse, it is in the domain of Vedic allusion that we must explain why Vyāsa would be encrypting *himself* as a sacrificial horse. Such occultation occurs where Vedic practices are of dark and doubtful *dharma* from the standpoint of post-Vedic Brahmanical culture. Vyāsa also makes a singular appearance in the *Nārāyaṇīya*, which, I have argued (Hiltebeitel 2006a, 249–50), offers a *bhakti* encryption of Vedic and purāṇic allusions.[46] The *Nārāyaṇīya* comes to its deepest disclosure[47] when Vyāsa tells Janamejaya,[48] just now told to perform a Horse Sacrifice on top of his Snake Sacrifice (12.334.8–9), about Nārāyaṇa's manifestation, called Harimedhas, as the Horse's Head (Hayaśiras). Janamejaya learns how Nārāyaṇa places the Horse's Head as a "repository of the Vedas" and source of world-oriented *dharma* (*pravṛttidharma*) in the northeastern ocean.[49] Vyāsa says he was[50] originally born of Harimedhas, the "sacrificial sap (*medhas*) of Hari,"[51] which seems to identify him with the cosmic Veda-chanting Aśvamedha Horse's Head.[52] All this deepens Vyāsa's horseplay.

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[45] Such a momentary fusion of elements from the two great royal rituals would fit our scene, since Vyāsa would be engendering just such a king—or two.

[46] Vyāsa's Horse's Head story (below) is called a "*purāṇa* equal to the Veda (*purānaṃ vedasammitam*)" (*Mbh* 12.335.7b).

[47] It does this by dipping to the outermost dialogue frame of Śaunaka and Ugraśravas so that Śaunaka can ultimately hear what Vyāsa said to Janamejaya about the very same matter—the Horse's Head—that has made Śaunaka curious. As I show (Hiltebeitel 2006a) with reference to these dips, and as Grünendahl confirms particularly with reference to this third dip (1997, 52–53), the Pune Critical Edition errs in substituting the Vaiśampayana-Janamejaya frame for the Ugraśravas-Śaunaka one. Indeed, in coming to this disclosure in the fourteenth of its eighteen *adhāya*s (as reconstituted from the Pune Critical Edition's misguided attempt to make it nineteen), the episode may occur at a specifically designed narrative core; see Brodbeck 2006. 29–30.

[48] This is the only occasion where Vyāsa explicitly addresses Janamejaya at his snake sacrifice. Vyāsa is addressed by Janamejaya on two other occasions (1.54.18–22; 15.42–43), but he responds there mainly through actions rather than words. See Hiltebeitel 2006a, 246 n. 59.

[49] *Mbh* 12.335.10–72, quoting 54c, 69d. The Horse's Head retrieves the Veda from two cosmogony-disrupting demons, Madhu and Kaiṭabha, who had sought to hurl it into the ocean.

[50] Vyāsa reveals that he himself was first "born of that god Harimedhas' grace" before he was born again "by Nārāyaṇa's grace" as Vyāsa (337.54–55).

[51] Perhaps the "tawny/yellow/reddish (*hari*) sacrificial essence" (see Hiltebeitel 2006a, 249 n. 70).

[52] A Horse's Head with its neck formed by Kālarātrī, the Night of Time (*Mbh* 12.334.44–48).

Now Vyāsa only *says* he will sire sons the likes of Mitra and Varuṇa (*Mbh* 1.99.38b). We would love to know how this would have turned out, but he does not get to do this because Satyavatī says matters are too pressing to give the widows a year for such a vow. Our third puzzle piece crops up here where things have been willfully set askew.[53] Before Satyavatī asks Vyāsa to do it, she first tries to appoint (*vi-ni-√yuj*) Bhīṣma to sire sons with his brother's "*two mahiṣīs*" (*mahiṣyau*; 1.97.9a). Can there be two *mahiṣīs*? This is the only dual of *mahiṣī* in either epic. As we just observed, the *Rāmāyaṇa's* first Aśvamedha incongruously has three queens lie with the horse, but on unequal terms: the two *non-mahiṣī* queens apparently do so only briefly on the same busy night.[54] Just as the *Rāmāyaṇa* has reasons to give each one time with the horse, the *Mahābhārata* has reasons to have two *mahiṣī*s[55]—curious ones, though, since neither Ambikā nor Ambālikā would be a *mahiṣī* if Ambā were still around. It is Satyavatī who mentions "two *mahiṣī*s," not Vyāsa. Her usage in speaking to Bhīṣma may be a reminder that Ambā's unavailability as a Mother complements Bhīṣma's as a Father, and is an intimation that despite the legal

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[53] Instead of being a case of lost Vedic symmetries. Dumézil seems to ignore this verse, perhaps because it does not help his case that an original set of incarnations has been effaced: that Pāṇḍu would originally have incarnated Varuṇa:, Dhṛtarāṣtra and Vidurā likewise the two "minor sovereigns" Bhaga (god of destinies) and Aryaman (god of Ārya clans); and Yudhiṣṭhira would have been sired by Mitra were it not that a "clumsy retouch" replaced Mitra by Dharma (1968, 146–48, 152, 159–60, 170–74). Dumézil was convinced that he could recover a Mbh whose "primary form [was] contemporary with the oldest Vedic times, or anterior" (172).

[54] Vyāsa also comes to Ambikā in the dead of night (*Mbh* 1.100.2–6).

[55] Both epics use the term mahiṣī almost exclusively for single chief queens, and where they do otherwise it is with similar notes of discordance that spell misfortune for the real *mahiṣī*. Thus the gallivanting Arjuna, already among those wed to Draupadī, exclaims to Kṛṣṇa what good fortune he has that Subhadrā will be his *mahiṣī* (Mbh 1.211.19)—a discordance on top of an anomaly, since Yudhiṣṭhira, speaking for all five Pāṇḍavas, had said that Draupadī "will be the *mahiṣī* of us all" (1.187.22ab). Similarly, when the troublemaking Mantharā tells Kaikeyī she (rather than Kausalyā) is Daśaratha's mahiṣī (Rām 2.7.19), Kaikeyī is so imperious that Sumantra as her messenger speaks for her as the *mahiṣī* when he tells Rāma that she and Daśaratha want to see him (14.11); and when Rāvana invites Sītā to be his *mahiṣī*, it is with the odd qualifier that she will be his agramahiṣī, "primary chief queen" (3.4.24; 5.18.16)—a term used nowhere else in either epic's critical edition (the Southern Recension makes Śakuntalā an agramahiṣi in two interpolations, at *Mbh* 1.69.41 and 684* line 15; and Mandodarī would seem to have that position in the *Rām*, although the term is not used for her). On the other hand, in two plural usages it means mainly "woman" (Mbh 1.187.26; Rām 2.36.7; see 36.1).

incongruity, to speak of Ambikā and Ambālikā as two *mahisī*s gives them an equal chance to become the mother of the one desired heir.

Here Biardeau and Jamison's puzzle pieces may also reenter the picture. Ambikā should now be the single *mahisī*, empowered like Durgā in the *Devī-Māhātmyā*. And hers is the main name in Rudra's epithet Traiyambaka, the one "possessing three Ambikās."[56] *Our* main event *may* allude to this Homa,[57] whose "'husband-finding' spell" is performed at an inauspicious crossroads for a spinster running out of time in finding a mate.[58] Our Ambikā is in *some* such predicament. And it is the result of her larger failure to meet the reduced vow demanded by Vyāsa of bearing "my smell, my looks, my garb, and my body" (99.43ab) that her son will be born blind and unfit to rule.

Jamison also relates the Traiyambaka Homa to Bhīṣma's abduction of the three Kāśi sisters on two interesting points. But she assumes that an older version of the epic story complemented this ritual (cf. above n. 52). In favor of positing an older version, she suggests that without one, "the epic maidens would provide bad role models for the husband-seeking girl of the Sākamedha" (245). But if we take things as we find them and ask what the epic poets might have made of the model of the older Vedic rite, the "husband-finder" of the Traiyambakahoma would be a good role model, given her bad situation, for something untoward to go further haywire in an epic series of turnabouts, which would include Bhīṣma's turning of a husband-finding ritual into a wife-finding ritual—something even more basic

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[56] Jamison 241, 303 n. 76. Although "Tryambaka" may—as usually translated—refer in the epic to Śiva's having three eyes (see Scheuer 1979, 237–36, 255–56), the matter is uncertain (Hopkins [1915] 1969, 220), and in the one case where the *Mbh* gives an etymology (Vyāsa is telling Arjuna how Śiva preceded his chariot in battle), it refers to his having three goddesses: "And since the Lord of the universe possesses three goddesses—Sky, Waters, and Earth—he is remembered as Tryambaka" (7.173.89).

[57] See Jamison 1996, 243. The *Mbh* never mentions the *pativedana* or the Traiyambaka Homa. Generally, the epics seem to overlook the Caturmāsyāni rites. The *Mbh* does mention a Traiyambaka Bali (7.56.1–4, esp. 3d): according to Scheuer 1982, 255–63, it is probably offered nightly throughout the war on Arjuna's behalf by his servants, after which Arjuna sleeps on the ground surrounded by weapons. Cf. also Scheuer 258 n. 23 on the Pāṇḍavas' offering (*upahāra, bali*) to Rudra Tryambaka (14.8.23–24; 64.1–8) after a night's fasting to get hold of the wealth needed to perform their postwar Aśvamedha. Ambikā as Rudra's sister is linked with autumn, which in some texts is Rudra's season of "special murderousness" due to her influence (cf. 241, 245, 304 n. 94). The *Mbh* does know Śiva as [Pārvatī-] "Ambikā's husband" (*ambikābhartre*), yet a *brahmacārin* (7.57.53).

[58] See Jamison 1996, 240–44; 303 n. 80.

than his turning a "woman's-choice" *svayaṃvara* into a man's-choice *svayaṃvara*, which, as Jamison notes, he does with verbal precision (1996, 299 n. 38). Jamison then says that while Ambā became a murderous avenger after the abduction caused her to lose her husband, "[e]ven Ambikā and Ambālikā, though they settled happily enough into their married life after their unexpected abduction…, might not have chosen this particular method of *pati-vedana* [husband-finding] if they had their druthers" (245). But we know they *did* have their druthers. They too were going to have a *svayaṃvara.* It would seem that as personifications of "the tryambaka," the three Kāśi sisters would be embodiments of a "husband-finding" by *svayaṃvara* that goes awry, at least for them, because Bhīṣma carts them off Rākṣasa style to *find* their rather limited *un-chosen* husband Vicitravīrya, whom Ambā in fact rejects. Of course here we have a way to suggest that if the epic poets recall both Vedic rites, it is separately: the "husband-finding" ritual would underlie the beginning of the three sisters' adventure into the Kuru dynasty; the "Aśvamedha" would underlie the two younger sisters' nights with Vyāsa.

In any case, the allusion to the Aśvamedha's "three mothers invocation" would underline that, rather than Ambā, it is Ambikā and Ambālikā and Ambikā's Śūdra servant who lie with the smelly author. Three mothers once again, and again something askew with the Śūdra servant replacing Ambā, setting the stage for the next set of three queens, Gāndhārī, Kuntī, and Mādrī.

E. *Kuntī's Anti-*Niyoga *Aśvamedha Tale* (Mbh *1.112*)

Gāndhārī and Kuntī are again rivals to bear a single legal heir. But before Kuntī will tell Pāṇḍu that the Ṛṣi Durvāsas gave her a secret mantra that will enable him to win this race, she must divert his demand that she perform *niyoga*, even if her solution smacks of another quasi-*niyoga* in that she will be calling in the intervention of gods.[59] When Pāṇḍu tells her about a woman who goes at night to a crossroads (like a *pati-vedana* spinstress) with a flower in her hand until she finds a *niyoga* partner (1.111.33–36), Kuntī answers him with an equally outrageous story of her own, called the *Vyuṣitāśva-Upākhyāna* (1.112).

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[59] See Doniger 1995; Dhand 2004.

Like Vicitravīrya, King *Vyuṣitāśva* died sonless of "consumption" (*yakṣmāṇam*) after a bout of lust with his wife, Bhadrā Kākṣīvatī (112.16–17). The term *yakṣmāṇam* is used in the epics only for these two kings.[60] Famed as a *yajamāna* (8) in numerous Soma sacrifices (9, 14), the glory of King Vyuṣitāśva's reign's was an Aśvamedha at which he "became Indra among kings, endowed with the strength of ten elephants" (12). Lamenting and wanting to join him in the next world, Bhadrā says, "Faithful as a shadow, I shall ever do your will, always loving to please you (*nityam priyahite ratā*)" (23).[61] His name with *-aśva* means "the Daybreak Horse," and perhaps also "One Who is Inhabited or Possessed by the Horse."[62] The first meaning resonates when Kuntī calls him a rising sun before his Aśvamedha (10) and a setting one after it (17b), dying after his amours with Bhadrā during which they would have been making up for a year's lost time after she (or another queen) lay with the horse. The name "Daybreak Horse" is enough for an Aśvamedha innuendo. But "possession" may also be in the air since Vyuṣitāśva can speak from his corpse with an "inner voice" (*vāk…antarhitā*) and impregnate Bhadrā.[63] Recall that the king may utter the most erotic mantras to the *mahiṣī* while she is lying with the Aśvamedha horse. Possession is also hinted on Bhadrā's side: uttering a long lament in which she vows to lie on *kuśa* grass "possessed (*āviṣṭa*) by sorrow and intent on seeing you" (27), she "embraces the corpse" (*taṃ śavaṃ samparisvajya*) and gets his instructions on her bath and timing for intercourse (29–31). "By that corpse the lady gave

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[60] See 1.96.57d and 5.145.23f on Vicitravīrya, always with the same verb *samapadyata*.

[61] A *mahiṣī is* formulaically "dear" (*priya*) to her royal husband. Draupadī is the "dear" (*priya*) *mahiṣī* of Yudhiṣṭhira (*Mbh* 4.15.31, 16.12; 10.11.17) and of all the Pāṇḍavas (4.20.19, 5.80.22); so is Sītā to Rāma (*Rām* 4.48.18, 5.12.43–44, 13,46; *Mbh* 4.20.10 according to Draupadī), Śakuntalā at their happy ending to Duḥṣanta (1.69.43); Indrāṇī to Indra (5.11.13; 12.22, while coveted by Nahuṣa); and Tārā *was* dear to Vālin according to their son Aṅgada (*Rām* 4.54.3). Both Draupadī (*Mbh* 4.19.10; 20,10, 19; 5.80.9) and Sītā (*Rām* 6.38.3) speak of the title with pride, and Vālmīki uses it even when he welcomes the banished Sītā to his *āśrama* (7.48.8). When Vyuṣitāśva's corpse impregnates Bhadrā she is also a *pativratā* (32b).

[62] See MW 1040–41. As a neuter noun, *vyuṣita*, "daybreak," derives from vi-2.√vas "to shine forth" (from *vi-uṣ*, "to dawn"). But as an adjective from *vi-5.√vas*, "to abide, dwell, live," it can mean "inhabited by" in compounds.

[63] On the prominence of possession in the *Mbh*, see Smith 2006, 250–55, 259, 265–68, 272–75, with discussion of *āveśa* and derivatives of *ā-√viś*, an additional example of which is cited below.

birth to her sons, the three Śālvas and the four Madras, O best of Bhāratas" (33)!

In brief, Kuntī answers Pāṇḍu not in the name a *niyoga* like that incurred after the death of Pāṇḍu's father Vicitravīrya, but with reference to an Aśvamedha king who is like Pāṇḍu's father in one way but unlike him in another. Like Vicitravīrya, Vyuṣitāśva died of "consumption." Unlike him, he remained potent in death like an Aśvamedha horse. Kuntī thus fills out our quadrangle with this Aśvamedha gloss on Vyāsā's nights with the "two *mahiṣīs*." The means she will use to get pregnant is also Atharvanic, like the Putrīya Iṣṭi through which Ṛśyaśṛṅga gets Daśaratha's three queens pregnant by the "appointment" of Viṣṇu. The mantra that Kuntī gets from Durvāsas is something "heard in the *Atharvaśiras*" (*atharvaśirasi śrutam*; *Mbh* 3.289.20), and is, in particular, said to be "sorcerous" when Pāṇḍu calls on her to use it to sire their first son through the god Dharma (1.113.34, 39, 42cd). As one would now expect, the *Rāmāyaṇa* scene is again cleaner, omitting any suggestion of sorcery, not to mention possession, in the birth of Rāma.

F. *Knowing Vedic Allusions*

If it can be shown that such epic usages are matters of knowing allusion, one possible conclusion worth exploring would be that, rather than the standard view that the epics' references to Vedic ritual, and particularly Vedic royal rituals, are distanced by desuetude and confusion about them, we should look at epic depictions of Vedic rituals, at least where they are narrated, as deft and cunning. Van Buitenen's (1972) treatment of the *Mahābhārata*'s Book 2 Rājasūya-and-Dice Match sequence has been a supple illustration of this point for over thirty years now.

The *Mahābhārata* poets do indeed devalue the Aśvamedha, Rājasūya, and Vājapeya relative to pilgrimage in Book 3, and debunk Yudhiṣṭhira's Book 14 Aśvamedha relative to the practice of gleaning. But these asides come by way of exalting pilgrimage and gleaning in the name of the ordinary man who cannot afford Vedic rituals much less sponsor royal ones. It may also be that when the *Mahābhārata* poets speak of morally superior substitutes or equivalents for the Aśvamedha, Rājasūya, etc., that these rites were decreasingly performed during the time that the *Mahābhārata* was composed. But whether or not

doing other things like pilgrimage or gleaning were deemed morally superior, and whether or not these royal rituals were becoming less common if not necessarily less prestigious during the period of epic composition, this would not seem to have diminished the epic poets' interest in referring to them in ways that deepen their stories. Moreover, the Aśvamedha seems to have been revived under the Śuṅgas by Puṣyamitra, and remained on tap for later Brahmanically inclined kings such as Samudragupta (Thapar 2002, 284, 296), and the early Pallavas (329, 335). No doubt these kings and their priests would also have made knowing *ritual* adaptations. One also finds what seem to be traces of the Aśvamedha, and in particular some likely evocations of the ritual scenes we have been describing, in popular rites and folklores that are traceable, at last hypothetically, to regional kingdoms.[64] Here we come to a different problem: that of accounting for continuity in circumstances where Vedic allusions seem to be unknown.

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[64] See Biardeau 2004, 174–76, 183–85, 217–22, 223 n. 169. Generally, Biardeau posits that local goddess traditions, often linked with the *Mbh*, offer some explanation.

AUTHORIAL PATHS THROUGH THE TWO SANSKRIT EPICS:
VIA THE *RĀMOPĀKHYĀNA*

In advancing the arguments of this article, I want to acknowledge at
the outset that I am emboldened to make them because I have been
persuaded that Madeleine Biardeau has recently cleared up some basic
and satisfactory working premises for scholarship on the two San-
skrit epics. To the point: I agree with her chronological positioning
of the *Mahābhārata* as older than the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Biardeau 2002, I:
700–701 and ff., 726; 1999: xxxiii–xxxv), though with some differences
between us as to relative dating, manner, and time span of compo-
sition that I need not go into fully here.[1] I also agree with her that
each epic received its basic contents and design in the process of its
first composition, and that there is nothing to be gained by excavating
or surgically peeling back from their "extant" texts to uncover cores,
interpolations, and strata—here again with some further differences
as to the merits and implications of the *Mbh*'s Critical Edition, on
which I am more positive than Biardeau and some others.[2] Further, as
Biardeau sees, one must address not only the relation between the two
epics as provisional wholes but as provisional wholes including parts.
For this paper, that is especially relevant to the *Rāmopākhyāna*, the
Mbh's main version of the Rāma story, which Biardeau regards as an
integral part of the *Mbh*, and thus in principle earlier than the *Rām*.
Moreover, to theorize this relation, it should be pertinent, she says,
that the *Rāmopākhyāna*, along with the *Bhagavadgītā*, the *Nārāyaṇīya*,

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[1] See Hiltebeitel 2001a: 15–31, 165; 2004c.
[2] See Hiltebeitel 2004c on the distinction between excavation and surgery, for which
Fitzgerald (2003a) is an advocate, and Hiltebeitel 2005c for some discussion of the
merits of the Critical Edition. Fitzgerald's negative remarks on the "unsuccessful effort
to arrive at a critical edition" (Fitzgerald 2002: 89, n. 1) would seem connected to his
view that the recovery of the political intent of the first written *Mbh* requires surgical
excision to remove *bhakti* segments that would have been among the features added
as late as the Gupta period (see also Fitzgerald 2001). But the attempt to defer epic
bhakti to a vague lateness that extends to the Guptas is an old ploy of epic "analysts"
that has no external, and thus no internal, evidence to support it; see Hiltebeitel 2001a;
2004c; 2006a; and indeed Fitzgerald 2004a: 141.

and the *Sauptikaparvan*, is one of the units of the eighteen-*parvan*
Mbh to have eighteen *adhyāya*s: that is, it has an eighteen-to-eighteen
part-to-whole relation.[3] This numerology suggests that each of these
units can be viewed as one or another kind of epitome. Further, in
Biardeau's terms, the *Rāmopākhyāna* is one of three "mirror stories"
in the *Mbh*'s Forest Book that the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī hear (the
other two being "Nala" and "Sāvitrī").[4] From an inside-out perspec-
tive, the *Mbh*'s Forest Book is thus the *Rāmopākhyāna's* frame story.

    This means that I now take a position on the priority of these two
texts. Before this recent turn, I regarded the *Rāmopākhyāna* as to some
extent intelligible simply as being first and foremost the *Mbh*'s main
version of the Rāma story, and considered the question of priority
between it and the *Rām* to be inconclusive. But I now believe there are
good reasons to accept the view (if not all the arguments) of scholars
who have considered the *Rāmopākhyāna* to be prior: notably, in the
most recent discussions, P. L. Vaidya (1971: xxxi–xxxvi), J. A. B. van
Buitenen (1975: 207–214), and Biardeau.[5] But let us see what this pri-
ority might mean.

Authors, Heroines and the Ends of Tile Paths

There has been some interest over recent decades in similarities in
design between the two Sanskrit epics,[6] perhaps enough to begin
noticing how the similarities relate to differences. I will argue that one
of the areas of tension by which the two epics betray significant differ-
ences is in their respective treatments of the way the "author" of each
epic is positioned in relation to other *ṛṣi*s and to the lead heroine, and

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[3] Biardeau 2002, I: 700, Vaidya (1971: xxxi) notes the *Rāmopākhyāna* count without
comment on it, though perhaps as prelude to his view that it is "a genuine part of the
Mahābhārata" (p. xxxii). On the *Nārāyaṇīya*, see Hiltebeitel 2006a.

[4] As "Nala" is a mirror story recalling primarily the dice match and anticipating
primarily the Pāṇḍavas' year in disguise, "Rāma" is a mirror story recalling the abduc-
tion of Draupadī and anticipating primarily the war.

[5] Disagreeing with criticism of Vaidya and, after Rāghavan's study (1973: 2–31), of
van Buitenen, see Goldman 1984: 33–39, and Brockington 1998: 473–477. Of the older
discussions mentioned by these authors, I have reviewed (the English translation of)
Jacobi [1893] 1960: 69–84; Hopkins 1901: 58–84, alone here in favoring the priority
of the *Rāmopākhyāna*; Winternitz 1927, I: 500–507; and Sukthankar 1939 and 1941:
472–487.

[6] See Hiltebeitel 2001a: 6, n. 27, citing Pollock 1986: 38–42 and Biardeau 1997:
77–119.

that this positioning can be traced through notions of a path through each of the two texts. I will try to establish at the outset that this is a potent configuration, and then demonstrate some of the particulars by which it can be traced.

A provocative first difference is this: Whereas in the *Mbh* the author appears in person to introduce the heroes to the heroine by showing the path that leads to her before they meet her at the debut scene where she will "choose" a husband, in the *Rām* the author appears in person only in the last stages of the heroine's path from the point where he receives her at his hermitage to the final scene where she calls on the earth to engulf her. More specifically, in the *Mbh* Vyāsa makes three of his forty-one appearances in a row to advance Draupadī's story. First, he tells the youthful forest-wandering Pāṇḍavas the Over-anxious Maiden story that introduces Draupadī as destined from her previous life to marry five husbands (*Mbh* 1.157.6–16); then he shows up again to keep them "on the path" (*pathi*) to Pañcāla (176.2–3); and third, he shows up in time to narrate the stories that explain how Draupadī' s polyandry is virtuous, dharmic (187.32–190.4). And in the *Rām*, Vālmīki not only receives Sītā after Rāma has banished her (*Rām* 7.44–48), but receives her pregnant with the twins Lava and Kuśa, helps her raise these boys, teaches them the *Rām* and brings them to Rāma's Aśvamedha (7.84.5) to sing it—whereupon Rāma realizes their song is about him and wishes to be reunited with Sītā; Vālmīki then brings Sītā before Rāma, attests to her purity as a *dharmacāriṇī*, one who "fares in *dharma*" (7.87.14–20), and tells Rāma that "she will give proof of her fidelity" (*pratyayaṃ dāsyate*; 87.15c and 20d) by the act of truth that then ends her life (88.10).[7]

I would propose that the two texts work this configuration along with a common design and a largely overlapping vocabulary. When we realize that Vyāsa makes no further appearances in the main story that concern Draupadī as the person most directly affected,[8] and that Vālmīki makes no appearances in the main story at all until the events

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[7] See Hiltebeitel 2001a: 318–322.

[8] Two of Vyāsa's forty-one other appearances affect Draupadī immediately, but are not primarily concerned with her: When he appears with Nārada between the weapons of Arjuna and Aśvatthāman, he changes the terms that affect Draupadī's revenge against Aśvatthāman for slaying her children—terms that leave Draupadī barren (see Hiltebeitel 2001a: 62–64); and she is among those whom Vyāsa enables to see her slain sons when he brings forth a vision of the slain warriors from the Gaṅgā (Hiltebeitel 2001a: 81).

just described, we may say, in brief, that not only do the "authors" stories follow paths defined by their heroines, but that the authors appear at these two decisive *doubtful* end-points precisely to vouch for the purity, fidelity, and chastity of the heroines on whose paths their narratives proceed. Along the way, each epic will be full of reminders, with words like *mārga*, *pathā*, *pantha*, *vartman*, *adhvan*, *padam*, and in the *Mbh* the additional word *padavī*, that the heroines' movements define such a "path", and that she walks it as a *dharmacāriṇī*, a vibrant phrase, at least when used in narrative contexts, that I believe could be well glossed as "one who moves gracefully in *dharma*".[9] Moreover, if Vālmīki appears only at the end of his story, vouchsafing for Sītā there by this very phrase, there is also the indication at its beginning, where his poem is introduced, that the composition he imparted to Kuśa and Lava to sing to Rāma is called *sītāyāścaritam mahat* (1.4.6b)—that is, if I may translate it in the same vein, literally "The Great Course of Sītā".[10]

Pivotal to making the case for such a path through each epic will be the Forest Books, with their preludes and sequels. For it is there that the heroines' paths take them and the heroes on their longest and profoundest journeys.

B. *Walking the Path of Draupadī*

In the *Mbh*, it is in and around the forest that we meet that epic's distinctive use of the term *padavī*, "footstep, path, way", used with the roots *car* or *gam*, "move" or "go", and modified by *draupadyāh*, "Draupadī's", or, if Draupadī is speaking herself, by *mama*, "my", to describe "walking on the path of Draupadī" (as I will translate it).

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[9] In the *Mbh*, it has the following uses for Draupadī. Vidura (who incarnates *dharma*) establishes after the dice match in words to Yudhiṣṭhira: "And Draupadī walks in the Law and is wise both in Law and Profit" (*dharmārthakuśalā caiva draupadī dharmacāriṇī*) (2.69.9cd; van Buitenen 1978: 163). And just after this, once the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī have left for the forest, Dhṛtarāṣṭra reveals his anxieties to Saṃjaya, and Saṃjaya replies: "Though warned by Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and Vidura, [not] to bring in Draupadī, the Pāṇḍavas' beloved wife, who walked in the Law (*draupadīṃ dharmacāraṇīm*), your foolish son Duryodhana sent the son of a sūta as an usher" (2.72.6–7; van Buitenen 1978: 167). See also 3.222.58; 4.15.35; 18.1.9 and 18.2.11 (as described by Yudhiṣṭhira, not finding Draupadī in heaven). For the *Rām* as designating Sītā, see 1.72.17 (*dharmacārī*, a short form, as described by her father to Rāma at their wedding); 2.23.19; 2.109.21 (as perceived by Anasūyā); 7.87.14 (as attested to by Vālmīki at the end of her road, as already cited).

[10] As others have taken the term *Sītāyana*.

Although the *Mbh* is, of course, a text of many crisscrossing paths and doors,[11] I will let this idiom suffice to make my case that Draupadī's path is the one that the *Mbh* marks the most carefully. On the verge of entering the forest, the first occurrence comes with Nakula's oath of revenge after the dice match:

> At the command of Dharmarāja, walking the path of Draupadī (*nideśād dharmarājasya draupadyāḥ padavīṃ caran*) I shall soon empty the earth of the Dhārtarāṣṭras (2.68.45).

Then, most tellingly, Draupadī uses these terms twice herself in the Forest Book in the episode of her abduction by Jayadratha, just before he grabs her:

> I am very strong (*mahābalā*), but here it is as if the Sauvīra king thinks me powerless—that, convinced by subjugation, I would speak here pitifully to the Sauvīra king, (I) whose path the two Kṛṣṇas will surely walk (*yasyā hi kṛṣṇau padavīṃ caretām*), the two companions stationed on a single chariot—not even Indra could carry her (*tām*) off, how then a mere miserable man? When Kirīṭin, the slayer of enemy heroes, stationed on the chariot, shattering the foes' minds, pervades your army on my account, burning deadwood like a summer fire, Janārdana's heroic Vṛṣṇi followers and all the great Kekaya bowmen too, indeed, all these princes of pleasing form will walk my path (*ete hi sarve mama rājaputrāḥ/prahṛṣṭārūpāḥ padavīṃ careyuḥ*; 3.252.13–16).

Note that Draupadī is describing how Jayadratha will be killed in the Mahābhārata war, not how her husbands will rescue her now from his grasp, which the immediate sequel does not fail to describe in related terms. For as Indrasena, Yudhiṣṭhira's charioteer says on learning with the Pāṇḍavas of her abduction,

> Even if the queen has entered the earth, ascended to heaven or plunged in the sea, the sons of Pṛthā will follow her path, for so surely tortured is Dharmarāja (*tasya gamiṣyanti padaṃ hi pārthās/tathā hi saṃtapyati dharmarājaḥ*)...She's the walking heart of the Pāṇḍavas! (*bahiścaraṃ hṛdayam pāṇḍavānām*) (3.253.12 and 13f).[12]

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[11] See Hiltebeitel 2001a: 1, n. 3 on "forking paths", and p. 20, citing 12.342—the end of the *Śāntiparvan* on the many doors to heaven. At the beginning of the *Śāntiparvan*, consider the play on contending "roads" and "paths" (12.8.37–12.9 and 11) in the disagreement between Arjuna, who has just had Kṛṣṇa to set his course (i.e., drive his chariot) through the eighteen days of war, and Yudhiṣṭhira, who now has some decisions to make on his own.

[12] Slightly modifying van Buitenen 1978: 715, but keeping his translation "tortured", which elegantly conveys the sentiment behind what would be a more literal "for so surely does Dharmarāja burn..." Among further iterations of the path theme in this

Next, such terms occur twice in Book Five on occasions when Kuntī tells Kṛṣṇa to remind Arjuna that, with the war still ahead, "the path of Draupadī" has a ways yet to go (5.66.79; 135.19):

> Having gone, strong-armed one, say to the best of all weapon-bearers, the hero Arjuna Pāṇḍava, "Walk the path of Draupadī" (*draupadyāḥ padavīṃ cara*; 5.88.79);

and again,

> Strong-armed one, say to that best of all weapon-bearers, the tiger among men Arjuna Pāṇḍava, "Walk the path of Draupadī" (*draupadyāḥ padavīṃ cara*; 135.19).

And the terms last occur at the end of the war when Bhīma describes Duryodhana's death to Yudhiṣṭhira as a resolution toward which Draupadī's path has led:

> By good luck, the sinful Duryodhana has been slain with his followers in battle. By good luck, you have gone the path of Draupadī's mass of hair (*draupadyāḥ keśapakṣasya diṣṭyā tvam padavīṃ gataḥ*; 12.16.25).[13]

Draupadī's path is a dark one, foreseen by the incorporeal voice that announces at her birth that she will be the destruction of the Kṣatriyas.[14] As the passages further indicate, though the "two Kṛṣṇas"[15] and indeed "all the princes" follow this path, it is especially Dharmarāja who keeps them all to it with his indestructible yet "tortured" love for this woman. And finally, just because that is the case, it means that the text follows the path of Draupadī until the very end, when Yudhiṣṭhira asks to question Draupadī even when he is in heaven,[16] that is, even when she is no more.

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passage, the Pāṇḍavas "take to the path (*padavīm*) at once" (17d) and are thrice said to follow Jayadratha and Draupadī's tracks (*vartmaṇi*: 256. 16a, 20e, 22b).

[13] See Hiltebeitel 1981: 200–201.

[14] 1.155.41–46; see Hiltebeitel 2001a: 187.

[15] See Hiltebeitel 1984. As these passages remind us, it is also a path defined by the interwoven threads that link the actions of all the epic's Kṛṣṇas: the "two Kṛṣṇas", Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa; Draupadī Kṛṣṇā (her name at birth); and the author Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana, "the Island-born Kṛṣṇa", who set the Pāṇḍavas on this path in the first place, as earlier noted.

[16] 18.3.8; see Hiltebeitel 2001a: 276–277.

C. *The Seven* Ṛṣis *and Agastya*

In the *Rām*, the term *padavī* is very rarely used, and never with the same meanings or with reference to Sītā.[17] Rather, the path theme is developed in two phases divided by Sītā's abduction: the first defined primarily by *ṛṣi*s; the second traced mainly by animals. As we approach the first, we must get our bearings on the contrasting treatments of *ṛṣi*s in the two epics.[18]

As E. W. Hopkins has shown, as a class *ṛṣi*s form a rather elastic grouping; I quote him because he permits us to narrow things down rather quickly:

> Among Ṛṣis some are Devarṣis and Dānavarṣis; some are Maharṣis, some are Paramarṣis (the *arciṣmantaḥ* or very bright stars around the polar star); others, like Triśaṅku, are Rājarṣis, of kingly extraction; or Brahmarṣis (Viprarṣis), of priestly origin. The most famous group is that of the Seven Seers of the North (Hopkins 1915: 177).

Now, in both epics there are times when the *ṛṣi*s appear in all their variety to witness some great event. But there are also moments and situations where they are, as it were, represented by those "most famous" Seven, or by some significant variation thereof. These Seven have three major traits, all of which are functional and interrelated in the two epics.

First, they represent the religious authority of Veda; five of them have names that can be given to the "family books" of the *Ṛgveda* (Viśvāmitra [Book 3], Gotama [4], Atri [5], Bharadvāja [6], Vasiṣṭha [7]), and the other two (Kaśyapa[19] and Jamadagni) are known as poets of various hymns as well, as is Agastya, whom we must begin to keep track of along with the Seven. Jamadagni is the only one who has minimal association with the Vedic corpus (ṚV 9.65 being attributed to him or Bhṛgu), but he is of course a descendent of Bhṛgu, this latter being mentioned in a number of *Ṛgveda* hymns (8.43.13;

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[17] I find only three usages of *padavī* in the *Rām*, with different verbs and meanings: "come to the aid of" (*padavīm āgatān* [3.19.4d]; *padavīm prāpta* [3.20.12c], on which see Pollock 1991: 128, 131); the "region of the gods. etc." (*padavīṃ devatānām…gamiṣyasi*) that, according to Aṅgada, Rāvaṇa will attain when he is slain (6.31.41).

[18] The gist of §§ C.-E. of this essay was presented in 1979 at an American Academy of Religion panel I organized on the two epics, with Madeleine Biardeau, Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, and Robert P. Goldman as co-speakers. Twenty-five years later, perhaps it will be more timely. See Hiltebeitel 1979b.

[19] Some would add him as well to the short list of five as the *ṛṣi* of Book 9.

10.14.6; 92.12) and associated still more closely with the *Atharvaveda*. One may thus say that the Seven (who are themselves credited as co-authors of two hymns [ṚV 9.67; 10.137[20]]) and Agastya are *the* Vedic *ṛṣi*s par excellence. Their importance here is related to their identity as the eight *pravararṣi*s, the eponymous ancestors of the eight Brahman *gotra*s—that is, the ones to whom all Brahman families make invocation (*pravara*), and to whom they trace their line of descent. These eight gotras were the basis for the system of sept-exogamy, or marriage outside one's "eponymous clan". By classical times, the Seven *ṛṣi*s plus Agastya thus represent not only the authority of Veda, but the very human tissue of Brahmandom.

Second, both epics regard these *ṛṣi*s as having *āśrama*s in the forest, where they live as *vānaprastha*s, still sometimes in the company of their wives where the texts take in interest in such matters. But there is a difference. In the *Rām*, these *ṛṣi*s, or important members of their lines, are still living relatively earthly lives, and can thus readily interact with the hero and heroine. But in the *Mbh* their stories belong largely to the past—a past not so long distant in terms of generational time, though long in terms of ordinary human years. Their interactions with the heroes are thus more indirect.

Third, in the cosmological domain that epic scholars mostly ignore or shuttle aside, the Seven *ṛṣi*s and Agastya are important stars: the Seven form the Great Bear or Big Dipper, which moves around the Pole Star (*dhruva*, the Fixed) and is identified with the *devayāna*, the soteriological path to *mokṣa*. Agastya, however, is the star Canopus, second brightest star in the southern skies which are associated with the *pitryāna*,[21] the path of reincarnation, and with Yama, god of the dead and lord of the southern region.

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[20] On these hymns I thank T. P. Mahadevan for the following information and quoted comments: ṚV 9.67.1–21 has contributions from the Seven "amounting to three *gāyatri* verses [each] except Jamadagni's three *dvipadā gāyatri*. The order of the *ṛṣi*s is: Bharadvāja, Kaśyapa, Gotama, Atri, Viśvāmitra, Jamadagni, and Vasiṣṭha. This order, if it is a sign of the relative importance or prestige of the clans at redaction of the *Ṛgveda*, changes by post-Vedic times to the order [found here in this essay]. That order dates from the *sūtra* period and the subsequent *purāṇa* period…" The tenth book *ṛṣi*s hymn is "a seven-verse hymn with each *ṛṣi* getting one *anuṣṭubh* verse. The order of *ṛṣi*s is the same" as in Book 9.
[21] See Hiltebeitel 1977a: 347–350.

D. *The Seven* Ṛṣis *and Agastya in the* Mahābhārata

Before we consider the treatment of these Seven *ṛṣi*s plus Agastya in the *Rām*, we can thus expect to learn something from their contrasting treatment in the *Mbh*. Unlike the *Rām*, the *Mbh* does not present them as living concurrently with the heroes of the main story. The Seven *ṛṣi*s and Agastya's involvements with the main narrative of the *Mbh* are limited to visits from the heavens where they have already attained their stellar status (a partial exception may be Vasiṣṭha, who has a rather low-profile identity as a guru of Bhīṣma [1.44.32; 12.46.15]; but considering that Bhīṣma has spent time with his celestial mother Gaṅgā, we have no guarantee that this discipleship occurred on earth).[22] The Seven *ṛṣi*s do occasionally visit *Mbh* events en masse from above, as at the birth of Arjuna: "The Seven Seers Bharadvāja, Kaśyapa, Gautama, Viśvāmitra, Jamadagni, Vasiṣṭha, and he who rises as the sun goes down, the blessed lord Atri came there too" (1.114.41). But they do not structure the Pāṇḍavas' itinerary during their forest exile or elsewhere, and are not their major Brahman interlocutors there or anywhere else.

Yet they have another importance in this epic. Although we find stories about them widely dispersed, they repeatedly make signal contributions to the dynastic past, contributing to the great confluences of cosmic and societal forces, including mixture of caste, that recur through the lunar dynasty down to and into the *Mahābhārata* crisis. They do this over a long period, but with a seeming incremental intensity that marks their connection with the line at its major turning points or crises. According to a tradition that is found largely in post-epic texts, Atri, as the father of Soma, is the progenitor of the Lunar Dynasty itself. The epithet "he who rises as the sun goes down" is, however, surely connected with these lunar associations, which the *Mbh* knows (see Hopkins 1915: 90–91). As a group, the Seven *ṛṣi*s and Agastya all appear in the story of Nahuṣa, father of Yayāti, who, when he becomes king of heaven at the fall of Indra, makes the Seven pull his carriage, until he arrogantly touches Agastya's head with his foot.[23] The Bhārgavas then intermarry into the line through Yayāti when the

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[22] See Hiltebeitel 2001b.

[23] See 5.11–17, 12.329.29–41 (*Nārāyaṇīya*), and 13.101.44–103.37; Hiltebeitel 1977a.

latter marries the Bhārgava Śukra's daughter Devayānī; their son Yadu is not an ancestor of the central branch of the dynasty, which descends from his younger brother Pūru, the first of the line's eponymous ancestors, but Yadu's descendants—the Yādavas—twice recombine with the central branch in the epic's main narrative: first, when Kṛṣṇa's aunt Kuntī, a Yādava, marries Pāṇḍu and becomes the mother of the eldest three Pāṇḍavas (1.71–78); and second, when Kṛṣṇa's sister Subhadrā marries Arjuna, with their recombinant Paurava-Yādava descendants providing the dynasty's sole heirs.[24] Meanwhile, Viśvāmitra and the Apsaras Menakā were then the parents of Śakuntalā, who bears with King Duḥṣanta another famous eponym of the line, Bharata (1.65–69). And drawing still closer in time to the events of the epic, Vasiṣṭha is the father of Śakti, grandfather of Parāśara (1.169.1–8), and thus great grandfather of Vyāsa, who is the father of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Pāṇḍu, and Vidura, not to mention their non-dynastic elder half-brother Śuka. Meanwhile, off-center from the dynastic line but still contributory to the Kaurava camp and the build-up of the main epic crisis, one finds Bharadvāja directly siring Droṇa, and Gautama as either the grandfather, or a more distant ancestor, of Kṛpa and Kṛpī (1.120–21), with Aśvatthāman being the outcome of the marriage of Droṇa and Kṛpī—all these fighting Brahmans contributing to the crisis by siding with the Kauravas.

The only one of the Seven *ṛṣi*s, or *ṛṣi* families, not contributing genealogically to the crisis is Kaśyapa. But then this most highly generative *ṛṣi* has a hand in the regeneration of all the Kṣatriyas after their destruction by Bhārgava Rāma (12.49). He is also a still more primordial progenitor: partner of Aditi in bearing the Ādityas and, in other contexts, of incarnations of Viṣṇu. He is also, as the husband of Kadrū and Vinatā (1.14.5–7), the father of all snakes and birds. Thus if, as it seems, there is a connection between the Kauravas and snakes, Kaśyapa's progeny may have taken another route into the lineage. Perhaps it is thus fitting that one of his descendants should make the effort to cure the Pāṇḍavas' heir Parikṣit of snakebite, without however succeeding (1.46.38–39). And it is curious that the two somewhat disreputable Brahman brothers Yāja and Upayāja who officiate at the

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[24] See Defourny 1978. There is, of course, much more extensive Bhārgava material in the *Mbh*, one major upshot of which is that Bhārgava Rāma is still hanging around to teach weaponry to various heroes. See most recently Fitzgerald 2002.

sacrifice that produces the births of Dhṛṣṭadyumna and Draupadī are both Kāśyapas (1.155.7). Thus while Kaśyapa and the Kāśyapas present the largest exceptions to the main pattern by which the Seven ṛṣis and Agastya are treated, we find them marked by traits that still contribute to the pattern: those of primordiality, generativity, and willingness to use that generativity in the performance of an unusual but vital sacrifice.

Two more contrasts thus emerge. In the *Rām*, the Ikṣvākus' solar line is without such repeated Brahman interventions as these, which include several Brahman adulterations of the Kṣatriya stock. All this will allow us to say, secondly, that whereas in the *Mbh* the Seven ṛṣis and Agastya mainly map time, in the *Rām* they mainly map space.

E. *The First Part of the* Rāmāyaṇa *Path*: *The Seven* Ṛṣis *and Agastya*

With these themes in mind, we can now look at these ṛṣis as a relay system in the *Rām*, for it will be my contention that Vālmīki defines the first part of Rāma and Sītā's path precisely by this group of seven plus one, allowing in two cases, already anticipated by what we have just culled from the *Mbh*, for replacements by their descendants. More specifically, Vālmīki maps these ṛṣis onto the story as the main representatives and spokesmen for *all* the ṛṣis, who are to be the beneficiaries of the divine plan to have Rāma eradicate the *rākṣasa* nuisance that disturbs their forest *āśrama*s—a mission for which the abduction of Sītā will be necessary and a cause for the ṛṣis to rejoice.[25]

This pattern begins somewhat inconspicuously with two Brahmans who provide the ṛṣis with their generative "home base" in Rāma' s family, in effect suspending their *vānaprastha* mode of life while they serve the royal line. Thus, most importantly, Vasiṣṭha and Ṛśyaśṛṅga Kāśyapa (descendent of Kaśyapa) oversee the rites of Rāma and his brothers' births (*Rām* 1.9–1 6),[26] along with several other Brahmans named. After this, both Vasiṣṭha and a Kaśyapa (it is doubtful this

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[25] The moment Rāvaṇa lifts Sītā off, all the *paramarṣi*s of the immediate Daṇḍaka Forest are "thrilled and agitated"—*prahṛṣṭā vyathitāścāsan* (3.50.11a). I believe Shastri's "filled with joy" (1969: 110) and Raghunathan's "glad" (1981: 112) are closer to the sense of *prahṛṣṭa* than Pollock's "*shuddered*" (1991: 196).

[26] On the pair in combination, see notably 1.12.33–34; 13.42.

would still be Ṛśyaśṛṅga, but the continued home-base presence of
a Kāśyapa is still of interest) accompany Rāma's wedding party to
Mithilā (68.4), where Vasiṣṭha recites the Ikṣvāku lineage (69.14–15)
to which Ṛśyaśṛṅga has so crucially contributed in the case of Rāma
and his brothers. A Kāśyapa is then also among the Brahmans advising
Vasiṣṭha at Ayodhyā, along with others named (2.61.2). Vasiṣṭha and a
Kāśyapa are then in attendance, along with five other ṛṣis,[27] at Rāma's
enthronement (6.116.55), and finally they are among the first four of
the seventeen (in the Critical Edition) ṛṣis named when Rāma invites
"all the ṛṣis"[28] to his aśvamedha to witness what he believes will be
Sītā's conclusive oath of chastity, but which will instead be the end of
her life and her earthly path. Vasiṣṭha is a fixture in his role as purohita
of the Ikṣvākus under Daśaratha, Bharata, and Rāma (e.g., 1.11 .6c;
2.61.3d), as is probably also implied in the Rāmopākhyāna, as we shall
see below. This thread of Kāśyapas, beginning with Ṛśyaśṛṅga, seems
to be a theme launched by Vālmīki.[29] Let me just suggest that in map-
ping the Seven ṛṣis, the Rām handles the Kāśyapas much as the Mbh
does by having them contribute to the pattern but from the greatest
remove. Vālmīki thus solves his most difficult problem adroitly and at
the beginning by replacing Kāśyapa—the primordiality of whose sto-
ries perhaps dates him beyond the range of Vālmīki's Rām history—
primarily by Ṛśyaśṛṅga, who is also a Kāśyapa in the Mbh (3.110.2b
etc.) but without any connection there to the Rāma story, or more
particularly with the Rāmopākhyāna, and who shares with Kaśyapa the
traits one finds among Kāśyapas in the Mbh of extraordinary genera-
tivity and the availability to use it in an unusual but vital sacrifice.

For the other five of the Seven ṛṣis, however, their Rāmāyaṇa life
is in the forest. While Rāma is but a youth, Viśvāmitra appears to
demand his aid in slaying the rākṣasas who disturb his hermitage.
There this ṛṣi, the Kṣatriya who had become a Brahman, becomes Rāma
and Lakṣmaṇa's guru, "initiating" the boys into the mastery of weap-
ons that unite the brahman and kṣatra powers and testing them with
their use against the youngsters' first rākṣasa opponents—including

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[27] Vāmadeva, Jābāli, Kātyāyana, Gautama, and Vijaya.
[28] rsīn sarvān—the others named in the Critical Edition being Vāmadeva, Jābāli,
Viśvāmitra, Dīrghatapas, Durvāsas, Agastya, Śakti, Bhārgava, Vāmana, the "long-
lived Mārkaṇḍeya", Maudgalya, Cyavana, Śatānanda, Bharadvāja, and Agniputra
(7.87.1–4).
[29] As noted above and explored further below, it is not found in the Rāmopākhyāna.

the female *rākṣasī* Tāṭakā, whom Rāma kills at Viśvāmitra instruction. Then, just as Vyāsa does in directing the Pāṇḍavas to Draupadī, Viśvāmitra, now satisfied, informs the young men about the forthcoming marriage ceremony of Sītā and leads them to Mithilā, where, "protected by the son of Kuśika" (*guptaḥ kuśikaputreṇa*; 1.67.15), Rāma wins Sītā's hand. Along the way, Viśvāmitra has facilitated the transition between Rāma's killing of Tāṭakā and his marriage to Sītā by imparting instruction about the dangers of female sexuality,[30] and this has culminated, just before reaching Mithilā, with their passage through the hermitage of Gautama. There Rāma leams that this *ṛṣi* has long abandoned this retreat after cursing his wife Ahalyā for her affair there with Indra: she would remain there immobile and invisible, doing penance until she should be freed from the curse and purified by the presence of Rāma. Once Ahalyā is restored, she is rejoined by Gautama, who bestows "great homage" on Rāma before the latter "proceeded on to Mithilā" (1.47.11–48.22; Goldman 1984: 218). Probably Rāma thus restores the marriage relation between this *ṛṣi* and his wife in anticipation of his marriage with Sītā, with it likely reshadowed that his own marriage will also be one to suffer from long separations and a question of infidelity.

Upon the conclusion of the wedding,[31] Viśvāmitra takes leave of Rāma (1.73.1), or—more exactly—yields way, just as Rāma is confronted by Rāma Jāmadagnya (Bhārgava Rāma, Paraśurāma) in a terrifying apparition. Concerning Rāma's meetings with the Seven *ṛṣi*s, this is Vālmīki's only other adjustment after his handling of the Kāśyapas.[32] Vālmīki places *Rām* events in the aftermath not only of Jamadagni's killing, but the slaughters by Rāma Jāmadagnya that avenge it. This

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[30] Thanks to Sally Sutherland on this point, which she discusses in S. J. S. Goldman 2004: 55–76.

[31] It is to be noted that Gautama's son Śatānanda is King Janaka's *purohita* (1.69.1), and officiates, along with Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra, at Rāma and Sītā's wedding.

[32] Indeed, the two adjustments bear a temporal correlation—at least in the *Mbh*. For in the *Śāntiparvan* account of the Jamadagni-Rāma Jāmadagnya story, Kaśyapa figures as the *ṛṣi* who enables the Kṣatriyas' regeneration after Rāma Jāmadagnya has slaughtered them in revenge for his father's slaying. While Vālmīki could allow Rāma to meet Kaśyapa under these conditions, he is not willing to let Rāma meet Jamadagni, whose earthly career has been terminated too early in this episode, which, at least in this version, has Kaśyapa's intervention in its conclusion. Vālmīki thus leaves the matter of Rāma's status as a regenerate Kṣatriya to be worked out, without reference to Kaśyapa, in Rāma's face-off with Rāma Jāmadagnya, who now appears before Rāma to challenge him.

Rāma Jāmadagnya has thus now *already*—that is, long before the *Mbh*,[33] which makes so much of it—slain the earth's Kṣatriyas twenty-one times over, and now he threatens Rāma with the same extermination. He has heard Rāma has won Sītā by breaking the bow of Śiva; he now appears with the bow of Jamadagni himself, which had descended to Jamadagni from Viṣṇu. If Rāma can string it without breaking it, the two can then fight. Rāma strings the bow without breaking it, and with the arrow destroys the worlds that Rāma Jāmadagnya has won with his *tapas*. Rāma Jāmadagnya is thus defeated without a fight, and gracefully accepts his eclipse by Rāma Dāśarathi (1.73.16–76.3).

The fact that it is the mastery of the bow of the *ṛṣi* Jamadagni as well as that of Śiva makes this encounter all the more significant. For it was Jamadagni who had the restraint that checked, for one generation, the fateful combination of Brahman energy with Kṣatriya inclinations that appeared in his son Rāma Jāmadagnya. That Rāma Dāśarathi should destroy the worlds of asceticism of Rāma Jāmadagnya with the bow of Jamadagni is thus an indication of this restoration of restraint over the power of destruction.[34] Rāma holds the combination of *brahman* and *ksatra* powers as the disciple of Viśvāmitra (Rāma Jāmadagnya's great uncle, the two being the recipients of opposing destinies). That is, he is the disciple of the exemplary Kṣatriya who is oriented toward the *brahman* power; not of Rāma Jāmadagnya, the exemplary Brahman who is oriented toward the *kṣatra*.[35] Rāma thus shows his mastery of the two bows differentially and correctively. In one case, it is not only Śiva's bow but that of a Kṣatriya, Janaka, and he breaks it, still under the tutelage of Viśvāmitra, the Kṣatriya who had become a Brahman. In the other, it is not only Viṣṇu's bow but that of a Brahman (Jamadagni), and he leaves it unbroken, destroying the worlds of the Brahman with too much of the Kṣatriya in him.

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[33] Which could suggest the *Rām*'s knowledge of the *Mbh*.

[34] See further Biardeau 1976: 190–197, appreciating these and other interrelated themes in this episode: an affirmation of the complementarity of Śiva and Visnu, Rāma now having strung both their bows; further indications of the superiority of Visnu over Śiva (the episode invokes a myth to this effect), and of restraint over the power of destruction; and more particularly the eclipse of the destructive avatāric role of Paraśurāma by the restorative avatāric role of Rāma Dāśarathi. Cf. Thomas 1996 on Paraśurāma's durability.

[35] A description that also befits Droṇa, Rāma Jāmadagnya's most prominent Brahman disciple in the *Mbh*.

After this encounter, Rāma returns home and faces the circumstances that lead to his banishment: a series of affairs again highlighting Vasiṣṭha. As he is about to depart, his mother Kausalyā says to him, with suggestive transparency,

> May the Seven ṛṣis and Nārada guard you everywhere, my wise son, may all the constellations, and all the planets with their presiding deities, as you wander in a muni's garb through the great forest (2.22.5).

Kausalyā's words effectively bring out the Seven ṛṣis' (and Nārada's) double link with the stars (constellations and planets) above and the forests that loom ahead, and also bridge Rāma's movements from his princely upbringing (to which Ṛśyaśṛṅga Kāśyapa, Vasiṣṭha, Viśvāmitra, Gautama and Ahalyā, and Rāma Jāmadagnya have all contributed) to his banishment to the forest, where the meetings with the rest of the great ṛṣis will continue.

First, shortly after having set out, Rāma, Sītā, and Lakṣmaṇa encounter Bharadvāja, who, at Rāma's request that he "think of some good site for an ashram in a secluded place" (2.48.23; Pollock 1986: 188), directs them to go ten krośas ahead to Mount Citrakūṭa, "a meritorious (puṇyaḥ) place frequented by maharṣis" (2.48.25 [22–36]), where they will make their first real residence in the forest. But Bharadvāja's main contribution soon follows when Bharata passes through his hermitage on the way to his meeting with Rāma to ask Rāma to return to Ayodhyā. Bharadvāja conjures up a sumptuous feast and a royal palace for Bharata, but Bharata rejects the royal seat, thus anticipating his stewardship of Rāma's throne (2.84–85). Once Bharata has proved his worthiness, Bharadvāja again gives the directions to Citrakūṭa (2.86.8–13), this time so that Bharata can find Rāma there.

Second, when Rāma, Sītā, and Lakṣmaṇa leave Citrakūṭa, it is by way of the hermitage of Atri. There the main interaction is between Sītā and Atri's now aged wife Anasūyā, who informs Sītā about the duties of a faithful wife or pativratā, and then bestows on her the apparel that Sītā will wear henceforth in the forest (2.109.5–111.20)—adding to the jewels that Daśaratha gave Sītā on her departure (2.33.14; 34.15–18). Again Rāma receives directions. Just as Bharadvāja directs him and his companions on the path to Citrakūṭa, the ascetics at Atri's hermitage now direct him on "the path through the forest which the maharṣis use when they go to gather fruits" (eṣa panthā maharṣīṇām phalānyāharatām vane; 2.111.19)—all other routes, they say, being treacherous, as if the fruits to be gathered by Rāma will not

be treacherous too. The trio is, in fact, directed toward the danger-
ous, rākṣasa-infested Daṇḍaka Forest. There they will spend ten years
visiting hermitages, including those of two rather extreme ascetics
named Śarabhaṅga (a Gautama: 3.6. 14d), who *is* mentioned in the
Rāmopākhyāna unlike the second, Sutīkṣṇa, who finally tells them the
way they should proceed southward (3.10.36) through this forest to
the hermitage of Agastya.

   Rāma has thus encountered the Seven *ṛṣis*, five directly and two
through their descendants, in the following order: Vasiṣṭha, Ṛśyaśṛṅga
(for Kaśyapa), Viśvāmitra, Gautama, Rāma Jāmadagnya (for Jama-
dagni), Bharadvāja, and Atri.[36] At last he is directed on to Agastya,
who, added to the Seven, completes the list of the eight *pravarṣis*.
Upon seeing Agastya's hermitage, Rāma says,

> This must be the ashram of that seer whose power made the *rākṣasas* look
> on this southern region with terror and give up their hold on it. From the
> moment the virtuous sage set foot in this region, the nightstalkers ceased
> hostilities and grew peaceable (3.10.80–81; Pollock 1986: 109–110).

Agastya is, of course, *the ṛṣi* of South India, regarded as the bringer of
Brahmanical civilization to the south, and supposedly still resident on
Mount Podiyil in Tirunelveli District, Tamilnadu. When Rāma asks
him where he and his companions can find a peaceful spot, Agastya
reflects for a moment and then directs them toward Pañcavaṭī, near the
Godāvarī River (3.12.15–18). When they take up this "path by which
the great seer had directed them",[37] they are going into an uncharted
territory in which, from here on, their path will no longer be pointed
out by great or lesser intermediary *ṛṣis*, but by generally inauspicious
creatures, beginning with the vulture Jaṭāyus. From Pañcavaṭī, Rāma
will begin in earnest his extermination of the *rākṣasas* at Janasthāna,
and it will be at Pañcavaṭī that Sītā will be abducted. Indeed, Agastya
has directed them into a southern realm filled with inauspiciousness
and death where, once Sītā is soon abducted, the first help available
in recovering the path—which will now be the broken path of Sītā's
abduction—comes from deer, a headless trunk, vultures, monkeys and

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[36] Durvāsas, a son of Atri, will also mark the end of Rāma and his brothers' lives,
urgently demanding food in circumstances that prematurely end Rāma's sequestered
conversation with Time (or Death, Kāla; 7.93–95). The episode begins describing Rāma
as "firm on the path of *dharma*" (*rāme dharmapathe sthite*; 93.1b).

[37] Pollock 1986: 115; *Rām.* 3.12.25cd: *yathopadiṣṭena pathā maharṣiṇā prajagmatuḥ
Pañcavaṭīṃ samāhitau.*

so-called "bears", plus a strange cavewoman. For present purposes, it will suffice to recover this track through the directions of the vulture Jaṭāyus and the headless trunk.

F. *The Second Part of the* Rāmāyaṇa *Path*: *The Uncharted Territory*

After Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa learn from the dying vulture Jaṭāyus of Sītā's abduction, they proceed, as the bird has directed them, in a southerly direction on an "untrodden path" (*aviprahatam...panthānam*; 3.65.2).[38] Having exhausted their visits to the hemitages of all the famous Vedic *ṛṣi*s down to the southernmost and last, Agastya, they now go into uncharted forest that is, if one may so put it, Vedically unmapped. Passing through several thick woods, they meet Kabandha, the "Head-less Trunk", a Dānava suffering from a curse who guards the way past him (3.65.15–24).[39] Once Rāma has helped him to regain his beauty by cremating him, he tells Rāma that Rāvaṇa's abode may be found if Rāma forms an alliance with Sugrīva (68.10–22; cf. 67.20). Kabandha then provides them with an itinerary to Sugrīva's haunt on Mount Ṛṣyamūka near Lake Pampā, and on the way they must pass Mataṅga's Wood (*mataṅgāraṇya*; 3.69.27c; *mataṅgavanam*; 3.70.17c), where the non-Vedic *ṛṣi* Mataṅga had his hermitage (*mataṅgasyāśramam*; 4.11.41 d).[40] Within that hermitage all the *ṛṣi*s (including Mataṅga) have passed away—all but one: a "mendicant woman" (*śramaṇī*, 3.69.19; also a *siddhā*, 3.70.6 and 9) named Śabarī—in whose name we may read "the Tribal Woman".[41] The rest of them, Mataṅga and

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[38] Some of what follows in this paragraph is modified or summarized from Hilte-beitel 1980c: 200–211.

[39] As does the *rākṣasa* Kirmīra when the Pāṇḍavas first enter the forest (*Mbh* 3.11.23, 12.7–15). Moreover, at the beginning of Book 3, after the Pāṇḍavas have killed Kirmīra, they realign themselves along their implied path by "placing Kṛṣṇā first" (*kṛṣṇām puraskṛtya*) as they enter the Dvaita Forest (3.12.68).

[40] The "safe path" (*śivaḥ panthā*; 69.2) Kabandha recommends for their approach will be remarkable, past flowering trees and lotuses that make unfading garlands but which no man has ever picked. Explains Kabandha: "The disciples of Mataṅga there were well-adorned *ṛṣi*s. When they were overheated (*abhitapta*) by the burden of fetching forest produce for their guru, the drops of sweat from their bodies that fell to the ground quickly were born as flowers from the *muni*s' *tapas*. Produced from their drops of sweat, they do not die, Rāghava" (3.69. 16cd–18).

[41] Śabaras are now the Saoras. See Lutgendorf 2001.

his other disciples, as Śabarī will soon corroborate, ascended to heaven just when Rāma and company had reached Citrakūṭa.

Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa thus "set out in the forest on the path to Pampā shown them by Kabandha" (*tau kabandhena tam mārgam pampāyā darśitaṃ vane*; 70.1 ab). They head toward Mount Ṛṣyamūka by way of Mataṅga's hermitage, where they find Śabarī still there, awaiting Rāma's arrival so that, as Mataṅga had promised her, the sight of him would bring her heaven. This she soon enough obtains, rejoining her *maharṣi* preceptors there after Rāma gives her permission to enter fire (*hutvātmānaṃ hutāśane*; 3.70.26)—thereby indexing an association between fire-entry and purification that will later apply also, implicitly, to Vālmīki's Sītā. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa then leave Mataṅga's hermitage itself, and with a sense of a favorable turn, meet Sugrīva and company on Mount Ṛṣyamūka.

Yet however favorable the turn, the story of Mataṅga's vacating of his hermitage still defines this place, for in Mataṅga's name and story lie enigmatic references to untouchability, buffalo sacrifice, and, as already noted, impurity. Sugrīva can find asylum there because Mataṅga, before dying, cursed Vālin, Sugrīva's brother and enemy, for befouling the *āśrama* with the blood drops of a huge buffalo named Dundubhi, whom Vālin had slain. Although Rāma has thus arrived too late to meet this "untouchable" *ṛṣi*, the place remains one where Rāma can show his grace and prowess with respect to the residues of such impure presences, blessing the "Tribal", Śabarī, and kicking away Dundubhi's buffalo bones with one toe to impress Sugrīva that he, Rāma, will be up to the task of dispatching Vālin (4.3–12). Rāma thus forges his "friendship" with Sugrīva[42] in this portent-ridden place, which, beyond the range of the Vedic *ṛṣi*s, now marks the end of the trail as defined by *ṛṣi*s of any kind. Henceforth the path must be divined from the signs left by Sītā; the words of another vulture, Sampāti; the cavewoman Svayamprabhā; and the reconnoitering of the monkeys and bears, which the friendship with Sugrīva will have made possible. Through all this, though, the path is defined primarily by Sītā: the quest for her, begun when Rāma learns from the monkeys that she had dropped her garment and jewels to mark her trail as she passed over the monkeys on Mount Ṛṣyamūka.

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[42] I discuss the differing treatments of this friendship in the *Rāmopākhyāna* and Vālmīki in Hiltebeitel 2004b and 2004d.

G. *The* Rāmopākhyāna

As noted, it is the Forest Books of the two epics that bring the path theme to central stage. The *Mbh*, however, goes further in providing a touchstone for this theme: one that I have already signaled as the most salient moment in that epic's use of the distinctive phrase "following the path of Draupadī"—Draupadī's abduction by Jayadratha Saindhava. It is this episode that elicits the *Rāmopākhyāna*: a narrative in which the heroes and heroine of the one epic take consolation from hearing the story of the hero and heroine of the other—or, to put it, I think, more accurately, a narrative in which the *Mbh* auditors hear a story that Vālmīki will soon make the subject of that other epic.

As noted at the beginning of this paper, from an inside-out perspective, the *Mbh*'s Forest Book is the *Rāmopākhyāna*'s frame story. And indeed, it is a rather beautifully designed frame in which our path theme is one of the major linking threads. Here is how the *Mbh* author gets into the eighteen-adhyāya *Rāmopākhyāna* and out of it. First, from the *Mbh*'s own inner frame, Janamejaya begins a short connective *adhyāya* asking Vaiśampāyana: What did the Pāṇḍavas do "after they had incurred incomparable trouble because of Kṛṣṇā's abduction" (*evaṃ hṛtāyāṃ kṛṣṇāyāṃ prāpya kleśam anuttamam*; 3.257.1). Vaiśampāyana describes the scene. As "Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira sat with the throngs of *muni*s" who attend the Pāṇḍavas' forest travels, he asks, "in the midst" of those "listening and commiserating great *ṛṣi*s" (*teṣām madhye maharṣīṇām śṛnvatāṃ anuśocatām*): Unless it is the workings of time, fate, or predestination (*kāla, daivam, vidhi, bhavitavya*),

> how indeed could such a happening touch (*bhāva . . . saṃspṛśed*) our *dharma*-knowing wife, one who fares in *dharma* (*dharmacāriṇī*), as a false charge of theft (might touch) a pure man? Surely no sin is committed, not a blameworthy deed anywhere; even among Brahmans the great *dharma* is well fared (*sucarito*) by Draupadī (3.257, 1–6).

Be it noted that Yudhiṣṭhira starts out with the question "how could this happen to Draupadī", fully defending her, and not "how could this happen to me?" Even though he turns shortly to this second question, it is the subordinated one. Yudhiṣṭhira begins with a question and a defense that are not, I think, typical of Rāma-or at least of Vālmīki's Rāma. Now addressing Mārkaṇḍeya among the throng of *ṛṣi*s, Yudhiṣṭhira observes further that having one's wife abducted is

miserable, as is this forest life caused by lying kinsmen, and asks, "Is there indeed a man less fortunate than I, have you ever seen or heard of one before?" (7–10).

In response to this, Mārkaṇḍeya begins the *Rāmopākhyāna in medias res*:

> Immeasurable misery (*apratimaṃ duḥkham*) was obtained by Rāma, O Bhārata bull. His wife Jānakī was abducted by a powerful *rākṣasa*... (3.258.1).

Then, eighteen *adhyāyas* later, Mārkaṇḍeya has another short *adhyāya* to wrap things up and move on to the Forest Book's third "mirror story", "Sāvitrī" (3.277–83). Mentioning first that Rāma too met with "exceedingly terrible calamity" (*vyasanam atyugram*) during his *vanavāsa* ("forest residence") (276.1), he brings the focus back to our theme:

> Do not grieve, tiger among men, you are a Kṣatriya, enemy-burner; you are traversing a path of blazing resolve that relies on heroism of arms (*bāhuvīryāśraye mārge vartase dīptanirṇaye*); indeed, not the slightest bit of guile (*vṛjinam*) is seen in you. On that path (*asmin mārge*) even the gods and asuras with Indra might despair (2–3).

As is the case elsewhere, the main path through the *Mbh* relies on Yudhiṣṭhira's guileless or uncrooked resolve to follow it, but also on maintaining the force of arms that comes from keeping his brothers together, as Mārkaṇḍeya continues to emphasize (4–7) while thus turning to the heart of the matter:

> And now look at her (*itaśca tvamimāṃ paśya*)! Abducted by the ill-souled Saindhava, strong and drunk with heroism, Draupadī Kṛṣṇā was recovered by those great-souled ones [your brothers], having accomplished a very difficult feat...Rāma recovered Vaidehī without such companions...His allies were monkeys[43] and black-faced bears, creatures of a different species (*jātyantaragatā*), king—think that over in your mind (7–11).

Both sides of the *Rāmopākhyāna's* frame thus have the same structure, moving in from Draupadī to Dharmarāja, and out from Dharmarāja to Draupadī: it is Yudhiṣṭhira's guileless questions[44] and his resolve

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[43] Literally "deer of the trees", *śākhāmṛga* (3.276.11a).

[44] This is an important strain (or trope) that carries through the *Śāntiparvan*: e.g., Yudhiṣṭhira's reflections on the dashed "hopes" that he had for Duryodhana (12.125.1–7); his horrified and stunned reaction to the "robber morality" (*dasyumaryādā*) that Bhīṣma has unveiled as law for times of distress (140.1); his

that keep things to the path, but it is "looking at her"—something he has done from its beginning[45]—that defines it. As an eighteen-*adhyāya* epitome, one might thus consider the *Rāmopākhyāna* as a model lesson on sticking to the path not only in the face of adversity, but when the path is broken.

Now within the *Rāmopākhyāna* itself, while it allows one to trace a path theme that is sometimes explicit and more often implicit, it is, in *Rām* terms, only the second part of the path—from Kabandha on—that can be traced with any consistency. For the first part, there is to begin with no Vālmīki, and of course a different frame story. And from there on, of the Seven *ṛṣi*s, the only one to make an appearance is Vasiṣṭha, who, as hinted earlier, is probably already a fixture in the *Rāmopākhyāna* when Daśaratha hails his *purohita*, without naming him, in announcing his determination to make Rāma his successor (*Mbh* 3.261.14), and who thereafter appears by name twice.[46] We may note that the *Rāmopākhyāna* thus has no earlier roles for Vasiṣṭha. And for the rest of the *ṛṣi*s, next to nothing. There is no Ṛśyaśṛṅga, or for that matter Vasiṣṭha, at the boys' birth; instead, just this from Brahmā: "For that purpose the four-armed Viṣṇu has descended at my command" (*tadartham avatīrno 'sau manniyogāc caturbhujaḥ/viṣṇuḥ*; 260.5). There is no Viśvāmitra, Atri, Rāma Jāmadagnya,[47] or for that matter Vasiṣṭha involved in the stories of youth and marriage; just this: "In the course of time his 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" (261.4–5b; van Buitenen 1978: 731). There is no Bharadvāja; just this of Bharata: "He found Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa on Mount Citrakūṭa" (216.63cd). From Citrakūṭa to Pañcavatī (which is not named) there is not a peep from Atri or Agastya. Sītā drops her jewels over the monkeys when she is abducted (263.7), but there is no mention that she might have gotten

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claim not to "understand those who are cruel and their action" (*nṛśaṃsān na vijānāmi teṣām karma ca*; 158.1cd).

[45] See 1.182.11–15 on first seeing her; 2.58.33–37 describing her as he is about to wager and lose her.

[46] Where the *Rām* would lead one to expect him: attending Bharata into the forest to find Rāma (261.43) and performing Rāma's coronation after his return from Laṅkā (275.65)—both times with Vāmadeva.

[47] The *Mbh* knows a clear departure from or variant of this story only in a clear interpolation (3, Appendix I, no. 14), on which see Sukthankar 1936: 20–21; Fitzgerald 2002: 94, n. 12; Magnone 2004.

some of them from Atri and Anasūyā. Nor does Atri give any direc-
tions to the Daṇḍaka Forest, which Rāma enters via the hermitage of
Śarabhaṅga, the only forest ṛṣi mentioned (261.39), to settle down by
the Godāvarī (40). And from there his movements continue with no
Sutīkṣṇa or Agastya to give directions until the battle at Janasthāna has
left Khara and Dūṣaṇa killed and Śūrpaṇakhā disfigured (41–44)—it
does not say by whom. Further on, as we now see, there is no Mataṅga
ṛṣi either.

Once Rāma has "made this *dharma*-forest by the Godāvarī safe
again" (*cakre kṣemam punar…dharmāraṇyam*; 3.261.43cd), it doesn't
stay safe for long, since it is there that Sītā is soon abducted (262.40).
Whereupon the path theme blooms openly. First, by reading the head
gesture of the dying Jaṭāyus, Rāma gleans that Sītā has gone south
(263.20c–21b). And then comes Kabandha, of whom Vālmīki tells
quite a different, more attenuated story and revelation: that Rāma
may find Rāvaṇa' s abode if he forms an alliance with Sugrīva, though
Vālmīki also gives Kabandha the role of being the first to mention
Mataṅga's Wood. In the *Rāmopākhyāna*, the killing of Kabandha
sets free a *puruṣa* that not only reveals Kabandha's prior identity to
have been that of the *gandharva* Viśvāvasu cursed by Brahmā to pass
through a *rākṣasa* womb (34–38), but the following priceless, if partly
erroneous, information:

> Sītā has been abducted by King Rāvaṇa, who dwells in Laṅkā. Go to
> Sugrīva, he will render you help. Close by Mount Ṛṣyamūka there is a
> Lake Pampā…Sugrīva lives there with four councillors; he is the brother
> of the monkey king Vālin, of the golden garlands. This much I can tell
> you: you shall see Jānakī. The monkey king surely knows Rāvaṇa's seat
> (3.263.39– 42; van Buitenen 1978: 737).

Of course Sugrīva turns out not to know Rāvaṇa's seat, and soon enough
sends the monkeys out to the four directions to find not only Sītā but,
one must presume, Laṅkā (266.15–19). But for the rest Kabandha gives
reliable information that does not complicate Rāma's path to Sugrīva
with a forest or hermitage of Mataṅga or anything having to do with
it such as meeting with Śabarī, or hearing the stories of Vālin's fights
with Māyavin and the buffalo demon Dundubhi.[48] Indeed, Kabandha's

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[48] Curiously, the *Rāmopākhyāna* gives this name in the feminine as that of the
Gandharvī who takes birth as Mantharā to carry forward the gods' mission and the
plan of Brahmā (see 3.260.7–10).

words seem to remain continually useful beyond Kiṣkindhā. Rāma is reminded of them before he learns that Sugrīva has sent out the monkey search parties (266.4cd), and, after some explicit input on the path (*pathā*; 3.266.41d) from a female ascetic named Prabhāvatī rather than Svayamprabhā, they would seem to have been recalled when Jaṭāyus's vulture brother Sampāti finally tells that he knows where Laṅkā and Rāvaṇa are, giving specifics that Hanumān uses to jump the ocean (266.54). Thereafter, the Ocean allows Rāma to extend the "path" (*mārga*; 267.31a, 36a, 37a) to Laṅkā by a bridge.

And where does the path end up? Not of course with Vālmīki at Sītā's second ordeal, of which the *Rāmopākhyāna* is silent. It ends up at the only ordeal for Sītā that the *Rāmopākhyāna* knows. "Putting Sītā in front, who was put before Vibhīṣaṇa" (*sītāṃ puraskṛtya vibhīṣaṇapuraskṛtām*; 275.6ab), the kindly *rākṣasa* Avindhya[49] invites Rāma, "Receive your queen Jānakī of good conduct" (*sadvṛttām*; 7). But seeing "her body caked with dirt, wearing a black robe" (*śokakarśitām/malopacita… kṛṣṇavāsasam*; 9), Rāma suspects her of having been touched and spurns their reunion with the meanest words. It may be that having her come forth in black was a bad idea; Vālmīki has her emerge in costly jewels and "wearing a very costly robe" (*mahārhāmbaradhāriṇīm*; *Rām* 6.102.13d), though with no better results. So I think it more revealing to note that her appearance provides one of several reminders that Draupadī, who will soon begin her period in disguise entering the kingdom of Matsya "wrapped in a single large black garment that was very dirty" (*vāsaśca…kṛṣṇaṃ sumalinaṃ mahat*; *Mbh* 4.8.2), is listening—and that Sītā's path here overlaps with hers. Indeed, perhaps Draupadī has taken the cue from Sītā on this element of her disguise[50] in the hope that it will turn men off. In any case, it is now that Brahmā appears along with Indra, Agni, Vāyu, Yama, Varuṇa, Kubera, Bhagavat, the spotless Seven *ṛṣi*s, and Daśaratha, along with other gods and *gandharva*s, crowding the heavens "like the autumn sky dotted with stars" (3.275.18–20). Agni, Vāyu, and Varuṇa come

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[49] There is no Avindhya in this role in the *Rām*. See van Buitenen 1975: 212 and Vaidya 1971, who make this an argument for the priority of the *Rāmopākhyāna*, one which I believe still weighs in their favor despite Goldman's dismissal of it, drawing on Raghavan, that an Avindhya has lesser roles in the *Rām* (Goldman 1984: 37; Raghavan 1973: 18).

[50] On Draupadī and the Pāṇḍavas taking cues for their disguises from "Nala", see Hiltebeitel 2001a: 237–239.

to vouch for Sītā's innocence; Brahmā and Daśaratha for other stated reasons;[51] Bhagavat, rather unexpectedly;[52] and the Seven *ṛṣis*—for what? They would seem to be among the stars here. But perhaps they are also an inspiration for Vālmīki to bring them down to earth into the life of the hero and heroine. In isolation, the point is frivolous, but it is in their company, following the attestations by the elemental gods, that Brahmā tells Rāma,

> Son, for you to act here like this is not strange in you who obey the *dharma* of the royal *ṛṣis* (*rājarṣidharmiṇi*) and are strict in staying on the path of good conduct (*sādho sadvṛttamārgasthe*) (275.29a–c).

Brahmā is in effect saying that Rāma's behavior is up to code for one who strictly follows the royal *ṛṣis*' path, but that, now knowing Sītā to be innocent, he should (in the imperative) "Take her back" (*pratīcchemām*; 34b). Rāma should be accompanied on his "path of good conduct" by his wife "of good conduct"—both *sadvṛtta* (274.7 and 29), a term with some similarity to *dharmacārin*.

H. *Bhakti, Dharma, and Kāvya*

In treating how author, heroine, *ṛṣis*, and "path" are positioned, I have shown that the *Rāmopākhyāna* and *Rām* differ widely. But do the differences reveal anything significant? Some scholars have noted the absence in the *Rāmopākhyāna* of some, but not all, of the *ṛṣis* threaded through the *Rām*,[53] but none have seen a pattern there and none

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[51] Brahmā, among other things, to tell Rāma that he protected Sītā against Rāvaṇa's touch by Nalakūbara's curse; Daśaratha to hail his son and confirm him as heir.

[52] This usage could just refer back to Kubera, but more likely, in my opinion, it refers to someone additional, leaving Viṣṇu among the more surprising possibilities.

[53] Biardeau (2002, I: 724) observes the absence of Viśvāmitra, Ātreya and Anasūyā, and Agastya, but not the others; Vaidya (1971: xxxii) notes the absences of Viśvāmitra and "the episode of Ahalyā", which figures Gotama; Goldman (1984: 36), while criticizing Vaidya, remarks only on the absence of Viśvāmitra. For van Buitenen (1975: 211), without mentioning the *ṛṣis* at all, "Rāma and *Rām*, are wholly parallel till the death of Jaṭāyu"! For Brockington, "the Ṛśyaśṛṅga episode probably has an independent origin", and the Bhārgava Rāma encounter is an "interpolated" "grotesque story" (appreciatively quoting Sukthankar 1936: 21 to the latter effect) (Brockington 1998: 478–479). In another Brockington study, the Bharadvāja and Agastya episodes are "examples of interpolated episodes completely lacking in the Rāmopākhyāna" (Brockington 2000a: 299). Curiously, the only serious attention I know of to the related *Rām* themes of "Encounter holy hermit" and "Description of route through forest to goal" is Richard Gombrich's very suggestive comparison of the *Rām* with the *Vessantara Jātaka*, whose

even mention the absence of Vālmīki in this connection, although van Buitenen makes a good point about him when he says that the *Rāmopākhyāna* authors either did not know the *Rām* or knew that their own story was different from it, for

> [o]therwise it is hard to explain why they should not simply have placed the narrative in Vālmīki's mouth; *The Book of the Forest* does not hesitate to recruit a sage out of the blue to tell a story, witness Bṛhadaśva and the story of *Nala*. The *Mbh* does know Vālmīki as a sage (van Buitenen 1975: 214).

For most treatments of the relation between the two epic Rāma texts, it has been as if such features were secondary to the development of "real" *Rāmakathā*: that is, a heroic story about a king. With the exception of Biardeau, both scholars who have advanced the argument for the priority of the *Rāmopākhyāna* and those who have made good points while advancing the opposite position have weighed the discussion down with notions about source-dependence relations[54] and, above all, arguments about stages of growth, with the assumption that one or, better, both texts can be dissected to align portions of each along the timeline of a hero-story becoming mythologized by Rāma's divinization,[55] to which John Brockington adds an argument about recessional variation.[56] While I do think Vālmīki has the *Rāmopākhyāna* as a source, I believe the evidence of an archetype for both epics nullifies arguments for textual strata, for the hero-to-god timeline, and for recessional variation as a measure of early growth rather than simply *just* recessional variation. Yet when I say I believe that Vālmīki has the *Rāmopākhyāna* as a source, it must also be said that he almost certainly knew a variety of *Rāmakathā* sources,[57] as

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verse portions he dates to no "later than the 3rd century B.C." (Gombrich 1985: 428, 433 and *passim*). But the comparison goes only so far into the *Rām* as the Bharadvāja episodes, and concerns only that one *Rāmāyaṇa ṛṣi*.

[54] See Sukthankar 1939: 300–303; 1941: 487; van Buitenen 1975: 208. Goldman (1984: 34) starts his argument with Vaidya and van Buitenen's "revival of the theory that the *Rām* is not the source of the *Rāmopākhyāna*".

[55] This is now mainly Brockington's project (1998: 476–477; 2000: 297–300), which goes back to Jacobi [1893] 1960 and Hopkins 1930. But see also van Buitenen 1975: 209, 213; Goldman 1984: 38.

[56] See Brockington 1998: 474–476; 2000: 290–291.

[57] See Hiltebeitel 2005c for a discussion of non-epic genres in which the Rāma story was probably known before Vālmīki. See also Hopkins' not implausible argument that Rāma is originally a golden age king of legend whose story is only secondarily put to epic purposes (Hopkins 1930: 88–92).

would the *Rāmopākhyāna* author as well, if from nothing else than from the dispersal of varied Rāma story material in the *Mbh*. Indeed, as Brockington observes, the number of similes drawn on the Rāma story in the *Āraṇyakaparvan* and the battle books "implies considerable familiarity with the story on the part of the audience as well as the performer" (Brockington 1998: 472). As the *Rāmopākhyāna* itself says, "Even now 'Nala's Bridge' is famous on earth" (*nalasetur iti khyāto yo 'dyāpi prathito bhuvi*; *Mbh* 3.267.45ab). It is thus not necessary to rely on van Buitenen's notion of an "improbable proto-*Rāmacarita*" (Goldman 1984: 39) that the *Rāmopākhyāna* first summarizes before it grows further and "becomes known as the original poem (*ādikāvya*) of Vālmīki" (van Buitenen 1975: 211). We are surely not dealing with a linear cumulative development.

But yes, I do think the differences reveal something significant, and limit myself to three areas of more than a little consequence for Vālmīki: *bhakti, dharma,* and *kāvya.*

With regard to the first, the *Rāmopākhyāna*, like the *Nalopākhyāna*, keeps its story focused on the human plane of the hero and heroine, which is appropriate to their context as "mirror stories" for the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī. But like the *Nalopākhyāna*, it also makes a bare but sufficient allusion to its context amid the epic's wider *bhakti* idioms or conventions. Thus in the *Nalopākhyāna* Nala is accompanied by a superfluous charioteer named Vārṣṇeya described as *avatīrya vārṣṇeyo*, "Vārṣṇeya descending" (3.71.18), when he "descends" from the chariot, suggesting his role as a double for Vārṣṇeya Kṛṣṇa, avatar and chariot-driver for Arjuna.[58] And in the *Rāmopākhyāna*, Brahmā tells the gods and *ṛṣis* how Rāvana will be killed: "For that purpose the four-armed Viṣṇu has descended (*avatīrṇo ... viṣṇuḥ*) at my command" (260.5) as already quoted, with Brahmā going on to command the hosts of gods to take birth on earth as "Viṣṇu's companions" (*viṣṇoḥ sahāyān*; 260.6–7).[59] The chief difference is that whereas the *Nalopākhyāna* is intentionally cryptic (as it is frequently) in evoking an incarnation who is superfluous to its story, the *Rāmopākhyāna* can only be straightforward since it is introducing the hero as an incarnation. These are *bare* references, but the *Rāmopākhyāna* ones are not

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[58] See Biardeau 1985: 5–6, 8–9, 16–17, 31–32; Hiltebeitel 2001a: 219, 232; and further, the discussion of a "descent convention" in Hiltebeitel 2004c.
[59] The same term is used by Vaiśampāyana in the *Rāmopākhyāna's* "frame story" to describe the monkeys, bears, Pāṇḍavas, and allies of Indra (276.5–10—four times).

isolated, as has been argued by Brockington.[60] There is also, as we have seen, the strange appearance by "Bhagavat" among those who reunite Rāma and Sītā (275.18); and when Vasiṣṭha and Vāmadeva consecrate Rāma, he is called "the *Vaiṣṇava* hero" (*taṃ vaiṣṇavaṃ śūram*; 275.65). If Vālmīki had the *Rāmopākhyāna* among his sources, he would have been able to recognize a *bhakti* strain to improve upon, and also a model for restricting obvious *bhakti* references to scenes at the beginning and end of Rāma's story. The reasons for this economy in explicit reference to Rāma's divinity, which are especially pertinent in *Vālmīki* but also implicit in the *Rāmopākhyāna*, have been made clear by Pollock (1984).

As regards *dharma*, that is surely the primary subject that Vālmīki has enriched by introducing the Seven *ṛṣi*s plus Agastya, and by inversion the *ṛṣi* Mataṅga, as guides and signposts along the hero and heroine's path. For as representatives of Veda, the Seven and Agastya are now, for Vālmīki, the highest authorities on *dharma*, which is, in one way or another, what they and their wives communicate to Rāma and Sītā along that path. The striking thing, however, is that whereas the *Rāmopākhyāna* keeps the Rāma-Sītā story within the ambiguous, problematic, and somewhat forgiving (that is all Rāma has to do at its end) *dharma* of the *Mbh*, Vālmīki—it would almost seem—seizes on the Rāma story to present *dharma* as a much more rigorous and uncompromising affair: monogamy as the model; a *dharma* of the limit situation (*maryādā*)—a term never used in the *Rāmopākhyāna* but vital to Vālmīki's portrayal of Rāma.[61] One of the other personages absent from the *Rāmopākhyāna* but emphasized by Vālmīki is

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[60] Brockington 1998: 476: "The sole exception" [Brockington 2000a: 300: "the only exception"] to Rāma being mainly a human and exemplary figure, "the position reached in the middle of the second stage of growth of the Rāmāyaṇa", "is the brief *adhyāya* 260 where Viṣṇu incarnates as Rāma, and the other gods beget" monkey and bear sons. Brockington finds it "the more significant that the *Rāmopākhyāna* does not allude to Rāma's divinity in its closing chapter", but it is hard not to read Brahmā's closing words as just such an allusion: "Like an immortal, you have accomplished a great feat of the gods" (*kṛtaṃ tvayā mahatkāryaṃ devānām amaraprabha*; 3.275.34cd). In any case, as quoted just below, it is in the same closing *adhyāya* that Rāma is consecrated "the *Vaiṣṇava* hero" (65).

[61] See *Rām* 2.103.3 (Rāma speaking on "the man who is beyond the limit" (*nirmaryādas…puruṣaḥ*, pointing toward his post-epic title of Maryādā Puruṣottama); 4.18.25 (Rāma's new excuse for killing Vālin is the latter's "transgression of the limit"); 5.33.11 (Hanumān to Sītā: "Lovely lady, Rāma is the guardian of the four classes of society and enforcer of the norms of social behavior" [*maryādānāṃ ca lokasya kartā kārayitā ca saḥ*]; Goldman & Goldman 1996: 201).

the Śūdra Śambūka, killed by Rāma for the offense of practicing *tapas* (*Rām* 7.66–67).[62] The *Rāmopākhyāna's* Kiṣkindhā is uncomplicated by stories of impure buffalo blood and implications of untouchability contaminating a nearby Mataṅgavanam. The *Rāmopākhyāna* gives Sītā only one ordeal, the first, and it is not by purifying fire as it is in Vālmīki; and thereafter Rāma has no second thoughts about her—the story is over. Yet in the *Rām* it is precisely at the second ordeal, not found in the *Rāmopākhyāna*, and "crucial", as Shulman says, "to any understanding of the poetics of the work as a completed whole" (Shulman 2001: 34), that Vālmīki makes himself present at the end of the road to introduce his own final twist on the problematic character of *dharma* and Rāma's strict adherence to it: that it cost Rāma his wife.

As to *kāvya*, there are two ideas that have tied debate over these matters in knots. The first is that either the *Rāmopākhyāna* is some kind of résumé or abridgment of the *Rām*[63] or that the *Rāmāyaṇa* is some kind of embellishment of the *Rāmopākhyāna*. The issue has seemed inconclusive precisely because so much ingenuity has been expended in nuancing and making good arguments for both positions. The best argument for abridgment is that there certainly are passages in the *Rāmopākhyāna* that look like they need some fuller version to unpack them, and that the *Rām*, being a text one can cite in such cases, is a more convincing candidate than some "improbable proto-*Rāmacarita*". That is Goldman's argument (1984: 38–39). But I am no longer convinced that it levels the playing field.[64] For one thing, too much weight

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[62] Cf. Biardeau 2002, I: 275; Hopkins 1930: 101: The Rāma-Śambuka (*sic*) story *is* mentioned at *Mbh* 12.149.62.

[63] Recently, this is Shulman's view: "Western scholarship has laboured valiantly to make the relationship between this *résumé* and the text of the *Rāmāyaṇa* intelligible—but there is still no consensus"—that is, while there is no consensus on intelligibility, the *Rāmopākhyāna* is a "résumé", to which Shulman adds, "the *significant fact* remains that one epic *cites* at length *the story of the other*" (my italics). Shulman speaks of "certain minor but interesting divergences" between the two Rāma narratives without saying what they are (Shulman 2001: 22).

[64] Recognizing that this is a vulnerable point in my argument, I would, at least at this point, recommend that we approach individual cases from one or the other of two angles. Either the *Rāmopākhyāna* would probably be drawing on a *Rāmakathā* tradition that later makes it into the *Rāmāyaṇa*, as in the crow story discussed by Goldman (1984: 38), or it may only appear as an ellipsis because we know the *Rāmāyaṇa*, but actually makes sense on its own—as when Śūrpaṇakhā is defaced without it being told how (*Mbh* 3.262.44), which looks like a fragment, but, in its context, could have taken place while fighting alongside her brothers Khara and Dūṣana—like Tāṭakā. Similarly, Hanumān only faces (and kills) one marine *rākṣasī* (266.57).

has been put on the claim that differences are "easily explainable as examples of the *Rāmopākyāna's* somewhat awkward and often pedestrian condensation of the tale as told by Vālmīki" (Goldman 1984: 37; cf. Brockington 1998, 474: "a rather careless abridgement"). The differences are not so easily dismissed and the *Rāmopākhyāna* is perhaps not so awkward or careless. More than this, those maintaining the priority of the *Rām* have never answered why a poem condensing or abridging that text would persist in eliminating so many of the scenes and characters for which it is famous, many already mentioned, such as Sītā's *agniparīkṣā*, banishment, and final ordeal; Śambūka, Kuśa, Lava, Vālmīki himself and the creation and transmission of the poem; others not yet mentioned, such as Sītā's birth in a furrow; Hanumān "bringing the mount Droṇācala (*sic*) with its medicinal plants to revive Lakṣmaṇa hit by Indrajit's missile" (Vaidya 1971: xxxii);[65] and indeed, some of which are among those that best exemplify the *Rām* as *kāvya*: Rāma's madness upon Sītā's abduction; Hanumān's viewing of Rāvaṇa's harem and his telling Sītā her husband's story; all the scenes of grief upon Rāma's departure from Ayodhyā—grief being the *Rām*'s underlying *sthāyibhāva* or "stable aesthetic emotion" in relation to *karuṇā*, "pity" as its pre-dominant aesthetic flavor (*aṅgīrasa*).[66]

The second idea to have tied up debate is that the *Rām* as *kāvya*—indeed *ādikāvya*, "the first poem"—is to be differentiated from the *Mbh* as *itihāsa*, something like "history". This idea has been advanced along with different arguments. Vaidya, for instance, picking up on the "history" connotation of *itihāsa*, argues that

> the poet Vālmīki introduced into his epic poem an innovation of Sītā's test by fire against the epic and historical background of Vāyu assuring Rāma of Sītā's purity (Vaidya 1971: xxxv).

That is, since the *Rāmopākhyāna* is "a part and parcel of a work called Itihāsa", its account featuring Vāyu makes a "historical statement"

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[65] See Biardeau 2002, 1: 725.

[66] *Rām* 1.2.17; cf. 4.8. See Goldman 1984: 71–72; Tubb 1991: 174–179. There are only four uses of the word *śoka* in the *Rāmopākhyāna*, all at telling points but centered only on Rāma and Sītā: Rāma's grief at Sītā's abduction (*Mbh* 3.263.23); Sītā's "grief for her husband" in Rāvaṇa's *aśoka* grove (264.48); a description of Sītā as "thin from grief" as she is surrounded there by *rākṣasī*s (265.30); and finally another as Rāma sees her "drawn with grief" just as he is about to repudiate her (275.9). There are no scenes of grief in "Ayodhyā" paralleling those in the *Rām*'s second book. Vālmīki also emotionally deepens *Rāmopākhyāna* relationships in this direction, such as his construal of Rāma and Sugrīva's "friendship" as one of commiseration (see Hiltebeitel 2004b; 2004d).

(p. xxxv). As Goldman says, Vaidya's point can be counted among the "absurdities" to have arisen in this debate, since the *itihāsa/kāvya* genre distinction is useless in claiming one or the other to be "more or less valid historically".[67] On the other hand, stressing the *kāvya* side of the distinction, Shulman calls on the opposition to remind us that India provides no genre term for both works that would cover over the felt differences between them in the manner of the Western term "epic" (Shulman 2001: 39).

My working premise for this chapter has been a simple one: that the *Rām* poet knowingly develops his poem as a single-genre work out of, and over against, the multi-genre precedent of the *Mbh*, which characterizes itself not only as *itihāsa* but *purāṇa*, *ākhyāna*, *upākhyāna*, *saṃvāda*, *śāstra*, *upaniṣad*, *saṃhitā*, great *jñāna*, and fifth Veda. I believe that the selection of *itihāsa* as the genre term for the *Mbh* could only have arisen once classifying minds selected that term out of this welter of genre terms, and that such a reduction could only have been made once it became a matter of aesthetic interest to distinguish the *Mbh* from the *Rām* and the latter's reputation as *kāvya*.[68] As with his narrowed down articulations of *dharma*, Vālmīki invents a purer model, that of single-genre poetry.

Yet no one would say there are not fine poetic moments in the *Mbh*, or even in the *Rāmopākhyāna*. Moreover, the epic has some interesting things to say about *kavi*s, poets. Near the beginning of its very first *adhyāya*, before the bard Ugraśravas opens his storytelling, he announces to the Naimiṣa Forest sages,

> I will proclaim the thought entire of the infinitely splendid Vyāsa (*pravakṣyāmi mataṃ kṛtsnaṃ vyāsasyāmitatejasaḥ*). Some poets (*kavayaḥ*) have told it before, others tell it now, and others too will tell this history (*itihāsa*) on earth. It is indeed a great erudition (*mahaj jñānam*) established in the three worlds that is held (or "possessed": *dhāryate*) by the twiceborn in its particulars and totalities (*vistaraiś ca samāsaiḥ*) (*Mbh* 1.1.23–25).

Then, a little further along, toward the end of the second *adhyāya*, the bard adds,

> Having heard this *upākhyāna* so worthy of being heard no other will please him, just as the crow sounds harsh after hearing the male cuckoo.

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[67] Goldman 1984: 35. On the genre issue, see further Goldman 1995: 75–76; Hiltebeitel 2001d.

[68] Aspects of this argument need to be reconsidered in the light of chapter 4.

> From this supreme *itihāsa* arise the inspirations of poets (*jāyante kavibuddhayaḥ*), just as the three dispositions of the world[69] arise from the five elements. Purāṇa turns in the compass of this *ākhyāna*, O twice-borns, just as the four classes of creatures (turn) in the compass of space. Works of every quality resort to this *ākhyāna* even as the interacting senses resort to the manifold workings of the mind. There is no story (*kathā*) on earth that hasn't resorted to this *ākhyāna*, even as support for the body comes from resorting to food. This *ākhyāna* is lived on by all the best poets (*idaṃ sarvaiḥ kavivarair ākhyānam upajīvyate*) even as a lord is born with servants wishing for promotion (*udayaprepsubhir bhṛtyair abhijāta iveśvaraḥ*).[70]

Taken together in sequence, these two passages first have the bard locate the text as a possession of Brahmans. Then he indicates that now that he has heard it recited by Vaiśampāyana at Janamejaya's Snake Sacrifice, that is, at its debut recital in the world of men, from which he has travelled to the more or less celestial Naimiṣa Forest, domain of the celestial *ṛṣi*s,[71] it is now in that world of men for others to tell, and, more than that, for others to be inspired by as they seek to supercede it. Indeed, it is almost as if the bard senses in the second passage that a work such as Vālmīki's is competition coming over the horizon. I believe this possibility should be seriously considered. What is the relation between the *Rām* poet and the sage Vālmīki mentioned fairly frequently in the *Mbh*?[72] Considering the largely overlapping

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[69] Van Buitenen (1973: 43) translates "the configurations of the three worlds"; Ganguli & Roy 1884–96, 1: 35: "the formation of the three worlds". According to the Vedanticizing construal of Nīlakaṇṭha, *ādhyātmādhibhūtādhidaivānāṃ saṃyagvidhayo racanāḥ* (Kinjawadekar 1929–33, 1: 39).

[70] *Mbh* 1.2.236–241: *śrutvā tvidam upākhyānaṃ śrāvyam anyaṃ na rocate/ puṃskokilarutaṃ śrutvā rūkṣā dhvāṅkṣasya vāg iva//* 236 //
itihāsottamād asmāj jāyante kavibuddhayaḥ/
pañcabhya iva bhūtebhyo lokasaṃvidhayas trayaḥ// 237 //
asyākhyānasya viṣaye purāṇaṃ vartate dvijāḥ/
antarikṣasya viṣaye prajā iva caturvidhāḥ// 238 //
kriyāguṇānāṃ sarveṣām idam ākhyānam āśrayaḥ/
indriyāṇāṃ samastānāṃ citrā iva manaḥkriyāḥ// 239 //
anāśrityaitad ākhyānaṃ kathā bhuvi na vidyate/
āhāram anapāśritya śarīrasyeva dhāranaṃ// 240 //
idaṃ sarvaiḥ kavivarair ākhyānam upajīvyate/
udayaprepsubhir bhṛtyair abhijāta iveśvaraḥ// 241 //

[71] See Hiltebeitel 2001a: 92–176.

[72] See 1.50.14 (Vālmīki praised by Āstīka for his gentle firmness). 2,7.14 (among many famous *ṛṣi*s in Indra's *sabhā* or hall), 3.83.102 (among select *ṛṣi*s waiting for the Pāṇḍāvas on pilgrimage), 5.81.27 (among illustrious *ṛṣi*s attending Kṛṣṇa's departure for Hāstinapura to confront the Kauravas), 5.99.11 (a son of Garuḍa. and thus probably someone else), 12.200.4 (among *ṛṣi*s cited by Bhīṣma regarding Govinda), and 13.18.7 (addressing Yudhiṣṭhira regarding Śiva, who absolved Vālmīki of a charge of

reading communities created by these two works, it is not impossible that "Vālmīki" could be a *nom de plume* taken up from the *Mbh* by a *Rām* poet highly familiar with that text. Indeed, if the *Mbh* is a work of composite authorship, "Vālmīki" may have been an apprentice-contributor, or someone at least familiar with the project. To speak of the temporal priority of the *Mbh* over the *Rām* is thus not to rule out the possibility that the latter might have been started before the former was finished. We are a long way from making such speculation worthwhile, but I offer it because I believe that it points in a reasonable direction.

Yet this allusion to new ambitious *kavis* coming along, and possibly to Vālmīki as the first among them, was at some point no longer felt to be sufficient to characterize Vyāsa's inspiration of other poets, or indeed the relation of his work to the *Rām*. Thus the famous interpolation in which Brahmā appears to Vyāsa to recommend that Gaṇeśa be his scribe was introduced between these two passages, though much closer to the first, to make the point that the *Mbh* is indeed a *kāvya*. For present purposes, what matters is that the whole passage is an

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Brahmanicide and told him, "Your fame shall be foremost (*yaśas te ʿgryaṃ bhavisyati*; 8f). One problematic reference, however, is included in the Pune Critical Edition under questionable conditions, since it is not found in one Kāśmīrī manuscript. K4. At 7.118.48ab, Sātyaki, having taken criticism for the manner in which he has dismembered Bhūriśravas, attributes to "Vālmīki" the following "*śloka*" (even though it is only a half-*śloka*, and is referred to otherwise in many mss.): "what causes pain to enemies, that should be done" (*pīḍākaram amitrāṇāṃ yat syāt kartavyam eva tat*; 7.118.48cd = *Rām* 6.68.27cd). This epigrammatic line gets inflated with further *Rām* echoes in various mss. by an extra line to make it quotable as a "*śloka*", raising the likelihood that it has been overlaid not only by these echoes but by the attribution to Vālmīki. See Hopkins 1926: 216–217; 1930: 86–87, and Brockington 1998: 480, going over some of the same ground from different angles. Brockington (1998: 480) also mentions an identification by Albrecht Weber of the "Bhārgava" cited at *Mbh* 12.57.40–41 as Vālmīki, and concurs with Weber that the verses attributed to this "Bhārgava" are "based on" *Rām* 2.61.1. But given the extensive differences between the two passages, the identification cannot carry much weight. Fitzgerald identifies this Bhārgava as "= (probably) Śukra" (Fitzgerald 2004a: 302 and notations). Curiously, the only other problematic passage I know of implying direct reference to the *Rām*, one mentioning the work's title rather than its author, is also found in three lines (*Mbh* 3.147.11c–12d) omitted by the same Kāśmīrī manuscript that omits the attribution to Vālmīki, K4. Here, quite plausibly interpolated between lines that have Bhīma relate that he and Hanumān are brothers, Bhīma further describes Hanumān as "renowned in the *Rām*" (*rāmāyaṇe ʿtivikhāyātaḥ*: 147.11c) for the leap (already just mentioned by Bhīma at 147.9d) that rescued Sītā. In retaining these passages, the editors (S. K. De for Book 7 and V. S. Sukthankar for Book 3) seem to follow, without comment, Sukthankar's poor evaluation of K4 as "carelessly written" with some noteworthy insertions (Sukthankar 1933: xii, li; Prolegomena to Book 1). But Sukthankar does not address the value of K4's omissions.

interpolation within an interpolation.[73] First there was an interpolation featuring Brahmā's confirmation that Vyāsa has composed a *kāvya*. Says Vyāsa,

> O Blessed one, I have created this highly venerated *kāvya* (*kāvyam 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.[74] No poets (*kavayo*) are equal to the excellence of this *kāvya* (Vulgate 1.1.72–73b; Critical Ed. 1, App. 1, lines 33–35).

—more or less repeating what the second of the older passages had said about emerging rival poets, but substituting *kāvya* for the genre-terms *itihāsa* and *ākhyāna*. Second, twenty lines were subsequently inserted into this first interpolation for Brahmā to recommend that Vyāsa call upon Gaṇeśa to be his scribe.[75] While the Brahmā interpolation is concerned with *kāvya*, the Gaṇeśa interpolation within it is concerned with writing and mentions *kāvya* only in its lead-in verse.

Now as Shulman says, the Brahmā interpolation was "clearly composed under the influence of the *Rām* frame story, [in having] Brahmā visit Vyāsa just as he is said to have come to Vālmīki", adding further that it was "an attempt to bring the *Mahābhārata* in line with the *kāvya* tradition" (Shulman 2001: 33, n. 10). One might assume that at least the Gaṇeśa modification would have been made rather late in the *Mbh*'s manuscript history. Lüders observes that it is clearly a northern interpolation, and mentions references to the Gaṇeśa legend by the 9th century C.E. as a *terminus ante quem* (Lüders 1929: 1144). More interesting, however, are his remarks on the Brahmā interpolation. Based "not only on its occurrence in all Grantha, Telugu, and Malayālam manuscripts (with the exception of Mi), but also on the mention of Pāśupata philosophy" (Lüders 1929: 1144 [my translation]) in it, Lüders argues that the Brahmā interpolation was almost certainly introduced in south India. Although I doubt that Pāśupata philosophy

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[73] See Lüders 1929: 1144–1145.
[74] That is, Brahmā treats Vyāsa's word as generating an act of truth.
[75] Vulgate 1.1.74–83; Critical Ed. 1, App. 1, *apud* line 36. See Lüders 1929: 1144; Sullivan 1990; Hiltebeitel 2004d.

can identify the passage as south Indian, since Pāśupatas are also men-
tioned in the *Nārāyaṇīya* (*Mbh* 12.337.59b and 62d), the manuscript
evidence for the southern origins of the Brahmā interpolation is cer-
tainly sound. It is particularly its occurrence in all but one[76] of the
Malayālam (M) manuscripts that is striking. Here I would like to draw
on the current work of T.P. Mahadevan (forthcoming), who attempts
to link the migrations of two Brahman groups—the Pūrvaśikhās (those
with forelocks) and Aparaśikhās (those with topknots to the back)—
from north to south India with the north-to-south migrations of the
epics. Mahadevan argues that the M version—long recognized as the
shortest version in the Southern Recension, and similar in at least that
regard to the shortest Northern Recension versions (the Śāradā and
Kāśmīrī)—is connected with those who made the first migration, the
Pūrvaśikhas, and that the more inflated other manuscript groupings
of the Southern Recension (the Telugu and Grantha manuscripts)
reflect the overlay upon M that follows from the arrival south of the
much later (mainly) Aparaśikhā migration. Mahadevan argues that
the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans would have brought a *Mbh* probably close
to the Kāśmīrī-Śāradā recension which they fashioned into the oldest
Southern archetype and later developed into M in Kerala after (or even
during) the so-called Kalabhra interregnum of the 4th to 7th centuries
A.D. (Monius 2001: 3). Because the Brahmā story is so widespread in
Southern manuscripts, it would be likely to have originated from the
pre-Kalabhra times when M was not yet separate from the Southern
Recension,[77] and to have also traveled north even to be found in *some*
of the Kāśmīrī manuscripts. We thus get a quite early pre-4th century
date as likely for the Brahmā interpolation, with its concern to estab-
lish Vyāsa's *Mbh* on a par with Vālmīki's *Rām* as a *kāvya*. And indeed,
it would not be an insignificant fact for it to be in a south Indian set-
ting that the two epics would be for the first time felt in India to be of
a single genre, for that is what I have heard them called in south India:
irentu kāppiyam, "the two *kāvya*s".[78] In this regard, Shulman seems to

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[76] Note that the issue here differs from that raised in footnote 72 above concerning
the two omissions from one Kāśmīrī manuscript. This omission only reflects what is
clearly an interpolation as a whole, and could suggest a state of things in the south
prior to the interpolation's being made there.

[77] The statement here is corrected in line with the new notes near the end of chapter
7. The original article read that M "was establishing the groundwork of the Southern
Recension."

[78] I have not yet been able to learn how old this usage is—in particular, in relation
to that of *kāppiyam* as the genre term for classical Tamil epics. See *Encyclopaedia of*

have reached a selective conclusion when he writes in the next-to-last sentence of his essay on the historical poetics of the Sanskrit epics, "the Indian tradition is, in any case, clearly right to class the two epics separately, in different genres reflecting very distinct visions—even if to us both are surely 'epic.'" (Shulman 2001: 39). In South India, they can both be *kāvya*.

*F*inally, what happens if we add the theme I have explored most extensively in this essay—the unfolding of Rāma and Sītā's path by posting the Seven *ṛṣi*s plus Agastya along the way—to our examples of how the *Rām* as *kāvya* surpasses not only the *Mbh* but, with it, and more specifically, the *Rāmopākhyāna*? Here Mahadevan's research into the initial Pūrvaśikhā migration opens another intriguing angle. Whereas the Pūrvaśikhās, as first to arrive in the south, go by the primary *pravara* names of the Seven *ṛṣi*s plus Agastya (the latter is included, but only barely), the Aparaśikhās, as subsequent arrivals, take on only secondary and tertiary *pravara* names. That is to say, the *pravara* names used by the Pūrvaśikhās as the first Brahmans to migrate to the south are the very same names as those of the Vedic *Rām* Brahmans who guide Rāma and Sītā to the south. This coincidence would do nothing to discourage the idea that the *Vālmīki Rām* has something to do with "Brahman colonization" of the south. Indeed, in giving these Vedic *ṛṣi*s the trailblazing role in mapping the extension of Rāmarājya to the south,[79] Vālmīki, probably reflecting conditions in which that first migration had already begun, may go beyond the *Rāmopākhyāna*, and the *Mbh*, precisely to create a charter myth for this unfolding process.

In any case, considering how many have overlooked it, the marking of Rāma and Sītā's path by these *ṛṣi*s is clearly not the most memorable or "poetic" of Vālmīki's inspirations. But it is the one by which he sets forth the path of Sītā and Rāma as both a *ṛṣi*'s path and a *poet*'s path that leads, in more ways than one, ultimately to him.

Tamil Literature (1990): 138, 200–211, 342–353. But in harmony with what is said there, the *Tamil Lexicon* (1926–39): 2, 868 gives a definition of *kāppiyam* that certainly accommodates both Sanskrit epics: "kāppiyam, n. < *kāvya*. A narrative poem dealing with *aṟam, poruḷ, iṉpam*, and *vīṭu* [i.e., and *mutatis mutandis*, with *dharma, artha, kāma*, and *mokṣa*] and describing the exploits of a hero, being of two kinds, viz., *peru-ṉ-kāppiyam* and *ciṟukāppiyam* [i.e., big *kāvya* and small *kāvya*]."

[79] This is the brunt of what Rāma has to tell Vālin at 4.18.6–11 and 23–24: while in exile, Rāma extends the law of Bharata—itself, of course, anchored by Bharata's devotion to Rāmarājya via Rāma's sandals—throughout the world.

MAPPING *BHAKTI* IN THE SANSKRIT EPICS:
FRIENDSHIP, HOSPITALITY, AND SEPARATION

In a review of my book *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*, Jim Fitzgerald calls me "a fierce defender of the divine Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti*" in the *Mahābhārata* (Fitzgerald 2003, 803).[1] I am fine with "fierce," and happy to see that being a defender of "the divine Kṛṣṇa" in the *Mahābhārata* places me in the esteemed company of Bimal K. Matilal, whose seminal article "Kṛṣṇa: In Defence of a Devious Divinity" (2002) defends Kṛṣṇa for doing what he could, given that a Hindu god is not omnipotent, and that he was working with humans. But I do not take Matilal to have been defending Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti*. Of course Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti* does not need me to defend it, especially as it is enriched in vernacular traditions. But I do think it has been underestimated not only in the *Mahābhārata* but in both Sanskrit epics.

Yet those who see things differently always raise a problem, which I will call the intermittency problem: why do the epics' explicit *bhakti* signposts appear only intermittently? Following up some hints from my book, Fitzgerald suggests that I would attribute this intermittency to the composers' "lax process and…[their] love of concealment" (*idem*). That is a good start, but it is possible to be more specific.

Since that discussion, I have carried forward the effort to be more specific under the rubric of "Mapping *Bhakti* in the Sanskrit Epics," the lead title of this presentation. With the subtitle "Friendship, Hospitality, and Separation," I mean to indicate three stepping stones that my mapping project has located. This presentation will treat meanly the third stepping stone, separation, by which I mean of course the *bhakti* idiom of love of God in separation (*viraha*). But to get to that "third step," we must walk the first two. The leading thought of today's

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[1] This chapter retains its orally presented character. It was delivered at the colloquium "Approaching God: A Symposium on Hindu Devotion" held at the Princeton University Center for the Study of Religion, February 6–7, 2009. It can be read as the conclusion of series of three articles on *bhakti* and *friendship*; see Hiltebeitel 2007a, press- a and b.

presentation is that, while the first two steps help reduce the intermittency problem, the third step explains them all.

A. *Hospitality and Friendship*

Now if one seeks to map *bhakti* in the two epics, what kind of cartography best suits this double terrain? Clearly, it will not just be a matter of mapping *bhakti* terms or even themes, which can always be set off as pericopes in the name of higher criticism. One wants to get into the bones of these works, whose "governing intention"—and on this, I agree with Fitzgerald not only regarding the *Mahābhārata*—was "concerned to provide ideological and narrative grounding for a brahmanical conception of kingly rule and hierarchical society in the wake of the Mauryan empire" (2003, 811). But if a post-Mauryan Brahmanical ideology puts kingship front and center in both epics, and may even be said to be where the poets put their money, this is not, in either text, how they played the game. How society is ordered is one thing. How people get along is another. That was encouraged by invoking hospitality and friendship among the more open and flexible civilizational discourses and practices familiar as custom throughout South Asian Ārya culture under endless local and regional variations. The *dharmasūtra*s and *Laws of Manu* both harked back to the Veda in reformulating hospitality and friendship as *dharma*, and so did the epics. But the epics could give them far more nuanced treatment by telling stories, among others, about how God was once among men. In so doing, they could enliven these practices and discourses in narratives that were far more compelling than incessant topheavy reminders that the four social classes were created from Puruṣa. For present purposes, this means that the first two stepping stones, hospitality and friendship, invite us to walk *bhakti* along with *dharma*.

For the most part, the basic vocabularies on hospitality and friendship are shared by the epics and the *dharma* literature. But the epics also innovate and archaize. Let me say a few words about these basic vocabularies.

First, regarding hospitality, *atithi* is the main old word for guest, and *ātithyam* for hospitality, while there is no consistent term for host, that concept being more contextual. In the epics, a host may be found in a house, a sacrifice, a performance, perhaps on a chariot, in a heart, etc. In Paul Younger's terms, we can recognize that these locations

anticipate the *bhakti* idiom of "playing host to deity" in temples and festivals where God is both guest and host at once (2002, 13–14). But a few pre-epic usages are also of interest. Keeping in mind our image of stepping stones, we might make something of Laurie Patton's discussion of Viṣṇu as "the 'guest' par excellence" in the *ātithyeṣṭi*, the *ātithya* or "guest offering rites" rites mentioned in certain *Brāhmaṇa* and *Śrautasūtra* texts, which "call the gods to mind," and to which Viṣṇu is "invited" by the *acchāvāka* or "inviter" priest, a deputy of the *hotṛ*, by reciting the *Ṛgveda*, praising Viṣṇu for "traversing three times," he whose "power...is like a terrifying, hungry, wild animal who dwells in the mountains (or in speech), the one of many hymns" in whose "three steps, all worlds abide" (Patton trans., 2005, 151). Also on guests, *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* is suggestive in the same vein:

> 'Whether you hold them dear or not,' it is stated, 'guests lead you to heaven.' When a man gives food in the morning, at noon, and in the evening, they constitute the three pressings of Soma; when he rises as his guest gets up to leave, it constitutes the final rite of the Soma sacrifice; when he addresses the guest with kind words, it constitutes the praise of the priestly fee; when he follows the guest as he leaves, it constitutes the Viṣṇu steps; and when he returns, it constitutes the final bath (Olivelle trans., 1999, 50).

Friendship, meanwhile, is more multi-toned. Several Sanskrit words are often translated by "friend," two of which are important to differentiate: *sakhi* and *suhṛd*. I translate *sakhi* as "friend." But it is important to note that *Mahābhārata* usages draw on Vedic precedents in giving this term two senses, which I call "pact friendship," as when Indra makes pacts with demons such as Vṛtra and Namuci, and "intimate friendship," as when Indra is helped to defeat Vṛtra by his "intimate friend" Viṣṇu (*índrasya yújya sákhā*). *Gautama Dharmasūtra* may suffice to show how *sakhi*s, like fathers and teachers, are not ordinary guests or dependants, but should be treated as such at their discretion: "He should give food first to guests (*atithi*), children, the sick, pregnant women, females in his household, and the old, as well as menials. When his teacher, father, or friend (*ācāryapitṛsakhīnām*) is visiting, however, he should check with them before cooking the meal" (*GDhS* 1.5.24–25/5.26–27). I am well aware that with the exception of the friendship of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, friendship is not the first thing one thinks of regarding epic treatments of *dharma* and *bhakti*. But let us not forget that the epic uses *sakhi* to describe Kṛṣṇa's special friendships with *two* people, Arjuna and Draupadī. Here *Gautama* is again

interesting and unique in providing a rule on female *sakhī*s: "Sex with a female friend (*sakhī*) or sister (*sayoni*), a woman belonging to one's lineage (*sagotrā*), the wife of one's pupil, one's daughter-in-law, and a cow is equal to sex with the wife of an elder" (*GDhS* 3.5.12/23.12). Kṛṣṇa could be said to listen to Gautama in the epic, if not, of course, in later texts where he is a *sakhi* to the Gopīs. But we also get the larger idea that Kṛṣṇa is "a friend alike to friend and foe." Unlike *sakhi, suhṛd* seems to be an epic coinage. Meaning "one with a good heart," I translate it as "wellwisher." Rāma is a *sakhi* of no one in that term's sense of intimacy. Rather, as Rāma emerges into view in court and palace life, what he has are wellwishers, *suhṛd*s—impersonal and never named. For example, "As for Rāma's wellwishers, they were all bewildered: crushed by the weight of their grief, they could not rise from where they had fallen" (2.36.16). The *suhṛd*s are the last in the capital to bid Rāma adieu, after which, once he disappears from sight (37.1–2), they are among those left behind to think how every hill and grove he visits will treat him as "a beloved guest" (*priyātithi*) (2.42.10; cf. 3.4.25d; 3.11.27d). It is not until Sītā is abducted that Rāma needs to *make* friends, which he begins to do by widening a strange network of low status *sakhi*s among animals, beginning with Sugrīva. As with the low caste tribal (Niṣāda), Guha, his first mentioned *sakhi* of this type, these are only "pact friends" based on a relationship of "friend to master" (*sakhi* to *bhartṛ*) (*Rām* 2.44.14a; 2.78.5ab).

Hospitality and friendship are thus interrelated practices or discourses where *dharma* and *bhakti* coincide. And where they do so, I believe that they take us deeply into these texts. If we simply ask who hosts Kṛṣṇa and Rāma in these epics? whom do Kṛṣṇa and Rāma host in turn? how do these scenes play out? what is the tone or mood created? we get into revealing and, I would argue, indispensable material of which we could ask, What would be left of these epics without these scenes of divine hosting and visitation? They certainly cut down on the intermittency problem in the *Mahābhārata*—most obviously in Books 3, 5, and 12–14, and the war books too, if you think about it; and for the *Rāmāyaṇa*, one hosting covers the whole poem, since Rāma hosts its first public recitation. But let me just keep to the moods at Kṛṣṇa and Rāma's comings and goings. The epics detail such movements in ways that are not the case for other "characters." Rāma's prolonged departure from Ayodhyā has already been mentioned. But the *Mahābhārata* has similar descriptions of Kṛṣṇa's departures. I will cite only the last, which comes after Kṛṣṇa has lingered longer than he wished (see *Mbh*

14.15.21) to help Arjuna remember the *Gītā* by telling him the *Anugītā*. Having mounted his chariot amid the cityfolk of Hāstinapura, having said his difficult goodbyes to his sister Subhadrā, his aunt Kuntī, the Pāṇḍavas and others, and bid them return to the city; and having told his charioteer Dāruka to "urge the horses to speed," While Vārṣṇeya was proceeding to Dvārakā, O Bharata bull, those foe-scorchers with their retinue, having embraced, turned back. Again and again Phālguna embraced Vārṣṇeya and as long as he was in eye's range, he saw him again and again. And even so, Pārtha withdrew that sight fixed on Govinda with difficulty, and the unvanquished Kṛṣṇa did the same (*Mbh* 14.52.1–3; cf. *Mbh* 2.2.1–23; 2.42.45–59; 5.81.6–57).

B. *Separation*

We can now see that with hospitality and friendship as our first two stepping stones, separation is their inevitable outcome. Kṛṣṇa has just made his final separation, while alive, from Arjuna, which anticipates the devastating scenes of Book 16 describing Arjuna's handling of Kṛṣṇa's death: God's departure from the world. But I would like to make my case with two scenes of separation that are less obviously devotional, ones in which the poets may be said to be concealing their "love of concealment" while speaking through the woman's voice.

Now there are two planes on which the Sanskrit epics unfold what *dharma* holds for their heroines' spirituality. On the one hand, both agree with *Manu* that women find, or should find, their first spirituality in the home, and above all in the context of marriage. Normatively put, the ideal woman is a *pativratā* or "faithful wife"; and her husband is a god. Draupadī and Sītā, who embody this ideal as queens and cultural icons, never tire of speaking up for it. But something more is going on that we would not expect to find in a "Law-book." Their spiritual life comes to be intertwined with *bhakti*, "devotion"—and devotion not only to one's husband but to god. As we know from Fred Hardy (1983, 5–9, 331–429, 527–34;) and Karen Prentiss (1999, 53), vernacular *bhakti* traditions are well known for making the woman's voice a vehicle for strong devotional sentiments, but this is already happening in the epics. Draupadī can keep her two types of spirituality separate: her five husbands are gods of more than one kind, as husbands; her special friend Kṛṣṇa is something else. Sītā, on the other hand, would be bringing her two types of spirituality together in her

devotion to one figure: her husband Rāma, whom neither he nor she can *really* know to be god, at least on the scale of his being the incarnation of Viṣṇu.

To explore this, I will concentrate on passages where their voices are strongest—not only in what their words recall but what they anticipate in the fuller narratives. I choose episodes where the heroine's very embodiment of the cultural ideal of the faithful wife is first strained to the limit. Each episode marks the point where the heroine first speaks out after she has suffered the deepest outrage she experiences as a devoted wife and queen. And in each case, she address her kingly husband. The difference is that whereas Draupadī, whom I shall treat first, can address Yudhiṣṭhira in Kṛṣṇa's absence, Sītā can only speak to a Rāma who is not there.

B.1. *Draupadī in Exile*

Thirteen months into the Forest Exile (*Mbh* 3.36.31–32), Draupadī and the Pāṇḍavas have their first conversation since the dicing. The sequence introduces her as "dear and beautiful, a scholar (*paṇḍitā*)" (*Mbh* 3.28.2)—that is, as a "lady pandit." Draupadī berates Yudhiṣṭhira for his lack of kingly authority and manly wrath (3.28.19–34; Malinar 2007), and tells him a story to chide him for exalting patience and forebearance (3.29). After hearing his initial defense of patience, her exasperation mounting, she introduces a new turn with the exclamation, "Glory be to the Placer and Ordainer (*namo dhātre vidhātre ca*) who have befuddled you!" The *Mahābhārata* mentions these two old abstract divinities one hundred and forty times, and uses their names, Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ, for a variety of gods, including Kṛṣṇa, as when Yudhiṣṭhira says Kṛṣṇa is the Placer and Ordainer who should decide who marshals his army (5.149.33–36). With sixteen such usages in this dialogue, who would Draupadī and Yudhiṣṭhira be talking about? As with Sītā, devotional implications will not be obvious.

Setting out their differences as a matter of two intellects, the lady pandit and Yudhiṣṭhira repeatedly use the philosophically potent term *buddhi* with nuances that range from "intellect" to "mind" to "mental or spiritual attitude." She first remarks on his listless turn:

By my *buddhi*, you would abandon Bhīma and Arjuna, the twin sons of Mādrī, and myself before you would forsake *dharma*....Never straying, your *buddhi* always pursues *dharma* as one's constant shadow pursues a man (31.7–8).

Draupadī is not praising Yudhiṣṭhira with her simile that he pursues *dharma* like a shadow. She has been hearing about it up to the ears, and is saying that his *buddhi* follows it as something reflex, "on pilot." Her last word on the subject is that she wants him to be "resolute on his own with his intellect (*buddhi*) in front (*buddhipūrvaṃ svayamadhīraḥ*)" (33.23c), rather than trailing him like a shadow. Also worth noting is Draupadī's "so I have heard from the Āryas." She will conclude this whole dialogue by explaining that once, while she was doing errands and sitting on her father's lap, she overheard a learned Brahmin who had spoken to her brothers on subjects that had first been propounded by Bṛhaspati, chaplain of the gods (33.56–58). Draupadī refers her account to an "ancient tradition" about how the aforementioned Placer is behind everything: "As wooden puppets are assembled, so are these creatures, king; he makes the body and limbs move" (31.20–22). As we shall see, this "puppet speech" offers a possible clue to Draupadī's point of view during this exchange.

At the heart of what they are debating is the nature of karma with regard to what Yudhiṣṭhira calls the "fruits of *dharma*"—a topic on which he appears to share the philosophy of "Reflection's"—that is, the Mīmāṃsā's—view that the spiritual fruits of ritual action are "unseen." Since he charges her with heresy (*nāstikyam*; 3.32.1, 5), characterizing her view as an excessive doubt in *dharma* that can lead one to be reborn as an animal (6), their differences include an airing of contending spiritual attitudes. I limit discussion to what I believe are two levels to Draupadī's alleged heresy; and to what deity they might be talking about.

The first level comes out in Draupadī's "puppet speech." It is about the Placer: She says, "As wooden puppets are assembled, so are these creatures, king; he makes the body and limbs move" (22). Carrying this idea along with several "string" similes ("like a pearl strung on a string" among them), and remarking that creatures can be "pushed along" by the Lord to heaven or hell (24–25, 27), she builds up to this:

> This body they call the "field" is the Placer's mere instrument (*hetumātram*) by which the Lord causes action that has good or bad fruit.... a Lord who kills beings with beings, having bewildered (*mohayitvā*) (them) with his own magic.... having made a disguise, Yudhiṣṭhira, the god Bhagavān, the Self-Existent Great Grandfather hurts creatures with creatures. Joining them together and disjoining them, doing as he will, the Lord Bhagavan plays (*krīḍate*) with beings like a child with playthings (*krīḍanakair*). The Placer does not act toward beings like a father or mother. He seems

to act out of fury (*roṣa*). He is like another person (*yathā ayam itaro janaḥ*). (3.31.29–37)

Even at the end of this debate, Draupadī hols that the body is an instrument (*kāraṇam*) by which the Placer, now as the Great Lord (Maheśvara), moves beings to this or that task (33.21–22).

Of the two dimensions of heresy, Yudhiṣṭhira seems least interested in this one, probably getting to it only toward the end of his response when he reminds Draupadī of her birth, ostensibly to illustrate the principle that acts bear fruit. He says,

> So it is in you: recall your birth, Kṛṣṇā, and how the ardent Dhṛṣṭadyumna was born. This is a sufficient analogy, sweet smiling woman.... Fruition of both meritorious and wicked acts and their origin and disappearance are mysteries of the gods, beautiful woman. Nobody knows them, creatures *are* bewildered (*muhyanti*) about them. They are guarded by the gods; surely the gods' magic is hidden (32.30–31, 33–34).

Draupadī's birth from an earthen altar, just after her brother's birth from fire, is frequently cited as something known to the principal epic characters. Yudhiṣṭhira can remind her of it not only as one of the "mysteries of the gods" but as a ritual still bearing "unseen fruit." Granting that beings are bewildered, but not as puppets of a divine puppeteer, he rather suggests that they make up a bewildered audience to a divine plan. If he is bothered by the theology of the puppeteer heresy, it is not much. Rather, saying "Everything *is*" (*sarvam astīti*), set free your heretical heart (*nāstikyam bhāvam utsrja*)! Do not revile the Placer," he concludes with a ringing endorsement not only of the ontology of acts but of *dharma* and of everything the Placer does as "the supreme deity" (*uttamaṃ daivatam*) (32.38c–40). Yudhiṣṭhira thus reminds Draupadī of her divine birth not only as one of the "mysteries of the gods," but, implicitly, as part of their divine plan. We can understand why she might have a sense that she is buffeted around like a puppet, since one of her birth-given names, Pāñcālī, means not only a daughter of Pāñcāla but evokes a word for "marionette."

But if the puppeteer heresy is more Draupadī's problem and doesn't much bother Yudhiṣṭhira it is the other way around with her second heresy, which gets to the core of Yudhiṣṭhira's self-understanding. Virtually his first response is, "My mind is beholden to *dharma* by its own nature (*svabhāvāt*), Kṛṣṇā" (3.32.4). What exercises Yudhiṣṭhira is what Draupadī says last. Condemning the Placer (39), she asks: Having given Prosperity to the wicked Kauravas,

> What fruit does the Placer eat (*dhātā kim phalam aśnute*)? If karma done pursues its doer and not another, then surely the Lord is stained (√*lip*) by the wicked karma he has done. Or if the wicked karma done does not pursue its doer, then mere power is the cause here, and I grieve for weak people (3.31.40–42).

Draupadī is being literal in using the idiom "*phalam √aś*" as "eats the fruit"; for even after Yudhiṣṭhira has mentioned heresy, she comes back to this image. Using the example of babies suckling their mother's breast (33.4) to show that all beings obtain livelihood from what they do, she says: All beings know exertion, Bhārata, and visibly (*pratyakṣam*), having the world as witness (*lokasākṣikam*), they eat the fruit of their actions (*phalam aśnanti karmaṇam*). I see that creatures live off their own total effort (*svaṃ samutthānam*)—even the Placer and Ordainer, as does this crane in the water (33.6–7).

We can detect a Materialist bent in Draupadī here, for in philosophical terms she is, like a Materialist, stating that "visible evidence" or "perception" (*pratyakṣa*) is her standard (*pramāṇam*) for knowledge. Nor would she be contradicting herself by mentioning deities, since Indian materialism does not require atheism (see Bronkhorst 2007, 150–59, 161–62, 172, 309–10, 363–66). She may also be echoing the Jain notion that one is stained by one's karma, which, unlike Brahmanical notions, involves a *material* concept of karma. Not only does she want effort. She wants to *see* results! In contrast, Yudhiṣṭhira speaks like a good theist Mīmāṃsaka in seeing divinity behind the spiritual fruits of *dharma*, defending the Placer and *dharma* together (*dhātāraṃ dharmam eva ca*; 32.14b) for establishing the "Ṛṣis' standard" (*ārṣam pramāṇam*; 20a), without which "the universe would sink into foundationless darkness (*apratiṣṭhe tamasi*)" (23cd). Who is the Placer—at least for now, to these two speakers?

Most agree that Draupadī and Yudhiṣṭhira seem to be talking about Brahmā, at least in using some of his epithets. But she also uses the names Bhagavān, Īśvara, and Maheśvara, which have wider and more devotional ambience; and Yudhiṣṭhira thinks of him as "the supreme deity by whose grace a *bhakta* mortal attains immortality" (*yasya prasādāt tad bhakto martyo gacchaty amartyatām/ uttamaṃ daivatam*) (32.40ac). It has been suggested that when the Placer and Ordainer are named in situations of misfortune, it is as if the speakers are reluctant to blame their personal deity by name (Hill 2001, 176). In such a world two characters *could* be talking about different deities. Draupadī's story about the Placer comes from Bṛhaspati, who, as chaplain of the Vedic

gods, gets a reputation for having composed a Materialist *sūtra* (see Bronkhorst 2007, 150–53)! There are also Jain and Buddhist texts that mock the idea of a creator god. The *Mahābhārata* does not openly cite heterodox texts (real or imaginary), but here it seems to do so covertly, under a Vedic cover and in a woman's voice! Draupadī is particularly out of sorts at this point, and openly fed up with Yudhiṣṭhira. But she would also have reasons to be fed up with a divine plan that has put her through her ordeal at the dicing and now "placed" her in the forest (Biardeau 2002, 1: 437). If she would have a complaint about the Placer, then what about a friend who leaves things to the last moment to rescue her from afar with unending saris? Indeed, shortly before this on Kṛṣṇa's first visit to the exiled Pāṇḍavas, she asked him, "You are the lord of all beings, both divine and human. Then how was it that a woman like me, wife to the Pārthas, sister of Dhṛṣṭadyumna, your friend (*tava...sakhī*), Kṛṣṇa, came to be dragged into the hall?" (3.13.52c–53).

It could thus be that Yudhiṣṭhira is heading Draupadī off, implicitly, from speaking ill of her friend Kṛṣṇa, that grand illusionist who will tell Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, "The Lord of all beings resides in the region of the heart, Arjuna, making all beings reel, mounted to a device (*yantra*) by his power of illusion" (*BhG* 18.61)—which reminded Śaṅkara of a puppet play. Yudhiṣṭhira could have reasons to hear Draupadī's words that way. When she was summoned to the gambling hall, menstruating and in a single garment, he would have heard her say,

> So now the All-Ordainer disposes (*vyadadhāt saṃvidhātā*), touching both who are touched, the wise and the fool. He said, "In this world *dharma* is alone supreme." Protecting, he will dispose peace (*Mbh* 2.60.13).

Her words are the epic's single mention of the All-Ordainer (Saṃvidhātṛ), who seems to cover both the Placer and the Ordainer, and to leave open the possibility that she is talking about Kṛṣṇa.

In fact, there are vivid echoes between Draupadī's "heresy" and Kṛṣṇa's words with his other special friend Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Like Draupadī, who protests the point, Arjuna hears that he should consider himself a "mere instrument" (*BhG* 11.33) of a god on whom everything is "strung like heaps of pearls on a string" (7.7). Indeed, she says things that would rather defy the *Gītā*. Whereas Draupadī says, "The Placer does not act toward beings like a father or mother. He seems to act out of fury. He is like another person," Kṛṣṇa says, "I

am the father of this universe, the mother, the Placer, the grandfather"
(9.17). When Draupadī asks, "What fruit does the Placer eat?" that
might either stain him or leave people powerless before mere power,
Kṛṣṇa says, "I eat" (*aśnami*) whatever is offered to me with *bhakti*—"a
leaf, a flower, a fruit (*phala*), or water"—so as to free devotees from the
good or bad fruits (*phala*) of binding karma (9.26–28), while Arjuna
sees him with crushed heads stuck between his teeth (11.27). Kṛṣṇa
would not confirm Draupadī's supposition that "the Lord is stained by
the wicked karma he has done," since he says, "The four-*varṇa*-system
was created by me with distinctions as to qualities and acts (karmas).
Even though I am its doer, know me as the unchanging non-doer. Acts
do not stain me (√*lip*)…" (4.13–14).

Compared to the *Gītā*, we cannot contrast Draupadī's spirituality
as emotional with Arjuna's as intellectual. If anything, it is more the
other way around. Unlike her beloved Arjuna, the exemplary man of
action, the lady *paṇḍit* is a philosopher with a consistent and respect-
able position. As a materialist, she seems to speak for primal mat-
ter, *prakṛti*, in its subtlest aspect, the *buddhi*. This would be in accord
with Yudhiṣṭhira's final tribute to her after she has passed away: that
she was "the great dark one endowed with intellectual substance"
(*buddhisattvaguṇānivitā*).

B.2. *Sītā in Captivity*

Now to Sītā. Rāvaṇa has given her two month to live, and left her in an
Aśoka grove guarded by Rākṣasis with the threat that if she does not
come to love him in two months they will prepare her for his break-
fast or eat her themselves. Yet Hanumān has found her. Hiding in a
tree, he has seen her in this anguish, but not yet spoken to her. As he
sees her make three speeches amid exchanges with the Rākṣasīs, it is
not always clear what he actually hears, since her words seem at times
to become soliloquys, particularly as she more and more addresses
herself to Rāma.

I will look at these three speeches for the points where Sītā addresses
Rāma directly, even though he is not there. Be it noted that while
translators, quite sensibly, have wanted to keep Sītā talking on an
intelligible human and wifely plane, it has meant undertranslating
certain loaded words: most notably the impossible-to-translate *ātman*,
"self," but also words that I will translate with reference to gratitude

(*kṛtajña*: 5.23.16d; 24.12a; 26.12d), pity, compassion, lordship, power, abandonment, and belovedness so as to bring out her speeches' *bhakti* overtones. I am not saying this is the "right" way to translate these passages, just that we may trace a devotional thread through them that is intertwined with the ruptured domestic thread of Sītā and Rāma's marriage.

As Sītā's first speech (23.11–20) opens, she recalls a popular maxim quoted by *paṇḍit*s. As with Draupadī, this aside offers a glimpse of a female's listening-post position; but whereas Draupadī *is* a *paṇḍit*, Sītā only cites them. The maxim she cites concerns how death comes only at its appointed time (12–13), and she grieves that her death will come now separated from Rāma, whom she then dwells on until this train of thought ends. She says,

> This pitiable woman, whose merit must be small, like a woman without a lord (*anāthavat*) must surely perish, like a laden vessel struck by strong winds in the midst of the ocean.... How fortunate are those who are able to see my lord (*nātha*)—his eyes like the inner petals of a lotus—who walks with the valorous gait of a lion and is yet grateful (*kṛtajña*), a speaker of what is beloved (*priyavādinam*). Separated from Rāma who knows himself (*rāmeṇa vidita-ātmanā*), there is no way that I can survive.... What kind of sin did I commit in a former body that I obtain such cruel and terrible suffering?... I will never see Rāma again. A curse on this human state! A curse on being under another's power (*para-vaśyatām*). Although I wish to, I cannot end my life (23.14–20).

Sītā imagines the good fortune of others who might *see* Rama, without yet saying who they might be. She builds up a shaky image of him. She thinks he "knows himself," but he cannot really know his divine nature until he has killed Rāvaṇa. On this point, let me recall Sheldon Pollock's groundbreaking 1984 article demonstrating that Rāma's *seeming* humanity is 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 Rāvaṇa omitted because he disdained them (7.10.13–20). To slay Rāvaṇa, Rāma must be a man, and he must think he is one until he accomplishes this goal. It is worth quoting from a note that Pollock sent me in May 1992 during a correspondence we were having over my eventual article "Epic Studies: Classical Hinduism in the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*" (Hiltebeitel 1993), since it tells us something about careful and open-minded scholarship: "This was a reading (that is, on the divinity of Rāma) I came to adopt only with great reluctance but I did so by force of what I

felt to be overwhelming evidence, text-critical, narrative, and literary-historical both prior to and after the formation of the monumental text ("monumental" in the sense used in Homeric studies). Whether I'm right or not about an informing problematic of divinity, I read the *Rām.* with much more pleasure now, watching how it encourages us to understand, with a slowly growing wonder, the truly special nature of the nāyaka. Far more exciting than looking for the droppings of god-crazed interpolators." As the Princeton translation of the *Rāmāyaṇā* has continued, Robert Goldman and Sally Sutherland Goldman have now credited Pollock's approach in their introduction to the *Sundarakāṇḍa* (Goldman and Sutherland Goldman 1996; Sutherland Goldman 2001, 335 n. 30), the Book we are here considering.

Obviously, Sītā must think Rāma is a man too, but let us not be too sure that that is all she might think. She grieves at being under "another's power." Ostensibly she is held captive by the Rākṣasīs and Rāvaṇa. But she intimates that she is under some still higher power: her own karma? a lord's who should be grateful, who should know himself? As her own imaginings continue, Rāma will not be so perfect.

Sītā's second and longest speech (5.24.3–49) follows a vivid depiction of her: "Grieving like a woman possessed, or a madwoman, or a woman in a state of utter confusion, she rolled on the ground like a filly" (5.24.2). She "broods" further on her captivity under the "Rākṣasa women's power" and on her separation from Rāma (3–5), curses herself (6), addresses the Rākṣasīs and Rākṣasas including Rāvaṇa while predicting their downfall and Laṅkā's destruction (11–25), comes back to herself (35), and ends on the theme of being under "Rāvaṇa's power" (49). Here, she first centers her attention on Rāma wondering why he does not come for her. She says,

> Rāghava is renowned, wise, grateful, and compassionate (*kṛtajñaś ca sānukrośaḥ*). Therefore I think it must be the exhaustion of my good fortune that has made this man of good conduct uncompassionate (*sadvṛtto niranukrośaḥ*).... Why has Rāma, so firm in his valor, not come to rescue his cherished wife, who is carried off by a Rākṣasa? (24.12–18)

Her key verse here is the first one, bringing Rāma's compassion into question around the thought that he might become uncompassionate now that she has been abducted—as he will in fact be in imposing her two ordeals on her. But then, where was God's compassion something one could secure just by loving him? Sītā then multiplies these anxieties in this second speech's closing:

How, in my great suffering, shall I do without him—without seeing my
beloved Rāma, the corners of his eyes bloodred?...Rāma must not know
that I am alive. [Otherwise] the two of them would...scour the earth for
me. Surely [Rāma] has gone—out of grief for me—from here to the world
of the gods, having abandoned his body on earth. Fortunate are the gods,
Gandharvas, Siddhas, and supreme Ṛsis who can now see Rāma, my
lotus-eyed lord. Or perhaps this wise royal Ṛsi Rāma who loves *dharma*
and is the Supreme Self (*paramātman*) has no use for me as his wife.
There would be love for the one that is seen; there is no affection on the
part of one who does not see. Ingrates (*kṛtaghnāḥ*) destroy; Rāma will
not destroy. Is it that I am completely devoid of qualities, or is it just the
exhaustion of my good fortune, that I, Sītā, should be without Rāma, who
is deserving of the best? It would be better for me to die....Or perhaps
the two brothers...have laid down their weapons and are wandering in
the forest as forest dwellers, subsisting on roots and fruits. Or perhaps
Rāvaṇa...has slain the[m]...by some trick. I can wish only to die....For-
tunate, indeed, are those great-souled, great-fortuned Munis who are
revered for their truth, their selves conquered, for whom there is neither
beloved nor unbeloved. Homage to those great-souled ones who detach
themselves from both! Abandoned here by my beloved Rāma whose self
is known (*rāmeṇa viditātmanā*), and fallen under the power of the wicked
Rāvaṇa, I shall end my life (24.35–49).

The passage is a spiritual treasure trove. While imagining that Rāma
may have gone to heaven out of grief for her, or that he and Lakṣmaṇa
have relinquished their weapons and become forest wanderers, she
broods twice on the "fortunate" celestial Ṛsis or Munis in tellingly
contrastive terms. First she imagines them greeting Rāma in heaven:
"Fortunate are the gods, Gandharvas, Siddhas, and supreme Ṛsis who
can now see Rāma, my lotus-eyed lord" (39). But then she brings them
down to the circumstances of her own despair: "Fortunate, indeed,
are those great-souled, great-fortuned Munis who are revered for their
truth (*satyasammatāḥ*), their selves conquered, for whom there is nei-
ther beloved nor unbeloved. Homage to those great-souled ones who
detach themselves from both!" (47–48). According to commentators,
the passage "suggests the sages' capacity to transcend *saṃsāra*" (Gold-
man and Sutherland Goldman 1996, 422). Sītā cannot aspire to this
kind of detachment. Moreover, in the midst of all this, she has had
the disturbing yet also penetrating thought that "perhaps this wise
royal Ṛsi Rāma who loves *dharma* and is the Supreme Self has no
use for me as his wife" (40). One commentarial view is "that Rāma,
as the *paramātmā* and as one whose mind consists of *dharma*, does
not require a wife [to assist him in practicing *dharma*]" (Goldman
and Sutherland Goldman 1996, 421). Sītā brings her thoughts on this

anxiety to some complex and subtle questions. If, as we have noted, the fruits of *dharma* can often be unseen, what of Rāma and Sītā's love when she is unseen? Raising the image of Rāma as a potential ingrate, who, to the extent that he does "know himself," would "love *dharma*" more than her, she reassures herself, perhaps wishfully, that Rāma "will not destroy," yet asks whether her own "qualities" (*guṇas*) are such as to have left her now without him. Indeed, Rāma will not involve Sītā in his ritual duties after the war: at his Aśvamedha, even before she enters the earth, he will replace her with a golden replica (*Rām* 7.82.19ab; cf. then 89.4)! Her wifely *dharma* will be cast aside because he feels he must acknowledge the public's doubts about her time with Rāvaṇa.

Sītā's third speech carries on her lonely soliloquy with mixed apostrophe to Rāma (5.26.3–16), ending at the point where even she senses the favorable omens that presage the presence of Hanumān. As in the first speech, she begins with a popular saying: "Alas, the good speak this truth in the world: that there is no such thing as untimely death. Alas it must be true if I, who lack all merit, have managed to survive even for a moment under such abuse" (3). Surely suicide would not be a fault when "I am about to be killed by this one unbeloved in my sight, to whom I could not give my affection any more than a twice-born could teach mantra to a non-twiceborn" (5). For the rest (6–16), it is her concluding apostrophe to Rāma:

> Surely [, she says,] if Rāma, the lord of the world (*lokanātha*), does not come, the king of Rākṣasas will soon dismember me.... Then it will be for me, just as it would be for a thief, imprisoned and condemned to death for a crime against the crown, on the morning of his execution. Oh Rāma! Oh Lakṣmaṇa! Oh Sumitra! O mother of Rāma and my own mother as well! I, this luckless woman, will perish like a ship foundering in a storm at sea. [Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa] must have been killed on my account through the strength of that creature in the form of a deer...when, fool that I am, I sent away my husband [and his] younger brother.... Alas, Rāma of the long arms, true to your vows! Alas, you whose face rivals the full moon! Alas, you benefactor and beloved of the living world (*hā jīvalokasya hitaḥ priyaś ca*)! You do not realize that I am to be slain by Rākṣasas. My taking you for my sole divinity (*ananyadevatvam*), my long suffering, my sleeping on the ground, and my rigorous adherence to *dharma*—this fidelity to my husband has been fruitless (*pativratātvaṃ viphalam*), like the favors men do for ingrates. Surely this *dharma* adventure of mine (*dharmaś carito mama*) has been vain.... For, pale and emaciated, I cannot see you; I am cut off from you without hope for our reunion. Once you have carried out your father's orders to the letter and have returned

from the forest with your vow accomplished, you will, I think, make
love with wide-eyed women, carefree, your purpose accomplished. But
as for hapless me, Rāma, after having loved you so long, given you all
my heart—to my own undoing—and practiced my vows and penances
in vain, I shall abandon my accursed life (26.6–15).

Those who *see* Rāma, always potentially a *bhakti* idiom, are no longer
the celestial denizens but wide-eyed lovers. We see how Sītā keeps
dharma and *bhakti* at play along with all the strands of her predic-
ament before finally letting them unravel in her version of a wife's
worst-case imaginings, well in tune with Rāma's overriding concern
for his father's truth, if not when imagining his infidelities. Sītā also
deepens the implications of her first invocation of Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa,
and their mothers, this time mentioning all four again but adding "and
my own mother." For this, she uses an appropriately different term for
"mother," *jananī*, "begetter" or "genetrix," hinting that she is speaking
of the Earth, to whom she will finally appeal at her last ordeal when
she will really end her life. But for now, as she determines to hang her-
self from her ponytail (see Hiltebeitel 1980–81, 198–99), her thoughts
turn more fondly to Rāma as she becomes aware of the good omens
that presage the presence of Hanumān, and takes hold of the branch
of a great flowering tree (18–20).

C. *Conclusions*

On, then, to some conclusions. Both Draupadī and Sītā register that
their husbands' allegiance to *dharma* can leave them unprotected. In
this Yudhiṣṭhira is different from Rāma, whom Sītā must worry about
more for his strictness to *dharma* than his rather feebly shadowing it.
But as we have seen, Draupadī's argument with Yudhiṣṭhira is also one
about God. *Bhakti* allows for numerous arguments with God. Sītā's
and Draupadī's are certainly different, but there are also similarities.
Intellectually, both put a twist on the visible evidence that, if God is
as supreme as he is reputed to be, he would appear to have put each
heroine's *dharma* on trial with a certain transcendent aloofness. In
approaching God in his absence, each woman finds suggestive ways
to speak of him as theologically puzzling. But Sītā in captivity, more
than Draupadī in exile, anticipates the convention of having a wom-
an's voice express the emotional side of *bhakti*.

We thus come back to the intermittency problem, and to the neces-
sities and niceties of textual discretion in portraying the hiddenness of

gods among men, which constrains Kṛṣṇa to operate within human limits, and in Rāma's case is tacitly structured into the *Rāmāyaṇa* not only around Rāvaṇa's boon but in the poet's and Sītā's apostrophes to the perfect man. *Bhakti* is in the bones and sinews of these texts *as we have them*. Positing political ideologies or class interests as prior to their *bhakti* can only dim this intertwinement. I believe that these epics' *bhakti* politics reflected a sly and confident sense of taking over the game.

Finally, as this presentation would suggest, if one were to look closely at the ways dialogue is used in the two epics, it might be worth exploring the possibility that Vālmīki innovates in the enhanced transposition of dialogue into apostrophe. Our eavesdropping on Sītā would suggest that, where apostrophe is used, it is used to lift dialogue "out of context" not only to address an absent husband and God, but to address the reader: i.e., to engage the epics' target audiences. This of course means using apostrophe to create new dialogical communities of those engaged in the text. The reason to investigate this with regard especially to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and to ask whether Vālmīki enhances apostrophe as a new "move," is the fact that the *Rāmāyaṇā* is addressed first of all to its hero, Rāma. In a *bhakti* context (which is where I have argued this move is made), this would mean that the *Rāmāyaṇa* as apostrophe is a dialogue with God: one that draws in Rāma himself, the "perfect man," as the poet's first conversation partner, with readers following the poet in knowing all along that, like the poet, they are approaching God.

ON READING FITZGERALD'S VYĀSA

After an extraordinary twenty-six years' wait, the J.A.B. van Buitenen translation of the *Mahābhārata* has been resumed by James L. Fitzgerald and it has been well worth the wait. Fitzgerald is to be congratulated for a vigorous, nuanced, and often deeply moving translation, one for which he had to draw on varied skills and impulses to animate not only the text's epical and edifying strains as he moves from the *Strīparvan* to the *Śāntiparvan*, but, in the latter, the multigeneric character of the instructions of Yudhiṣṭhira. Although Fitzgerald makes it clear "that many of van Buitenen's translational conventions are not reproduced here" (p. xvii), one senses many debts and continuities, and, more than that, a similar commitment, even if it takes different forms and uses different idioms, to be daring and often enough amusing, as the text deserves. As van Buitenen did, Fitzgerald also provides well thought-out introductions to the major *parvan*s that include valuable state-of-the-field position pieces on their components. Only in the far more extensive and scholarly apparatus does the work feel resolutely different. Along with seven appendices, the endnotes are far more numerous and detailed, and many are signaled within the translation by the degree symbol ° "to indicate the presence of a relevant annotation in the endnotes" (p. vii, n. 5). Scholars may find some of these changes more felicitous than the "serious general readers of contemporary American English" (p. xviii) whom Fitzgerald mentions as his primary target, but in my view they offer a balance that is good for both.

To resume this translation has not, however, meant picking up where it was left off. From the *Udyogaparvan* (Book 5), where van Buitenen exited, to the *Strīparvan* (Book 11), where Fitzgerald picks up, the five books that recount the *Mahābhārata* war still remain in limbo. Fitzgerald tides readers over this gap under the heading "What Happened in the War" (pp. xxiv–xxxi), and outlines the plan whereby the University of Chicago Press will bring out the epic's remaining books under his editorship (pp. xv–xvi). More interesting than this temporary jump over the war, however, is the exciting opportunity this volume

offers for a new centering of *Mahābhārata* interpretation. For, though the translation resumes with the *Strīparvan*, Fitzgerald's interpretive center of gravity lies in his introduction to the *Śāntiparvan* (Book 12). Fitzgerald brings special and rare expertise to the *Śāntiparvan*, for with this volume he has now not only translated and introduced the first two of its three main instructional components—the *Rājadharma* and *Āpaddharma* sub-*parvan*s, but has written his dissertation on the third—the *Mokṣadharma* sub-*parvan*,[1] his translation of which will be a further contribution to this overall resumption.

Thus, by an accident of publishing history, this resumption will focus interpretative attention on the *Śāntiparvan*. I shall argue in this review that this accident may have the fortunate result of encouraging "suspended" readers and reviewers to raise interesting new questions, and hopefully shake up some long-standing assumptions, about the relation of parts to the whole. With that in mind, let me mention a few of Fitzgerald's most broad-stroke interpretative strategies, situate them in relation to some other recent approaches, and turn to a couple of points where I think his approach is not as fruitful as it could be.

Mahābhārata *Reading Strategies*

On the broadest scale, Fitzgerald uses the hyphenated term "*praśamana-anuśāsana*" to describe the double "cooling" and "instructional" character of the book's title term, *śānti* ("peace"). Fitzgerald suggests a sacrificial dimension to this word, as an apotropaic bringing-to-rest or neutralizing of effects—in this case, the effects of war—that reorients Yudhiṣṭhira, beset after the war by grief (*śoka*, from its root *śuc*, related by Fitzgerald to things "burning too hot" in Vedic ritual), toward being "fit to rule" (pp. 94–100). Though he is cautious about the ritual dimensions of this interpretation (pp. 97–98, 99 n. 97), I believe it makes a sound contribution to our appreciation of the depth of Vedic resonance that the epic poets repeatedly call upon. More immediately, Fitzgerald speaks of this *praśamana-anuśāsana*'s four main components—the three of the *Śāntiparvan* plus the *Dānadharmaparvan*, the main sub-*parvan* of the following *Anuśāsanaparvan* (Book 13)—as "four large

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[1] James L. Fitzgerald, "The *Mokṣa* Anthology of the *Great Bhārata*: An Initial Survey of Structural Issues, Themes, and Rhetorical Strategies" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1980).

anthologies" that "make up the first canonical library of 'Hinduism'"
(pp. 79–80). At this point, let me note only that in laying out these
overarching terms Fitzgerald writes as if Bhīṣma and Yudhiṣṭhira were
the only interlocutors in this vast span, leaving him grounds to impute
lateness to features that do not fit the pattern. Finally, at the most
local level affecting the many individual units within these anthologies,
Fitzgerald sees a "tension" (pp. 103, 105) between an older sense of
dharma (Law-based, often translated as "meritorious Lawful action,"
that "connects one to an important good, or goods, that do not lie
completely within the reach of normal human effort") and a newer
(yogic and virtue-based) one (p. 104). For Fitzgerald this tension has a
great deal to do not only with the dharma teachings of the four *rāja-*,
āpad-, *mokṣa-*, and *dāna-dharma* anthologies but with the historical
situation that "drove some brahmins to create the *Mahābhārata* as we
have it" (p. 105)[2] in its first written redaction (p. 103) and to construct
the figure of Yudhiṣṭhira as the son of the god Dharma (pp. 136–37). It
is not always easy to guess the reasoning behind Fitzgerald's "parsing"
(pp. 138, 140) of *dharma* in particular instances of translation or to
follow him from his discussion of a basic tension to his analysis of
dharma as having three senses (pp. 641–43) and "primary forms and
secondary forms" (p. 154), but it is clear that his analysis makes an
important contribution to understanding the complexity of usages
in the "didactic" anthologies, if possibly less of one in translating the
"narrative."

I would characterize Fitzgerald's interpretative work, along with
my own[3] and Madeleine Biardeau's,[4] as one of three attempts in the
last three years at "strong readings."[5] By this I mean readings that
acknowledge their hypothetical character, situate the text in history,
and are proposed as "revisionist" advances for offering a plausible
degree of coherence to the whole text in relation to its parts (philo-
logical readings of segments and of segments in relation to larger units
do not provide strong readings in this sense). These three readings are

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[2] Fitzgerald often invokes "some brahmins" as part of his diachronic view of the
text's production.

[3] In Alf Hiltebeitel, *The Education of Yudhiṣṭhira*: A Reader's *Guide* to the *Education*.
of the *Dharma* King (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001).

[4] Madeleine Biardeau, *Le Mahābhārata*: *Un récit fondateur du brahmanisme et son
interpretation*. 2 vols. (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2002).

[5] See Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975).

quite close in their historical contextualization[6] and agree on many things in their interpretation. There are, however, important differences in the ways they conceive of the parts-whole relationship. On the hypothesis of a coherent subsurface authorial design and the messages conveyed through it across the text,[7] Biardeau excludes two units of the *Mahābhārata* from discussion—the *Nārāyaṇīya* and the *Anugītā*—mainly because she finds them off-message.[8] On the hypothesis that the text was composed by a committee over a shorter time than is usually conceived, I hold off on excising anything, on the premise that the whole remains elusive so long as we have yet to discern the conventions by which its parts are interrelated. And on the hypothesis of an historical link between Aśoka Maurya and the situation that "drove some brahmins to create the *Mahābhārata* as we have it," Fitzgerald would excise many passages either because they do not reflect these politics or because they adumbrate it in supposedly later formulations. In other words, although all three share common historical reflections, one is a semiological hypothesis, one a literary hypothesis, and one a political hypothesis. These are of course not mutually exclusive categories. Biardeau and Fitzgerald speak quite similarly of their readings as "apocalyptic," though with opposed views on how the apocalypse would relate to *bhakti.* And all three readings are in one or another sense political. There is thus the possibility that each is strong enough to strengthen the others, but each would also have its weaknesses.[9]

Two Problematic Hypotheses

There are two points where I think Fitzgerald's approach is not as fruitful as it could be: his "hypothesis that the *Bhagavad Gītā* is a later amelioration of the kṣatriyas' ethical horizons over those set for them by

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[6] Fitzgerald would now have to soften his statement that he is "much more concerned with matters of history" (pp. 127–28, n. 198) than Biardeau.

[7] Biardeau, Le Mahābhārata, 1: 26.

[8] *Ibid.*, 2: 566, mentioning "leur étrangeté et leur difficulté intrinsèque."

[9] There is some justice in the criticism that my approach has been rather too case-by-case, and that it dooes not deliver a total statement, for instance, on the education of Yudhiṣṭhira. See James L. Fitzgerald, "The Many Voices of the *Mahābhārata*: Review article of *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*: *A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King* by Alf Hiltebeitel," *JAOS* 123 (2003): 803–18; John Brockington, review of *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65 (2002): 600–602.

The Laws for Kings" (p. 141) or *Rājadharma*, and his idea that the four anthologies of Books 12 and 13 would have been composed sequentially over a considerable time through what he has recently called "growth-rings."[10] Let me begin with a few of the arguments by which Fitzgerald supports these hypotheses, and then turn to the opening of the *Śāntiparvan*, up to Yudhiṣṭhira's first exchanges with Bhīṣma, where I believe these topics deserve to be put in a different light.

As regards the *Gītā* hypothesis, Fitzgerald repeatedly advances the following view of *bhakti* passages, elements, and themes: rather than being part of what he posits as the epic's quite capacious "original post-Mauryan written redaction" (p. 113, n. 139), which he also calls "the putative Śuṅga or post-Śuṅga text that likely knew nothing of the *Bhagavad Gītā*" (p. 141, n. 242). Fitzgerald considers such *bhakti* features to be uniformly "later"[11] than the "original," having become piecemeal parts of an alleged "Gupta text" (p. 114) that he posits to be the proximate archetype recovered by the Pune Critical Edition (see xvi n. 2). Since I address his view on *bhakti* elsewhere,[12] I leave it aside here other than to make one observation that applies equally to the growth-rings hypothesis: whereas Fitzgerald presents external evidence for the post-Mauryan/post-Śuṅga background of his "original redaction" (lately called the "main *Mahābhārata*"),[13] he presents no such evidence for the "Gupta text." Rather, all evidence for the lateness of *bhakti* is based on internal evidence, for which the "Gupta text" seems to provide a suitably distant date on which to hang arguments for a

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[10] James L. Fitzgerald, "The Rāma Jāmadagnya 'Thread' of the *Mahābhārata*: A New survey of Rāma Jāmadagnya in the Pune Text." in *Stages and Transitions: Temporal and Historical Frameworks in Epic and Purāṇic Literature.* Proceedings of the Second Dubruvnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas, ed. Mary Brockington (Zagreb: Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2002). 111; "The Position of Brahmins in the *Mahābhārata*: New Perspectives on the Development and Growth of the Epic Between the Empires" (paper presented for the "Between the Empires" Conference, University of Texas, April 2003), 2. The term does not appear in the book under review.

[11] See p. 104 (Fitzgerald says little about his exemplary figure Tanu's residence at Badarī with Nara and Nārāyaṇa); p. 112 (the older *Mbh* reflects a "Brahmanic vision" of a "universal plenum" that is only "later" envisioned "within the body of God"); p. 124, n. 183 (the lateness of *pralaya* themes and seemingly anything to do with Śiva, for whom Fitzgerald leaves a kind of blind spot: e.g., at 103, where Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, Indra, and Śrī, but not Śiva, are mentioned among deities supporting the older *Mbh's* pre-bhakti apocalyptic events); and p. 132 (nothing is said about the massive treatise first "abridged by Śiva").

[12] See now chapters 3 and 18 of this book.

[13] Fitzgerald, "The Many Voices of the *Mahābhārata*," 811.

lengthy process. In fact, to hang the *Gītā* midway on this timeline, Fitzgerald overrides "the great deal of [external] evidence" from the second century B.C.E. that the *Gītā's* composition would coincide with "the rise of the Bhāgavata cult focused on Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva" (p. 141). Stating rather implausibly that such "evidence only establishes a 'date after which' the *BhG* developed," Fitzgerald claims that his later dating is "not hampered by the fact that Vaiṣṇavism rose to eminence in the second century B.C." (p. 141). Clearly, however, it is not helped.

Second, Fitzgerald attributes a certain agency to "the armed stratum of society, the *kṣatra*" (p. 102) in negotiating the *Gītā's* "improved solution to the same basic problem of reconciling the older and the newer senses of *dharma*" (p. 140). Having apparently felt "a sense of insufficiency in the *praśamana-anuśāsana*" offered up in the early portions of Book 12 that Fitzgerald considers to have been part of the "original redaction" (p. 139), "the warriors and kings who were directed by *The Book of Peace* to embrace violence and bloodshed dutifully, even enthusiastically, may have found the blend of old and new dharmas an un-inspiring compromise" (p. 140); and having apparently "shared" with a "somewhat later" group of Brahmans a feeling that "a pall hangs over the epic narrative from the conclusion of Bhīṣma's instructions all the way to the end of the tale," this later group of Brahman authors[14] would have produced the *Gītā's* "more powerful solution" to better inspire them (p. 139). This new kṣatra constituency is arrived at by a kind of gerrymandering of the text.[15] Fitzgerald is right to call attention to some similar issues addressed in the prewar instructions of Arjuna and the postwar instructions of Yudhiṣṭhira, but his evidence for this increasingly disaffected "armed stratum" is left to our imagination. I believe, on the contrary, that while the epic poets recalled the old Vedic Kṣatriya with what Robert P. Goldman has called "*janapāda* nostalgia,"[16] they constructed the new one dur-

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[14] Other later such groups having apparently also intervened by now to have carried the tale to the end.

[15] See Fitzgerald, p. 15, on "society's need for warriors," who are taken to be the text's primary "imagined audience"—with one of Vyāsa's primary purposes, at least in Book 11, being to produce a narrative "gratifying to warriors." In positing a "triple-layered *Mahābhārata*," Fitzgerald hypothesizes that prior to the written post-Aśokan and Gupta "redactions," there would have been an archaic bardic precursor that glorified Kṣatriya clients (p. 82, n. 15). But even if that widely held view were true (which I see no reason to assume), it could not offer that same warrior population as audience for the written text(s).

[16] Orally, at a conference in Pondicherry, January 1997.

ing times when the Kṣatriya population was in major disarray, that they composed this epic in one swoop that entailed the bold move of depicting both Arjuna and Yudhiṣṭhira as contending yet also complementary images of their new ideal, and that they had their reasons for going over "the same basic problem" twice: once with the ideal warrior before the war where inspiring the yet-to-be-materialized new Kṣatriya to an "enthusiasm" for battle is fitting, and again after the war when the "pall" of victory would be faced by the more discerning ideal once and future king.

As regards the "growth-rings" hypothesis, Fitzgerald reserves its presentation for the end of his second Introduction. There, even though it follows directly upon his *Gītā* hypotheses, it still comes as something of a surprise, since he had earlier committed himself to a mainly "synchronic" reading. After suggesting that Kṛṣṇa's gift of the divine eye to Bhīṣma "reflects a relatively later stratum of editing or rewriting" because Bhīṣma claims "his own authority for some of the items he subsequently teaches Yudhiṣṭhira" (p. 95, n. 80),[17] he writes, "In a work like this, however, the diachronic question must be superseded by an attempt to read the whole received text in as thoroughly synchronic a way *as possible.* I occasionally remark upon issues of the text's history, but *for now* my *main* interest is to offer the text we have as sympathetic a reading *as possible*" (p. 95, no. 80, my italics). It is not yet clear how Fitzgerald defines the possibility of offering "as sympathetic a reading as possible." That is left for the close of the second introduction, where the "main interest" entirely subsides. There he allows the "diachronic question" to drive the main questions he asks of the text and thereby constrains any sustained sympathetic reading by favoring these diachronic questions.

Fitzgerald organizes these parameters under the headings of "reading maps" and "bird's eye views" of the *Śāntiparvan*'s three anthologies (with an initial mapping of *Dānadharmaparvan* of Book 13 as well) (pp. 142–64). His most programmatic statement is the following: "each of these collections clearly is an anthology constituted from various textual items that preexisted its insertion into the anthology. But it is not the case that each of the three anthologies of the *Śāntiparvan* were [sic] assembled at the same time or in the same fashion. In fact, each of

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[17] Fitzgerald similarly tries to explain away Vyāsa's gift of the divine eye to Gāndhārī in Book 11 (p. 18).

the three anthologies exhibits distinct traits of assembly and construction" (p. 144). Fitzgerald never indicates his criteria for determining preexistence,[18] but to support the claim of separate construction he seeks to demonstrate discontinuity and layering by proceeding from "the basic surface facts of each collection" to the "careful determination of their structure and history" (p. 144). One of his strategies is to contrast the relative "tautness" of the series of instructions that begin the first two anthologies, exemplified by a pre-dominance of topically focused one-*adhyāya* units, with the "more relaxed" character of the subsequent instructions, which have "looser aggregations" and "multichapter recitals" (pp. 147–49, 158)—with, moreover, each of the four anthologies being more relaxed than its predecessor as the result of "a progressive loosening of editorial integration" (p. 148). Another criterion is to identify thematic sets topically in the looser second parts of these two anthologies, and take such topical shifts as indications that segments were "prepended" and "appended" over time to the "first edition" and its "core" (pp. 152–53). Here Fitzgerald suggests, as a kind of leapfrog effect over time, that relatively inchoate segments on *āpad* and *mokṣa* in later parts of the first two parvans anticipated more articulate treatment of those topics as the main ones of the next parvans. Thus he detects a "*proto-Āpaddharmaparvan*" (p. 156) in the *Rājadharma*, I think unconvincingly,[19] and likewise a disaggregate "*mokṣa* group of texts" (p. 160) in the *Āpaddharma*.[20] A third

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[18] No doubt there were preexisting texts, but which ones, and what are the grounds for determining that status? Although not found in the four anthologies, one might on good grounds regard the "Sixteen Kings Story" (see below) as based on preexisting texts. But note how the *Mbh*'s two tellings are different in ways that are at least partly contextual (see n. 51 below).

[19] The term *āpad* is never used in this "proto-Āpaddharma" (12.110–15); its stories are little developed from the king's point of view, the view that Fitzgerald recognizes as prominent in the *Āpaddharma* (p. 159); there is barely a nod to the key *āpaddharma* theme of the king's survival (see Fitzgerald, p. 156); and little about *nīti* ("policy"). Indeed, the one exception regarding a *nīti*-wise (12.112.61b) jackal minister illustrates these differences: the jackal stops working for an untrustworthy tiger-king yet survives only to commit suicide. There is also nothing about *Āpaddharma* being a secret and somewhat disagreeable teaching (see Bowles 2004, 149, 155–58) and nothing about *dasyu*s, "robbers," who present a singular problematic in the *Āpaddharma* (see n. 25 below).

[20] E.g., Fitzgerald says of the last verse of the penultimate *Āpaddharma* unit, "12.161.48 relates (falsely as the text stands now) that Yudhiṣṭhira began questioning Bhīṣma about *mokṣa*" (p. 143, n. 248). He gets "the Law beyond these" from *tataḥ paraṃ dharmam*, which, he says, implies *mokṣa* by taking "'these' to refer either to the Laws" of the first two anthologies or to the *trivarga* mentioned some verses back.

criterion is to note alternations in the immediacy of the Yudhiṣṭhira-Bhīṣma dialogic frame, assuming that "larger framed items in the collection tend to diminish the sense of the Bhīṣma-Yudhiṣṭhira setting" (p. 158), which "often fades from sight" and is "once…even discarded" (p, 149)—in this latter claim mischaracterizing a shift of which he first says, more plausibly, that "the Bhīṣma-Yudhiṣṭhira protocol is temporarily suspended" (p. 144)[21]—and going on to say that even where it is strongest, at 12.56–90, "the Bhīṣma-Yudhiṣṭhira frame…is definitely an artificial frame" (p. 149).

I do not find any of these modes of analysis really convincing. On the second, for instance, Fitzgerald is not altogether persuasive in assigning successive "labels," "rubrics," or "topics" (pp. 149, 162) based on the "proper"-ness (p. 158), "fit" (p. 162), or "point" (p. 163) of units and sets (e.g., "two optimistic texts" [p. 162]). And with regard to the third, I think it unwise to posit that Indian audiences would ever forget who is listening in from any of the *Mahābhārata*'s multiple frames. (I would wager that one thing this text would have taught Indian audiences better than it has taught Western scholars is to keep these multiple speaker-audience relations always in the back of the mind.) Moreover, I can think of other reasons why the text might have been designed to produce the described effects, not the least of which being that its authors could have sought simply to approximate features of a plausible dialogue—with stretches of high-intensity focus followed by more relaxed unfoldings—between the two increasingly relaxed principals, Bhīṣma and Yudhiṣṭhira.

A Question of Sympathetic Reading

Here, then, I would like to suggest five assumptions, working premises, or strategies that might point a way to further "sympathetic reading," and then turn to the early going of the *Śāntiparvan* to illustrate how this approach can offer some reverse light on the questions raised

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On this basis, "Obviously, [the next unit] now intervenes, but it would seem that it was added…later" (778). But "these" is gratuitous: *tataḥ paraṃ* more easily means "beyond that, further." Cf. van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, 2: 770, translating "and friendship…higher still" (i.e., "higher than that") for *tataḥ paraṃ mitram* (3.281.29). Yudhiṣṭhira probably just wants to hear more about *dharma*.

[21] "Suspended" describes what one reads in the text, whereas "discarded" implies an authorial rejection. On the pertinent passages, see chapter 7 above.

so far about the *Gītā* and growth-rings. The first two assumptions are already by now implicit and can be mentioned quickly: the text trains its readers to watch for understatement and suspension in the comings and goings of Kṛṣṇa and the unfolding of *bhakti*, and one should not underestimate the staying power of its multiple frames.

Third, one should not overdo the didactic/narrative opposition. While I heartily agree with the conclusion of Fitzgerald's opening statement on the "four large anthologies": "What is surely lacking is an orientation to *The Book of Peace* as a deliberate literary and intellectual construction, as a functioning part of the *Mahābhārata*, serving some of the agendas of those people responsible for the epic" (p. 80), I would suggest caution on the point that this *praśamana-anuśāsana* "poses an effective counterweight to the reading narrative of the great Bhārata war, and it created another ancient Indian library of sacred texts" (p. 99). While the terms anthology, collection, compendia, and library are all analogically useful, one must be careful about where one heads with them, and with "library" I believe Fitzgerald takes too free a hand in emphasizing originally "independent components" (p. 199, n. 200).[22] But more important, the notion of "counterweight" relies on a didactic/narrative opposition that is perhaps due for questioning: the four anthologies' multiple texts and teachings would certainly have presented different problems from other parts of the *Mahābhārata*, but it may handle these problems in recognizably similar ways.[23]

Fourth, one should not miss that the four anthologies become a centerpiece in the life-long education of Yudhiṣṭhira by attending closely to his ups and downs and repeatedly reinforcing the foun-

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[22] E.g., that "The first part of the RDh instructions was definitely assembled from preexisting texts," with a significant effort made to "weave" them "into a (relatively) seamless text that appears as a genuine dialogue" (p. 148). I doubt that this significant effort, this weave, is secondary.

[23] Consider here what one might call a theory of the originary vastness of texts that would apply equally to the *Mbh* "as a whole." Presented twice in the Śāntiparvan, first at the beginning of Bhīṣma's instructions (12.59.13–92) and again in the *Nārāyaṇīya* (12.322.26–52), one hears of two ancient *śāstra*s, one of a hundred thousand *adhyāya*s (12.59.29) and the other of a hundred thousand verses (332.36), that, like the hundred-thousand-verse *Mbh*, offer dharmic instruction for kings. Indeed, the first of five abridgments of the first of these *śāstra*s was made by Śiva (59.85–87). Fitzgerald, however, starts using "hieratic capitals" (see xxi) in translating *śāstra* only at the onset of Bhīṣma's instructions (12.50.34), and then quite consistently thereafter (usually as "Teachings," "Learned Teachings," or "Learned Traditions," but in the case of Śiva's abridgement also as "Guidebook" [p. 309]). Fitzgerald thereby reinforces a division between narrative and didactic that is not discernible in the text itself.

dational trope of his guilelessness.[24] This overarching theme finds a good illustration in Book 3 where, after narrating the *Rāmopākhyāna* to the five Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī, Mārkaṇḍeya says to Yudhiṣṭhira, "Do not grieve, tiger among men, you are a baron, enemy-burner; you are walking the road of blazing resolve that relies on the prowess of your arms; for not the slightest bit of guile is found in you (*na hi te vṛjinaṃ kiṃcid dṛśyate param aṇv api*). On that road (*asmin mārge*) even Indra with the gods and Asuras might well despair" (3.276.2–3 as translated by van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, 2: 759). To trace this road or path through Books 12 and 13 one must be attentive to the Bhīṣma-Yudhiṣṭhira frame, including the build-up to it and moments where Vaiśampāyana breaks into it to offer cues to subtleties we would otherwise have to miss. Within the compass of this translation, one may consider Yudhiṣṭhira's quite developed and beautifully rendered evocation of the wanderer's path in response to Arjuna's insulting first speech, especially 12.9.2 and 12–19, ending, "ridiculing no one, frowning at nothing, my face always cheery, all my faculties thoroughly restrained, questioning no one about the road, traveling by any way whatsoever, not seeking to go in any particular direction, nor to any particular place, paying no heed to my going, not looking back, straight and steady as I go, but careful to avoid creatures moving and still—so will I be" (p. 185). Or consider Yudhiṣṭhira's reflections on the dashed "hopes" that he had for Duryodhana (p. 485; 12.125.1–7); his horrified and stunned reaction to the "robber morality"[25] that

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[24] Though to be sure, Yudhiṣṭhira also has his dark side and conniving moments as part of what Fitzgerald calls his interesting "complexity" (pp. 87, 125).

[25] My translation of *dasyumaryādā* at 140.1c; cf. Fitzgerald, 541: "barbarian law." This once I must disagree with Fitzgerald's translation choice of "barbarian" for *dasyu*, *mleccha*, *anāryajano* (p. 50; 11.14.13), Niṣāda (p. 132), and Caṇḍāla (p. 153 n. 263; 498). Fitzgerald unsuccessfully tries to distinguish *mleccha*s from *dasyu*s as "foreign barbarians" and "jungle barbarians" (pp. 495, 594 [even in translation], 823). A better distinction emerges in the *Āpaddharma*'s last unit (12.162–67), a story set among *mleccha*s of the north (162.28; the only usage of that term in the *Āpaddharma*) in which the characters and their village are designated by *dasyu* fourteen times. A Brahman settles into the village, meets a "good" *dasyu*, and starts living the *dasyu* life. Meeting a "good *dasyu*" would be different from meeting a "good *mleccha*," which I have never done in a classical Sanskrit text. The major trait of *dasyu*s that interests the *Āpaddharma* is that, although they can be wild and unruly, especially in their forests, they can be managed once a king recognizes that their wildness and unruliness can be of service if they run what are essentially protection rackets. In the *Āpaddharma* such unruly but regulable *dasyu* morality is mirrored in kings' being given free reign to rob others—in both cases exempting Brahmans (12.128.20; 133.14–18)—to restore their treasuries (12.128; 129.9; 131.1–6; 134). It is just after Yudhiṣṭhira hears how the Brahman Viśvāmitra robs dog

Bhīṣma has unveiled as law for times of distress (140.1); and his claim
not to "understand vicious men or their deeds" (p. 576; 158. 1cd).
Finally, let me add that I would also prefer "goodness" rather than
"courage" for *sattva* in "Then he whose courage (*sattva*) had never
been diminished[26] questioned the son of the river…" (p. 590; 161.48).
For Fitzgerald, however, "the Bhīṣma-Yudhiṣṭhira frame…is definitely
an artificial frame" (p. 149), as noted, and serves mainly to provide
a kind of shelf space for the "independent components" of the four
anthologies. When it comes to tracing it, although he attends to it
nicely in *adhyāya* summaries, he is quite minimalist in his interpreta-
tion: "occasionally, in *The Laws for Kings*, there is a little movement
in the overarching narrative" (p. 143). His emphasis is consistently on
what could be deemed late.[27]

Fifth, and tying all the preceding together, are the overarching nar-
rative *and didactic* devices of pacing, threads, repetitions (after the war,
more particularly, the text's plangency or mournful reverberation),
and juxtaposition. Fitzgerald is certainly appreciative of "themes" and
"threads" and their reverberation,[28] though I think somewhat suspi-
cious of juxtaposition. But when he gets to his growth-rings hypothesis
he tends to treat such matters as of secondary interest: "For the most
part these lessons are a succession of discrete textual units of varying
length and internal complexity that sometimes do and sometimes do
not exhibit thematic connections to the other textual units of Bhīṣma's
instruction" (p. 144). Yet one of the ways that Bhīṣma, and before him
others, finds of engaging the attention of Yudhiṣṭhira and guiding him
through his ups and downs is to take advantage of the *Mahābhārata*'s
character as a multi-genre work. Here again, as Fitzgerald recognizes,

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meat from a *caṇḍāla* that he says he shuns this "robber morality," since it leaves his
sense of *dharma* "completely undone" (p. 541; 140.1–2).

[26] Cf. Bowles, 297: "Again that man who had never lost his goodness.…"

[27] Right after mentioning the passage just cited as indicative of how "the text stands
now" (pp. 143–33 and n. 247), Fitzgerald mentions four passages to support his point,
among them two toward the end of the *Āpaddharma*: where Nakula questions Bhīṣma
rather than Yudhiṣṭhira, and where, with Bhīṣma taking a breather, Yudhiṣṭhira con-
verses with his brothers and Vidura. See above at n. 21 on Fitzgerald's imputation of
lateness to passages interrupting the Bhīṣma-Yudhiṣṭhira exchange.

[28] E.g., p. 88, "the dominant theme of Vyāsa's narrative becomes burning grief
(*śoka*)"; cf. pp. 149, 162–63 on labeling different sets and units by "theme," especially
the "proto-*Āpaddharma*." These terms too are anchored to an historicizing purpose:
"a thread of interconnection" between the anthologies "as a literary artifact and the
historical events that…stimulated the precipitation of this grand work" (p. 101).

"the contents of these books are instructional lectures, sermons, histories, and parables" (p. 143): the Viśvāmitra story "smacks of satire" (p. 157); and there are "animal fables and parables" (p. 158). Ought we not to ask whether there is an attempt to use artful juxtaposition in developing this curriculum for the troubled king?

Let me then turn to the *Śāntiparvan*'s opening with these issues, premises, and questions in mind.

Opening the Śāntiparvan

The *Śāntiparvan* opens with the conclusion of the funerary rites after the Kurukṣetra war. "There on the bank of the holy Bhāgīrathī brahmins by the hundreds of thousands comforted and encouraged (*āśvāsayantaḥ*) the king, who was out of his mind with burning grief" (p. 168; 12.1.8). Fitzgerald takes two words, "comforted and encouraged," for one, *āśvāsayantaḥ*, here, no doubt recognizing that it is an important term: indeed, the long *praśamana-anuśāsana* of Yudhiṣṭhira is equally his *āśvāsana*: the revival of his spirits, his breathing anew, his cheering up. Now amid this conclave of ṛṣis is Nārada, the proverbial "troublemaker for the welfare of the world," whose words of "comfort and encouragement"—"I hope yon feel like celebrating now" (*api kaccin modasi*) (p. 169; 1.11d)—rather confront Yudhiṣṭhira with the terrible irony of his situation. Beset with grief over the killing of Karṇa, whom Yudhiṣṭhira did not know was his elder brother until their mother Kuntī just revealed it over Karṇa's corpse (11.27.6–24), Yudhiṣṭhira asks Nārada to tell all that brought on Karṇa's doom. Upon further hearing his mother confirm Nārada's ultimately elegaic account, Yudhiṣṭhira says, "Damn the *kṣatra* way" (*dhig astu kṣatram ācāram*) (7.5a), insists that "no one could make us rejoice at being a king" (*rājyena nāsmān kaścit praharṣayet*) (7.8ab), remarks that "We are not dogs, but like dogs we greedily went after a piece of meat! Now our piece of meat is gone; and so are those who would have eaten it" (7.10), and soon announces to Arjuna that he will depart for the forest, concluding, "You rule this wide earth.... The kingdom and the enjoyment of it are no affair (*artha*) of mine" (7.40). Vaiśampāyana then frames the continuation, ending this *adhyāya*: "With this the King of Law, Yudhiṣṭhira, stopped...," and beginning the next with, "Now Arjuna, like a man who is not going to let an insult pass (*adhikṣipta ivākṣamī*), attacked him with harsh words and

delivered a very apposite speech" (8.1). This is the first of six speeches by Arjuna, which open retrospective vistas on the *Bhagavad Gītā*. The point, however, emerges only gradually. First, the two brothers are differentiated with respect to two concepts that are basic to the *Gītā*: their "purpose" (*artha*) and their "intellect" (*buddhi*). (Since Fitzgerald translates *buddhi* variously, I will insert the word "intellect" to signal that it is what the conversation is still about.)

Has Arjuna really been insulted? When a *Mahābhārata* narrator describes someone with the particle *iva* in the sense of "like" or "as if," he signals what would appear to be so but also suggests that there is an ambiguity to ponder. Clearly Yudhiṣṭhira is throwing his troubles into Arjuna's lap along with some coded barbs, but it is not so clear he has insulted him. My sense is that Arjuna needs to feel insulted, and generates his initial outrage mainly over the dog reference. As the war's most tenacious fighter, he could find this insulting, but Yudhiṣṭhira may not have intended it to be so.[29] But appearing to take it as an insult, "licking the corners of his mouth over and over again (*sṛkkiṇī saṃlihan muhuḥ*)" (p. 182; 12.8.2d)—indeed, Vaiśaṃpāyana would seem to be telling us that Arjuna is looking rather like a dog—Arjuna insults Yudhiṣṭhira's manhood in no uncertain terms: connecting Yudhiṣṭhira's "heights of sissy feebleness" (*vaiklavyam uttamam*) (p. 182; 8.3b) with his decision to renounce the kingship. Arjuna asks, how could you do this "unless you are daft (*buddhilāghavāt*)" (p. 183; 8.4d), for which Fitzgerald supplies a more literal gloss in the notes: "(except) from lightness of mind?" (p. 682). Arjuna is calling Yudhiṣṭhira a "mental lightweight," whereas, by comparison, that is what he himself is, although Yudhiṣṭhira is too polite to say so, for now.[30]

Further, as if to underscore not only Yudhiṣṭhira's addled "intellect" but his complicity in the slaughter, Arjuna now asserts that Yudhiṣṭhira was "insensate with rage" (*krodhamūrchitaḥ*; p. 183; 12.8.5d) in killing all the kings in the war. There are good grounds to read this not only

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[29] Yudhiṣṭhira had said much the same before the war, but to Kṛṣṇa: "With the prevention of conciliation it becomes terrible like a trifle among dogs, as marked by the wise: tail-wagging, a bark, a bark back, backing off, baring the teeth, howling, and then the fight begins. The one who is stronger, having won, eats the meat, Kṛṣṇa. So it is too among humans; there is no distinction at all" (*evam eva manuṣyeṣu viśeṣo nāsti kaścana*) (5.70.70–72).

[30] Later he twice overcomes this reluctance in the closing words of his speeches: first, in response to Arjuna's third speech (p. 201; 12.17.19–20, 23d), and then in response to his fourth (19.26); see below.

as an exaggeration but a deliberate distortion. The descriptor here, *krodhamūrchitaḥ*, is never used for Yudhiṣṭhira in the war or anywhere else, and it is also never used for Arjuna. Rather, it is used for ill-tempered heroes and outraged Brahmans, cows, and mountains. In other words, to be "insensate with rage" is behavior that is beneath the most refined heroes, and it is never used to describe the chief antagonists of any war book. Moreover, in all of its other usages a speaker is *describing someone or something in a story.* Only Arjuna uses it, this once, to describe another character being spoken to directly as (having been) "insensate with rage." In this sense, in challenging the rest of the text, Arjuna's words are out of line: both formally, in being atypical, and in what they claim to be true.

Arjuna then grounds his argument in what Yudhiṣṭhira has declared to be no "affair" of his, *artha.* He mentions that Yudhiṣṭhira is now "rejecting altogether both Law and Profit" (*dharmārthāv akhilau hitvā*) (p. 183; 12.8.9c), and quotes the adharmic Nahuṣa, of all people, in support of doing "cruel things" (*nṛśaṃsā*) while fighting for "wealth" (*artha*) (8.11). For Arjuna, "he who has wealth has allies (*mitrāṇi*), he who has wealth has relatives (*bāndhavāḥ*)" (8.19). His view soon becomes an argument for *dasyumaryādā*, "robber morality" (8.25–31), as epitomized by his saying, "all that is better when they take it from someone else" (*kṛtsnaṃ tad eva ca śreyo yad apy ādadate 'nyataḥ*) (8.29cd),[31] on which Fitzgerald notes, "These swashbuckling words are consistent with the rest of Arjuna's fierce assertion of self-interest" (p. 682). More than this, Fitzgerald notes that when Arjuna introduces the idea that Yudhiṣṭhira should offer a horse sacrifice, he does so with words clarified by the *Bhagavad Gītā*: Yudhiṣṭhira should perform "a sacrificial rite, one made of substance (*dravyamayo yajnāḥ*)" (8.34a) rather than "one done mentally," citing *BhG* 4.33 (p. 682), where Kṛṣṇa, with the reverse emphasis, tells Arjuna, "better than the sacrifice made of substance (*śreyān dravyamayād yajñāt*) is the sacrifice of knowledge (*jnānayajna*)."[32] The compound *dravyamaya* occurs nowhere else in the *Mahābhārata.* On the face of it, either Arjuna is quoting something

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[31] Cf. Bowles, 109–10, making a more general connection with *āpad*, and n. 25 above on *dasyumaryādā*.

[32] Here and below, for the *BhG*'s translation I quote from Franklin Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā Translated and Interpreted*, part I: *Text* and *Translation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1952). For the *BhG* text I cite the Pune Critical Edition (6.23–40).

he has remembered from the *Gītā*,[33] which makes rather good sense at this point in the *Mahābhārata*, or Kṛṣṇa is made to quote Arjuna, which makes no sense at all.

The Bhagavad Gītā *and the Cheering Up of Yudhiṣṭhira*

This brings us then to the first matter on which I believe Fitzgerald points us in an unfruitful direction: his idea that the *Gītā* is a centuries-later improvement on the arguments made now to Yudhiṣṭhira. I propose a different reading. What Yudhiṣṭhira hears, among other advice, is a cumulative argument introduced by Arjuna and carried forward by Kṛṣṇa and Vyāsa—these three, in fact, being the only ones present who could know the *Gītā*'s contents—that recalls and evokes the *Gītā*. But there is also one noteworthy but cogent omission: whereas Arjuna, a prince and not a king, can be told before the war to act without the desire for the fruits of his actions (which might be important in what Fitzgerald considers to be the *Gītā*'s "improved" *bhakti-yoga* "solution" [pp. 140–41], although he does not mention it), Yudhiṣṭhira, as a king who has just won the fruits of a victory he has certainly desired, must be spared that teaching.[34] Indeed, were he told now to act without desire for the fruits of his actions, he might just take it as an invitation to head for the forest. Let us see how this works.

Arjuna's second speech is not pertinent to this point. But his third, beginning with an exaltation of the *daṇḍa* or rod of punishment that would pertain primarily to a king, returns to matters that he would seem to have learned from the *Gītā*, building up to a strong defense of "rightful infliction of injury" (*sādhuhiṃsā*) (p. 198; 12.15.49c) or "'good' violence" (Bowles, 110) in the name of world rectification, divine precedent, and scaring people into behaving (15.1–55), and then getting philosophical with, "The inner self of all creatures cannot be slain, there is no doubt of that. When the Self is unslayable, how

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[33] Biardeau also remarks on a point in Arjuna's early speeches where "L'enseignment de la BhG a pris racine dans sa pensée" (2002, 2: 536; cf. 543–44).

[34] See Vyāsa's words to Yudhiṣṭhira at 12.36.45: "You will get free of the evil you incurred, king, because of the motive you had prior to acting (*pūrveṇa hetunā*)—either you acted to effect a rescue by killing these men, or you did it because it was the duty of kings" (p. 249). But I think better for option two would be the more straightforward "…or because it was the act of a king (*atha vā nṛpakarmaṇā*)."

can anyone be slain by anyone?[35] For, just as a man might move into a new house, so does the soul arrive at various new bodies. Discarding old bodies, it takes on new ones" (15.56–58b).[36] Note that Arjuna does not bring up the "warriors go to heaven anyway" argument (Kṛṣṇa will do this). Here he is giving Yudhiṣṭhira a rather half-baked digest of Kṛṣṇa's teachings on the sinlessness of the killer.

Between Arjuna's second and third speeches, the twins and Draupadī have chimed in, making it clear that along with Bhīma they are leaving Arjuna to carry a joint message: Yudhiṣṭhira should get his act together. But Arjuna's third speech brings Bhīma to intervene—it seems, to try to soften Arjuna's harshness: "You know Law, king. There is nothing on this earth yon do not know. We are always trying to understand what you do, but we never can" (p. 198; 16.2). He actually elevates the discussion, pointing ahead: "Now a terrible battle with your mind awaits you. A battle in which there is no need for arrows, nor allies nor kinsmen: a battle you must fight by yourself" (p. 199; 16.20cd–21). And he ends on an auspicious note while for the first time calling attention to Kṛṣṇa: "Fortunately the wicked Duryodhana and his followers have been killed in the war. Fortunately you have followed the lead of Draupadī's tresses. Worship as prescribed with a Horse Sacrifice that offers good presents to priests. We are your servants (kiṃkarāḥ), Pārtha, and so is the heroic Vāsudeva" (p. 200; 16.25.26).

Yudhiṣṭhira responds to this with what Fitzgerald takes as "a kind of soliloquy" (p. 694) in which "[t]he inner battle that Bhīma predicted now takes place within Yudhiṣṭhira" (p. 179). But this is unlikely. I believe the portended inner battle is to last through the rest of the *Mahābhārata*, but that it will be waged especially in Yudhiṣṭhira's lengthy exchanges in the four anthologies—and that it thus should not be identified with this following speech.[37] Moreover, it is easier to read the first half of Yudhiṣṭhira's response as addressed implicitly to Bhīma and the second half to Arjuna. First Yudhiṣṭhira speaks of

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[35] *Mbh* 12.15.56: *avadhyaḥ sarvabhūtānām antarātmā na saṃśayaḥ/avadhye cātmani kathaṃ vadhyo bhavati kenacit*, Cf. *BhG* 2.30: *dehā nityam avadhyo 'yaṃ dehe sarvasya bhārata/tasmāt sarvāṇi bhūtāni na tvaṃ śocitum arhasi*.

[36] *Mbh* 12.15.57–58b: *yathā hi puruṣaḥ śālām punaḥ sampraviśed navām/evaṃ jīvaḥ śarīrāṇi tāni tāni prapadyate//dehān purāṇān utsṛjiya navān sampratipadyate*; cf. *BhG* 2.22: *vāsāṃsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya navāni gṛhṇāti naro 'parāṇi/tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇāni anyāni saṃyāti navāni dehī*.

[37] Note that Arjuna, in his fifth speech, can briefly refer to this process as still lying ahead: "Now conquer yourself (*vijitātmā…bhava*)" (p. 213; 12.22.10cd).

kingship in relation to matters of desire and appetite, concerns typi-
cal of Bhīma. Then he contrasts those who have *buddhi* with those
who are *mandabuddhi* or "dull-witted" (p. 201; 12.17.19–20), and
concludes, "Everything is based in understanding" (*sarvam buddhau
pratiṣṭhitam*) (17.23d). I believe these are indirect barbs at Arjuna's
"intellect," and that they show Yudhiṣṭhira beginning to overcome
the politeness he has shown so far to Arjuna (see n. 30), which he
will do more emphatically after hearing Arjuna's fourth speech.
Vaiśampāyana's framing of Arjuna's reply makes this the most likely
reading: "When the king lapsed into silence, Arjuna spoke to him
again. He was deeply pained by the king's verbal darts, and he burned
with grief and sorrow" (p. 201; 18.1).

So stung, Arjuna's fourth speech is rather a Lulu. This time he cites
a story about Janaka and his wife, but he quotes the wife rather than
Janaka, a famous Upaniṣadic royal sage whom the epic presents as an
authority on *buddhi*.[38] After Janaka became a wandering bald beggar,
his wife found him in a deserted place and berated him about his tak-
ing up the mendicant life. Arjuna says she made "reasoned arguments"
(*hetumad vacaḥ*) (12.18.6d), the least persuasive of which, certainly, is,
"Having given up brilliant Royal Splendor, you look like a dog" (*śriyaṃ
hitvā pradīptāṃ tvaṃ śvavat samprati vīkṣyase*) (18.12ab)—perhaps a
payback on the dog theme, since Arjuna is implying that Yudhiṣṭhira
would soon look like Janaka were he to set forth as announced. The
queen dislikes beggars: a king should give, not take, and he should
support the different types of mendicants, including those "lacking
understanding (*abuddhayaḥ*)" who abandon not only the three Vedas
but their children (18.32).[39] Arjuna says that Janaka was sung of as
a great sacrificer in this world, but then got confused (18.35–36). As
noted, Yudhiṣṭhira now no longer holds back. No doubt it is Arjuna's
imputation that Yudhiṣṭhira is like those "lacking understanding" that
finally pushes him over the edge, for that is the ground on which he
defends himself. Whereas Arjuna knows "only the teachings on fight-
ing" (*yuddhaśāstravid eva*) (p. 204; 12.19.8a), Yudhiṣṭhira claims to
know a great variety of *śāstras* down to their deepest subtleties (19.1–4,

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[38] As in his instructions bearing on liberation to Vyāsa's eldest son Śuka (12.313.40–
41, 47).
[39] No doubt implying Buddhists, Jains, and other heretic (*nāstika*) mendicant orders.

16–17, 22, 25).[40] Moreover, he closes with the claim that he has the "intellect" to pursue this course: "O son of Kuntī, one who knows Law always attains the universal principle (*mahat*) through asceticism; he finds it (*mahat*) through the higher mind (*buddhyā*); he gains happiness through renunciation" (p. 205; 19.26). Clearly, one can derive from this that Yudhiṣṭhira is prepared to implement some of the basic "proto-Sāṃkhya" teachings of the *Gītā* without Kṛṣṇa having to impart them.

At this impasse, the Ṛṣi Devasthāna "interrupts the family colloquy" (p. 205) for two *adhyāya*s (12.20–21) to explain some of Arjuna's more general points in new ways, and to do some initial tablesetting for the contents of the *Śānti* and *Anuśāsana Parvan*s—advising Yudhiṣṭhira to be "resolved upon *Rājadharma*" (21.16b); telling him "it is extremely difficult to get to Extinction (*nirvāṇam*); there are many obstacles to it" (p. 212; 21.16ef); and that one of the ways royal sages reach heaven is by their dedication to making gifts (21.17b). No doubt encouraged by this saintly backing, Arjuna now makes his fifth speech, which Vaiśampāyana prefaces by describing Yudhiṣṭhira as Arjuna's "lord (*īśvaram*), whose mind was sunk in depression (*viṣaṇṇamanasam*)" (p. 213; 22.1).[41] As Bhīma did, Arjuna admonishes Yudhiṣṭhira, "now conquer yourself" (22.10cd), but for Arjuna this means exalting "kṣatra Law" (*kṣatradharma*) with all its brutal horrors and insisting that Indra "who killed ninety-nine nineties of his own wicked kinsmen" (p. 213; 22.11cd) should be Yudhiṣṭhira's model. Upon Arjuna's finishing, Vaiśampāyana tells Janemejaya that Yudhiṣṭhira "said nothing.…so Dvaipāyana spoke" (p. 212; 12.23.1). Vaiśampāyana thus frames Arjuna's fifth speech as if it may have gone over the edge: certainly his "lord" Yudhiṣṭhira's depression was not going to be reduced by hearing a near rant on *kṣatradharma*. Yudhiṣṭhira's silence thus makes Arjuna's last words a segue for Vyāsa. Says Arjuna: "You should not grieve one bit for anyone who departed in this way.…They all went the furthest course, doing the kṣatra Law, purified on the sharp blades of weapons. What has happened had to be so (*bhavitavyaṃ tathā tac ca yad vṛttam*)…for it was ordained (*diṣṭam*).…It could not have been averted" (p. 213; 12.22.14–15). Here again, Arjuna is

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[40] Arjuna will soon cite only "tradition" (*smṛtaḥ*) (p. 213; 12.22.5b) rather than *śāstra* or *śruti*.

[41] The same verb *vi-ṣad* (√*sad*) also describes Arjuna's "despondency" three times at the beginning of the *Gītā* (1.28b, 2.1c, and 2.10c).

restating ideas he could recall from the *Bhagavad Gītā*, notably *BhG*
11.33c: "they have already been slain long ago." Vyāsa, the author by
whom all this was "ordained" just as it was by Kṛṣṇa, will now find a
better way to put these ideas into words suitable for Yudhiṣṭhira.[42]

Beginning, "This statement of Bībhatsu's is completely true,
Yudhiṣṭhira" (pp. 213–14; 12.23.2ab),[43] Vyāsa opens a foray that leads
to three exchanges with Yudhiṣṭhira in six *adhyāya*s (12.23–28), rein-
forcing Arjuna's topics, but with a different kind of voice. For one
thing, he hooks Yudhiṣṭhira into asking his first leading question (24.1)
since he asked Nārada about Karṇa. Second, as already suggested,
Vyāsa speaks with an implied authorial voice: "Rejecting household-
ing and going to the forest is not what is prescribed [or "ordained":
vidhīyate] for you" (p. 214; 12.23.3cd). And when Yudhiṣṭhira despairs
to the point of saying he will fast to death, and asks that all bid him
adieu, "Vyāsa stopped him (*vyāso nigṛhya*)," saying, "I will declare to
you once again what has already been said: This was fated (*diṣṭam
etad*), lord....As the Creator has made you [or "as you are issued/
created by the Disposer": *yathā sṛṣto 'si...dhātrā*] for deeds, O son
of Kuntī, do them. Your perfection will come from that. You are not
your own master all by yourself, king" (p. 224; 12.27.26d, 27cd, 32).
Note how author/creator resonances emerge here: Yudhiṣṭhira can
only be a perfect character by overcoming his resistance to doing
what the author/creator disposes. It is in this vein that Vyāsa carries
forward Arjuna's presentiments of ideas from the *Gītā*. In fact, it is
while quoting another *gītā* of King Senajit (12.26.13), on how Time
(cf. *BhG* 11.33) with its "inevitable turning" (*paryāyaḥ...dustaraḥ*)
(p. 220; 12.26.14) is the fundamental cause, that he says, "But men kill
other men, king, and then other men kill those first men as well. This
is the conventional wisdom, king. In fact, no one kills, no one is killed
(*saṃjñaiṣā laukikī rājan na hinasti na hanyate*). Some think 'He kills,'
while others think 'No one kills.' The coming into being and passing
away of beings is fixed according to their basic natures (*svabhāvatas tu
niyatau bhūtām prabhavāpyayau*)" (26.15–16). First, Vyāsa reiterates
and presumably must think he improves upon Arjuna's formulations

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[42] Cf. Hiltebeitel 2001a, 66–72, where I trace the "education of Yudhiṣṭhira"
through Books 12 and 13 in relation to the author, but not in relation to the four
anthologies.
[43] Vyāsa concurs with Arjuna also at 24.30.

on the unslayableness of the soul.[44] Then he breaks into cosmological ground that all but references the deity. Although the *Gītā* does not use the Upaniṣadic yogic phrase *prabhavāpyaya*,[45] it uses the more straight-forward *prabhavaḥ pralayaḥ* twice: "Of the whole world I am the origin and the dissolution, too (*ahaṃ kṛtsnasya jagataḥ prabhavaḥ pralayas tathā*)" (7.6cd; cf. *BhG* 9.18c). The more yogic phrase could be more suitable for Yudhiṣṭhira (cf. *Nārāyaṇīya* 12.328.14).

  It may also be that these words cue Arjuna to be reminded of Kṛṣṇa. Up to the middle of Vyāsa's exchange with Yudhiṣṭhira, Arjuna "remained angry (*kupite ca dhanaṃjaye*)" (12.26.1b), but in his last short sixth speech, his anger seems to be gone. Having heard Vyāsa speak of the great, deep ocean of time with its monsters of old age and death on which beings meet like floating sticks and into which the world sinks (12.28.36, 43), Arjuna, at last, has words of sympathy for his "drowning" elder brother. "He is drowning in an ocean of grief. Revive his spirits (*tam āśvāsaya*), Mādhava. Everyone has been thrown into doubt once again, Janārdana. O strong-armed hero, please make his grief go away" (pp. 227–28; 12.29.2c–3). In asking Kṛṣṇa to "revive Yudhiṣṭhira's spirits," Arjuna uses the same verb that describes the moment when Kṛṣṇa brings Arjuna back to his senses after showing him his cosmic form in the *Bhagavad Gītā*: "Having thus spoken to Arjuna, Vāsudeva again revealed his own (natural) form, and comforted (*āśvāsayām āsa*) him in his fright by once more assuming his gracious aspect" (*BhG* 11.50). Of course this verb is found widely[46] and the dramas differ, but scenes of Kṛṣṇa offering comfort surely create echoes. In any case, it is Kṛṣṇa who is now called on to "revive the spirits" of Yudhiṣṭhira, this being the first time the verb *ā-śvas* has been used since those hundreds and thousands of Brahmans failed to "comfort and encourage" Yudhiṣṭhira when Nārada threw things off course with his intolerable irony.

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[44] See n. 35 above. Again, pertinent *BhG* lines include 2.19cd: *ubhau tau na vijāniyo nāyaṃ hanti na hanyate*; 2.20cd: *ajo nityaḥ śāśvato 'yam purāṇo/na hanyate hanaymāne śarire*; 13.28cd: *na hinasty ātmanātmānaṃ tato yāti parāṃ gatim*; and 18.17cd: *hatvāpi sa imāṃl lokān na hanti na nibadhyate*.

[45] *Kaṭha Up.* 6.11; see Patrick Olivelle, tr., *The Early Upaniṣads: Annotated Text and Translation* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 401: "When the senses are firmly reined in, that is Yoga, so people think. From distractions a man is then free, for Yoga is the coming-into-being as well as the ceasing-to-be (*yogo hi prabhavāpyayau*)."

[46] Vyāsa will soon tell Yudhiṣṭhira, "Cheer (*āśvāsaya*) your brothers and your friends" (12.34.22c).

Now against this background of reverberations between these pre-war and postwar scenes, nothing is more revealing than the ways that Kṛṣṇa "comforts" Arjuna in the one and Yudhiṣṭhira in the other. For Arjuna, just after Kṛṣṇa's terrifying theophany, Kṛṣṇa brings comfort after terrifying the Terrifier (Bībhatsu, a name for Arjuna), his dear and intimate friend (*sakhi*), into becoming his friend *and* devotee (see *BhG* 11.41). With Yudhiṣṭhira, who is never called Kṛṣṇa's *sakhi*, Vaiśampāyana cues us to ponder something strangely different that seems to combine a longstanding mutual affection, a respect for each other's "intellects," and a knowing mutual deference between the incarnate deity and the king:[47] "The king could never disobey Keśava—from the time he was a little boy, Govinda (*bālyāt prabhṛti govindaḥ*) had been more dear to him than even Arjuna. The strong-armed Śauri took hold of Yudhiṣṭhira's sandal-streaked arm that looked like a pillar of stone and he spoke to him disarmingly (*abhivinodayan*)" (p. 228; 12.29.4–6).[48] Fitzgerald's "disarmingly" is most felicitous,[49] even (indeed especially) with Kṛṣṇa taking hold of Yudhiṣṭhira's pillar-like arm. But how is Kṛṣṇa "disarming"? We may say with the varied meanings of the verb *vi-nud*: disarm, divert, amuse, entertain.[50] First he "disarms": "Your face is beautiful, with your fine teeth and sweet eyes. It is sincere, like a fully opened lotus awakened by the sun" (p. 228; 12.29.7). Having begun in this extraordinary fashion, he tells Yudhiṣṭhira not to grieve, and quickly affirms the point noted earlier that Arjuna left open: all the slain warriors have gone to heaven and should not be mourned (8c–11), recalling *Bhagavad Gītā* 2.32 and 37. Then, leaving *Gītā* references behind, he is suddenly diverting, launching new versions of two "old accounts" that were earlier told to Arjuna by Vyāsa, in Yudhiṣṭhira's hearing, upon the death of Abhimanyu.[51] Quoting Nārada, who is of course present, Kṛṣṇa begins a significantly

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[47] Recall that Bhīma has told Yudhiṣṭhira that Kṛṣṇa, too, is his "servant" (12.16. 25–26).

[48] It is not certain whether the little boy in question is Kṛṣṇa, Yudhiṣṭhira, or both of them (one could read it as "from the time of their youth").

[49] Given that Monier-Williams suggests the implausible "gladdeningly" or "causing to rejoice" for this very singular usage.

[50] Indeed, Mahāvinodin, "The Great Entertainer," is a name for Śiva.

[51] About a resurrected boy-prince, in that context emphasizing that he could be resurrected, unlike Abhimanyu, because he left the world without having fulfilled all his virtues—a point pertinently made to Arjuna but not to Yudhiṣṭhira, for whom it could not be more irrelevant; see Alf Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1990), 347–48.

different retelling of sixteen vignettes about great kings of old (in its first telling called the *Ṣoḍaśarājakīya* or "Story of the Sixteen Kings"), emphasizing that Nārada first told it to a king named Sṛñjaya to divert him (12.29.14.cd, 15d) from mourning a young son when great kings of old, far greater than his son, had met their ends (29.16–136). Then, quite incredibly in these circumstances, Kṛṣṇa turns from diverting Yudhiṣṭhira to amusing and entertaining him. Recalling how Sṛñjaya had to convince Nārada that he had indeed been paying attention during these rather tedious vignettes (29.137–39), Kṛṣṇa saves his first mention of the boy's name for Nārada's closing words: "I will give you once again the dear departed boy Suvarṇaṣṭhīvin ["Excretor of Gold"]…; he will have a golden navel and will live a thousand years" (p. 236; 29.141).

As the next *adhyāya* begins, this has been enough to hook Yudhiṣṭhira into asking his next lead-in question,[52] and moreover his first set of questions (five of them) of which the last is: "And I want to know if 'Excretor of Gold' was merely Suvarṇaṣṭhīvin's (*sic*) name, or was he really an 'excretor of gold (*kañcanaṣṭhīvī*)'?" (p. 237; 12.30.3). I propose that this is an early experiment in alternating what the *Rāmāyaṇa* calls *rasa*s (1.4.8), with this first brief flicker of humor (*hāsya*)[53] being an alternance on Yudhiṣṭhira's underlying "stable aesthetic emotion" of grief (*śoka*).[54] In short, Kṛṣṇa has comforted Yudhiṣṭhira by lifting his spirits for the first time since the war, if only momentarily, into a bit of shared humor. Moreover, once Kṛṣṇa has said the line about slain warriors going to heaven, it is as if he has turned to humor to divert Yudhiṣṭhira from *Gītā* matters such as they have been covered so far by Arjuna. Kṛṣṇa now continues with some amusing background to the "Excretor of Gold" story as it bears on Nārada, and then suggests that

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[52] Omitting the rhetorical and unanswered questions he asks of Vyāsa about his involvements in the killings of Droṇa, Karṇa, and Abhimanyu (12.27.17ef-19ab).

[53] Granted that humor is proverbially difficult to recognize in another language and culture, and even more so to translate in a two-thousand-year-old text, it would seem that if we consider the span covered in this translation it would resurface toward the end of the *Rājadharma* where Yudhiṣṭhira hears explicitly of moments of smiling and laughing in the Tanu story (12.125.18, 126.1 and 126.46), then again when he listens to the gallows humor of "The Conversation Between a Vulture and a Jackal" (12.149) in the middle of the *Āpaddharma*, and that such passages prepare us for his own first spontaneous smile (161.40d) in the convivial side-conversation he has with his brothers and Vidura in the *Āpaddharma's* next to last unit—leaving aside a few formal smiles in brief exchanges.

[54] See n. 28 above.

Yudhiṣṭhira ask Nārada for the rest of the story since Nārada witnessed all that happened (30.42). When Yudhiṣṭhira obliges rather unexpansively (31.1cd), it seems that he is once again getting morose. As Vaiśampāyana reports, once Nārada has finished, "The grieving King Yudhiṣṭhira kept silent, and the ascetic Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana, who knew the fundamental truth of Law, spoke to him" (p. 241; 12.32.1), again.

Kṛṣṇa thus leaves it to his co-ordainer Vyāsa to deliver the final authoritative statement on the pertinence of the *Gītā*'s teachings to Yudhiṣṭhira. Vyāsa speaks sternly of Law, assuring Yudhiṣṭhira that what he has done through war falls within it, and when Yudhiṣṭhira protests his guilt for so many deaths, Vyāsa offers four (Fitzgerald, however, says five [209]) perspectives on what accounts for action: the Lord,"[55] man, chance, and karma (32.11). Focusing on the king's use of the rod of punishment, Vyāsa says Yudhiṣṭhira is blameless from each perspective, but gives the greatest attention to the first and, his own, the fourth. On the first, he begins, "When men who have been commanded by the Lord (*īśvareṇa niyuktāḥ*) do a good or bad deed, the consequences of that deed go to the Lord. For obviously if a man were to chop down a tree in the forest with an axe, the evil would belong to the man doing the chopping and not at all to the axe" (pp. 241–42; 32.12–13). As in *Bhagavad Gītā* 11.33d, a king using the *daṇḍa*, like Arjuna taking up his weapons, would, like the axe, be the "mere instrument" (*nimittamātram*) of the Lord. Vyāsa concludes that from this standpoint, "It would not be right, son of Kuntī, that one should acquire consequences effected by another. Therefore assign it to the Lord (*tasmāc ca īśvare tan niveśaya*)" (p. 242; 12.32.15). Here, as applied to a king's use of the *daṇḍa*, one may detect echoes of the *Gītā*'s *bhakti yoga* such as Kṛṣṇa details it soon after telling Arjuna to "be a mere instrument": "But those who, all actions (*karmāṇi*) casting on Me, intent on Me, with utterly unswerving discipline meditating on Me, revere Me, for them I am the Savior from the sea of the round of deaths become right soon, son of Pṛthā, when they have made their thoughts enter into Me. Fix thy thought-organ on Me alone. Make thy consciousness enter into Me (*mayi buddhiṃ niveśaya*); and thou shalt come to dwell even in Me hereafter; there is no doubt of this" (*BhG* 12.6–8). In each case there is the imperative *niveśaya* plus a loca-

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[55] Fitzgerald points out that the Lord "might be interpreted to signify a person's 'master' or 'boss;' but admits that this does not match other epic usages (p. 709).

tive construction applied to casting one's karma on God. But whereas Kṛṣṇa recommends this to Arjuna as a *bhakti yoga* technique, Vyāsa leaves it as a theoretical option for Yudhiṣṭhira's "intellect" to ponder, and, with Kṛṣṇa standing by, soon gets to his own recommendation. What he believes, he says, is that since *karma* always has good or bad consequences, Yudhiṣṭhira should do his own *dharma* (*svadharma*) and take advantage of "expiatory measures" (*prāyaścittāni*), "or you will roast when you die" (*pretya taptāsi*) (p. 242; 12.32.20–24)!

Yudhiṣṭhira envisions falling "headfirst into hell" (33. 11cd) much as Vyāsa has just warned him, but rather than expiatory measures, he says he wants to free himself by fierce *tapas*, closing with a curious line, "Grandfather, tell me about some especially good hermitages" (*āśramāṃś ca viśeṣāṃs tvam mamācakṣva pitāmaha*)" (p. 243; 33.12cd)! Is this desperation or is he keeping his sense of humor? Yudhiṣṭhira can hardly expect Vyāsa to tell him about lovely forest retreats. The author and this seemingly incurable protagonist are at loggerheads. But it is not exactly a throwaway line either, since upon hearing it Vyāsa marks something significant, perhaps seeing an opening, since *tapas* and *prāyaścittas* are not irreconcilable. Says Vaiśampāyana, beginning the next *adhyāya*, "After listening to what Yudhiṣṭhira said, the seer Dvaipāyana, who had made a shrewd assessment (*samīkṣya nipuṇam buddhyā*)"[56] of him, responds with what Fitzgerald rightly flags as "an intricate and important sermon" (p. 209), which he summarizes nicely though mentioning only this much as regards what I now discuss: "invoking the kṣatriya Law and Time (Time in its lordly form uses beings to slay beings), he tells Yudhiṣṭhira that those killed were villains with wicked intentions, while Yudhiṣṭhira is still virtuous since he was compelled to do what he did" (p. 209). Examined more closely, we see that Vyāsa makes these connections by building upon pertinent matters from the *Bhagavad Gītā* that reconcile the first and fourth options, while also mentioning the third, chance,[57] that he just presented in his previous speech: "You were not their killer (*na tvaṃ hantā*), nor was

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[56] Fitzgerald, p. 243; 12.34.1c. At 13.57.6c Vaiśampāyana uses the similar *parīkṣya nipuṇam buddhyā* to describe Bhīṣma's scrutiny of Yudhiṣṭhira and frame a key familial turning point in Book 13 (see 13.57.42–44).

[57] "Once you understand that the origination of a man has no special cause, and that his annihilation occurs at random (*yadṛcchayā*), then grief and joy are pointless" (pp. 243–44; 12.34.11). Kṛṣṇa mentions "chance" in the *Gītā* twice: "Presented as mere luck (*yadṛcchayā*), an open door to heaven—happy the warriors…that get such a fight" (2.32); "Content with getting what comes by chance (*yadṛcchālabhasaṃtuṣṭaḥ*), passed

Bhīma, nor Arjuna, nor the twins. Time, in its characteristic revolu-
tion (*kālaḥ paryāyadharmeṇa*), took the life of those men (*dehinām*).[58]
They were destroyed by Time, Time who has no father or mother, who
treats no one kindly (*na yasya mātāpitarau nānugrāhyo 'sti kaścana*),
who is the witness of creatures' deeds (*karmasākṣi prajānām*). This
[war] has merely been the instrument of Time (*hetumātram idam
tasya kālasya*);[59] when it slays beings by means of other beings, that
is its form as Lord (*tad asmai rūpam aiśvaram*).[60] Realize that Time
has deeds for its bodily form (*karmamūrtyātmakaṃ viddhi*)[61]—it is
witness[62] to deeds good and bad, and it yields its fruit later in Time,
giving rise to pleasant and unpleasant things" (p. 243; 12.34.4–7). In
effect, rather than being a revelation *by* Kṛṣṇa, Vyāsa offers a revela-
tion *of and about this Kṛṣṇa who is standing by.*[63] Continuing to offer
this depersonalized *Gītā* theology in the deity's presence,[64] Vyāsa turns
to what Yudhiṣṭhira should derive from it: "Consider your own good
character, your vows and your special observances; yet you were made
to act and approach such deeds as those by fate (*vidhinā*). Just as an

beyond the pairs (of opposites), free from jealousy, indifferent to success and failure,
even acting he is not bound" (4.22).

[58] Uses of *dehin*, "embodied one," for the soul are prominent in *BhG* 2.11–30 at
2.13, 22, and 30, where, along with one usage of the equivalent *śaririn* (2.18), they
occur without usage of *ātman*—a feature Mislav Ježić has taken as evidence that
BhG 2.11–30 forms the *Gītā*'s "first sāṃkhya layer," and one prior to the *Gītā*'s later
philosophical unfoldings; see Przemyslaw Szczurek, "Some Remarks on the So-Called
Epic Layer of the *Bhagavadgītā*," in *Stages and Transitions*: *Temporal and Historical
Frameworks in Epic and Purāṇic Literature* (above n. 10), 60 and 70 (for discussion).
My point, however, would be only that *dehin* is one of the *Gītā*'s signature terms;
cf. also *BhG* 2.59;3.40; 14.5–8, 17.2.

[59] Cf. *BhG* 11.32a, 33d.

[60] Cf. *BhG* 11.3cd: "I desire to see Thy form as God, O Supreme Spirit (*draṣṭum
icchāmi te rūpam aiśvaram puruṣottama*)"; 11.8–9: "'But thou canst net see Me with the
same eye of thine own; I give thee a supernatural eye; behold My mystic power as God
(*yogam aiśvaram*)!' Saṃjaya said: 'Thus speaking then, O king, Hari (Viṣṇu), the great
Lord of Mystic Power (*mahāyogeśvaraḥ*), showed unto the son of Pṛthā his supernal
form as God (*paramaṃ rūpam aiśvaram*).'" Cf. *yogam aiśvaram* at 9.5, and of course
BhG 11.31–33 (*kālo 'smi lokakṣayakṛt pravṛddho lokān samāhartum iha pravṛttaḥ…*)
on this *rūpam/yogam aiśvaram* as Time ripened to destroy worlds and beings.

[61] Cf. *BhG* 9.4–10, where Kṛṣṇa says (I paraphrase) that with respect to creation
and destruction (and thus Time), all beings (and thus their *karma*) are caught up in
his material nature (*prakṛti*).

[62] See *BhG* 9.18a on Kṛṣṇa as "witness (*sākṣi*)."

[63] On this effect, cf. Mārkaṇḍeya's words to Yudhiṣṭhira on Kṛṣṇa's having just sat
and listened to a cosmic narrative about him at 3.187.49–55.

[64] Yudhiṣṭhira later asks Bhīṣma to talk about this attendant Kṛṣṇa, for whom he and
his brothers have affection, at 13.126.1–6 (cited in the closing discussion below).

apparatus (*yantra*) fashioned by a carpenter is in the control of the one who holds it, so the universe is driven by action that is yoked to Time.[65] ... But now since falsehood snares your mind on this, king, you are therefore commanded: 'Perform expiation (*prāyaścittam*) now'" (pp. 243–44; 34.9–10, 12). As Fitzgerald nicely observes, "As they have all failed to persuade Yudhiṣṭhira that he is not guilty of wrongdoing, Vyāsa reluctantly tells him he must perform the expiation" (p. 709). But note what Vyāsa does not and cannot tell him: to act (or better, the impossible to have acted) without desire for the fruits of his action. It is precisely because that course is closed off to Yudhiṣṭhira that *prāyaścitta* is required. Moreover, Vyāsa has once again made his authorial "command" coincide with what is divinely "ordained," on which he offers a story as divine precedent. Demonstrating from this tale that "the wise man must realize that there is Right with the appearance of Wrong," and urging that as "an educated man (*śrutavān*)" Yudhiṣṭhira should realize he is not going to hell, he says, "Cheer (*āśvāsaya*) your brothers and your friends" (34.13–22). Now making his point that Yudhiṣṭhira is one whose *karma* was done "unwillingly (*anicchamānaḥ*)" and with regret, he says the Aśvamedha is the right expiation (34.23–26), offering advice that previews distinctive events yet to occur in Book 14[66] where the Aśvamedha will be performed. And he concludes on the note of Yudhiṣṭhira's current worries about hell: "perform your Law, son of Kuntī, and what you experience after death will be better" (p. 245; 34.36).

Thus ends Vyāsa's turning-point speech. Borrowing a trope from Karṇa's prewar depiction to Kṛṣṇa of the forthcoming "sacrifice of battle," let me take the gamble that if I review matters so far as a postwar "sacrifice of baseball," terrible as it sounds at first, it will be illuminating and to the point.[67] Arjuna has been the starting pitcher. He pitched well enough, delivering fastballs he learned from Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* (he hadn't mastered the curves). But he fell behind, and Devasthāna (technically, a set-up man), Kṛṣṇa, and Nārada took over the middle innings, the latter two tossing a few bloopers. And when the home

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[65] Cf *BhG* 18.61: "Of all beings, the Lord in the heart abides, Arjuna, causing all beings to turn around (as if) fixed in a machine (*yantra*), by his magic power."

[66] Yudhiṣṭhira should do "soothing things even for babies still in the womb," foreshadowing, or even announcing, the birth of Parikṣit, now still in the womb, and he should replace the defeated kings, even by princesses (p. 245; 12.34.32–33).

[67] My apologies to readers beyond the baseball world, for some of whom cricket might be still a bit pertinent.

(*gṛhastha*) team finally took a precious lead, Vyāsa brought himself in as a would-be closer. But now a (double) question from Yudhiṣṭhira (only his third) does not allow the victory so quickly: "What are the deeds that require expiation? What does a man do to get free? Tell me, grandfather (*kiṃ kṛtvā caiva mucyeta tan me brūhi pitāmaha*)" (p. 245; 12.35.1). Vyāsa has hooked Yudhiṣṭhira on the help to be offered by expiation, over which Vyāsa reigns as the acknowledged expert. But expiation will never be enough for Yudhiṣṭhira, and with this "*mucyeta*" in the second of these two questions—which could just mean "freed of sin by expiation," but which in standing alone suggests far more[68]—he ties the score, hinting that it may be necessary to satisfy this restless king with a *Mokṣadharma Parvan.* Vyāsa will now make a few more pitches and then bring in the long reliever Bhīṣma for the anthologized extra innings.

The Four Anthologies

This brings us then to the matter of growth-rings through Books 12 and 13, on which I believe Fitzgerald points us again in an unfruitful direction. Not only is it a matter of the shaky evidence for this within the "four anthologies," but the fact that the head topics of all four sections are anticipated in the exchange Yudhiṣṭhira continues with Vyāsa just before the latter brings in the long reliever. I have begun with the teaser just noted: Yudhiṣṭhira's ambiguous *mucyeta.* But matters soon get more precise. First, and let us note that from this point Yudhiṣṭhira's questions flow freely and can no longer be profitably counted, "Yudhiṣṭhira thought for a moment" and asked four questions, two about eating and two about giving (p. 249; 12.37.1–2). For the rest of *adhyāya* 37, Vyāsa offers preliminary detail on these matters, but concludes concessively, "this is a large matter that had to be learned in brief form (*samāsena mahad hy etad śrotavyam*)" (p. 252; 37.43cd). This leaves giving to be taken up—cumulatively, I would suggest—in numerous other contexts, and especially as what will be the major agenda of the *Dānadharmaparvan* in Book 13.1–152, where giving will repeatedly intersect with food, particularly in connection

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[68] Literally translated, the question would read, "And having done what may one be freed?"

with giving food to Brahmans.[69] But now, having focused matters on expiations and food, offering this foretaste on gifts, and leaving the subject of "release" at the ambiguous placeholder we have noted, Vyāsa has now successfully revived Yudhiṣṭhira's appetite for things of this world. And so it is that in the next *adhyāya* Yudhiṣṭhira opens by asking Vyāsa the agenda-setting question for the next two sub-*parvans* of the *Śāntiparvan*: "Great sage, blessed one, most excellent of brahmins, I wish to hear at length (*vistareṇa*) all the Laws for kings (*rājadharmān*) and all the Laws of the system of the four Orders of society, and how a king determines policy during times of distress (*āpatsu*)" (p. 252; 12.38.1–2). Appreciating that Vyāsa's discussion of expiations and food "answers my interests exactly and cheers me a little," he nonetheless comments that "Doing what is Lawful and ruling as a king are constantly in opposition—I think about this all the time, and yet this opposition baffles me" (pp. 252–53; 38.3c-4). As Vaiśampāyana immediately suggests, it would be just such a response that Vyāsa has been awaiting, for at this very moment, "having glanced at Nārada (*nāradaṃ samabhiprekṣya*),"[70] he tells Yudhiṣṭhira, "If you wish to hear the Laws in their entirety, approach Bhīṣma (*śrotum icchasi ced dharmān akhilena…praihi bhīṣmam*)" (p. 253; 38.5c, 6c).

It would seem to me that these anticipations of all four anthologies, which Vyāsa has probably just referred to as "the Laws in their entirety," would be significant at this pivotal moment in the text. Let us note that in three of the four cases, there is specific attention to the volume needed to treat the topics: giving and food are "a large matter" that cannot be addressed now; and *rājadharma* and *āpad* are what Bhīṣma will shortly speak to "at length" and in sequence. I take this as evidence that the plan for Books 12 and 13 is condensed here, and note that this segment is *not* one that Fitzgerald includes among those he considers to be late. Nor does he highlight or consider any of these

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[69] Intermittently at first (e.g., 13.9.12, 23.39, 24.49, 35.1–2, where the preeminent subjects are cows and women, including the gift of a bride [44]), and then at full bore after Vaiśampāyana describes a happy exchange between all the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī at 57.42–44 and Yudhiṣṭhira makes giving his next primary question at 58.1–2 (see especially 13.62, 65.53–63, 66, 93.1–2, 94–95, 113.7–28 [Bṛhaspati is the speaker during a surprise visit from heaven (112.4–114)], 116, and 122.10–16).

[70] Note that at 12.38.27, when Yudhiṣṭhira gets up to enter the city, Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa, Devasthāna, and Vyāsa are the four who are said to have persuaded him "along with the others." Nārada would seem to be only among the others, his cogent contributions having been to set things in motion, to follow Kṛṣṇa's cues on the story of "Gold-Excretor," and to receive this glance from Vyāsa.

apparent references to what is to come, at least the last two of which seem to me to be beyond question.

I thus believe there is a stronger case to be made for reading Books 12 and 13 whole, as part of the *Mahābhābrata's* total design and earliest inspiration, than an *adhyāya*-by-*adhyāya* and anthology-by-anthology approach envisions or allows. In this regard, recent approaches by John Brockington and Adam Bowles, each generated by the study of one anthology, suggest principles that may have some generalizable merit.

Brockington, in an article that seeks "to assess how far" the *Mokṣadharma* "is just a random collection and how far its growth conforms to a definite purpose or reveals a clear structure,"[71] mentions Robert C. Zaehner's view that "[t]he scheme of the twelfth book of the *Mahābhārata* resembles" the *Gītā* in that the *Mokṣadharma* becomes "increasingly theistic."[72] But Brockington cautions: "In so far as [Zaehner] regards the *Nārāyaṇīya* as its climax, such a view might possibly be justified, but in reality the final passage of the *Mokṣadharma* is the *Uñcha-vṛtty-upākhyāna*" (p. 72)—a unit, named after the ascetic practice of "gleaning" food from the remains of the harvest, that tells a puzzling story (or better, puzzle story) about the travels of a Brahman who has learned about the many doors to heaven. Brockington then restates his opening caution as a conclusion (p. 81) after thrice asserting the lateness of the *Nārāyaṇīya* (pp. 74, 78, 80).[73] Considering the parvan's history as the only setting in which the *Nārāyaṇīya's* theism could be climactic, and weighing supposed evidence for both the earliness and lateness of the tale of gleaning, he decides that the latter "cannot easily be explained as a mere afterthought or appendix" and that it "constitutes perhaps the strongest argument against a definite structure to the *Mokṣa-dharma*" (p. 82). But what if the *Mokṣadharma* has a "common structure" with one of the other anthologies? The *Āpaddharma* likewise ends with a puzzle story about a journey to the north, the "Story of the Ungrateful Brahman" (12.162–67). Indeed,

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[71] John Brockington, "The Structure of the *Mokṣa-dharma-parvan* of the *Mahābhārata*," in *On the Understanding of Other Cultures: Proceedings of the International Conference on Sanskrit and Related Studies to Commemorate the Centenary of the Birth of Stanislaw Schayer (1899–1941)*, ed. Piotr Balcerowicz and Marek Mejor (Warsaw: Oriental Institute, Warsaw Univ., 2000), 72.

[72] R. C. Zaehner, "Utopia and Beyond: Some Indian Views," *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 32 (1963): 281–309, citing p.302.

[73] But see Hiltebeitel, "The *Nārāyaṇīya* and the Early Reading Communities of the *Mahābhārata*" (above, n. 21).

each of these two puzzle narratives features a mysterious guest who has the word *dharma* (Rājadharman, Dharmāraṇya) in his name.[74] Let me suggest that the puzzle story is one of the anthologies' multi-genre options, and that it is used in these two transitional instances to mark significant movement in the Bhīṣma-Yudhiṣṭhira dialogue. For whereas Bhīṣma is postponing not only his death but his heavenly ascent until the completion of the fourth anthology, and has cosmo-logical puzzles to ponder on his own, Yudhiṣṭhira is especially good at such puzzles. Indeed, the ends of these two sub-*parvan*s recall the end of Book 3 where Yudhiṣṭhira answers the Yakṣa's questions.[75] This said, I believe there is some merit to Zaehner's attempt to trace a cur-rent of theism. But it would not be one measured through any of the text's sub-units or its historical development, and for that matter it would be not so much an increasing current (it barely trickles through the *Āpaddharma*) as one that runs through Bhīṣma's entire discourse, with the deity always present and listening. This current reaches its full strength in the *Dānadharmaparvan* when Yudhiṣṭhira finally asks Bhīṣma to describe this long-silent "Nārāyaṇa" (13.126.5–6), and, after Bhīṣma obliges with a run of lauds and mostly theistic narra-tives, Yudhiṣṭhira finally addresses Kṛṣṇa himself (13.144–46) before Bhīṣma finishes.

Bowles, in his very strong recent dissertation on the *Āpaddharma* (see n. 19), notes that "We have no way of knowing how much time elapsed between the various chronological 'layers,'" and that, as a temporal marker, the term "later" is "indeterminate."[76] While offering careful and cautionary arguments that some passages are inserted, he develops his main argumentation and advance through the sub-*parvan*

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[74] Indeed, another puzzle story ends the main narrative in the *Āśvamedhikaparvan* (14.92–93): apparently overheard by Yudhiṣṭhira, it features two incarnations of Dharma—one, again, a mysterious guest and the other a mysterious mongoose—and addresses the question of whether a king's giving in sacrifice is comparable to the "pure gift (*śuddhena tava dānena*)" (14,.93.57a) elicited by Dharma. See Hiltebeitel 2001a, 20, 78, 156 n. 93.

[75] Cf. Bowles, 304 on the episode of "The Yakṣa's Questions": just as in the Yakṣa story the questioning Yakṣa, who is ultimately Dharma, first appears in the form of a crane (*baka*), in the story ending the *Āpaddharma* Yudhiṣṭhira hears about a crane named Rājadharman, evoking the name Dharmarāja for Yudhiṣṭhira, and "drawing (him) within the ambit of the very tale being narrated to him" (*ibid.*). The name Dharmāraṇya (12,349.50), "Forest of Dharma," coming second, could then deepen this "draw."

[76] *Idem*, 5, 306.

by readings that are attentive to design and interlinkages with the surrounding "didactic corpora" and the *Mahābhārata* as a whole. On the point in question, concerning the *Āpaddharmaparvan* and its two surrounding anthologies, the *Rājadharma* and the *Mokṣadharma*, Bowles writes, "A logic of action informs this structure, a logic that models the proper duties of the royal life. A king's desire for salvation must follow the proper completion of his royal duty, or, rather, it follows *from* the proper completion of his royal duty. The syntactic order of the *Śāntiparvan* text…mirrors, therefore, the proper syntactic order of the royal life and the proper order of the king's concerns" (p. 297). I believe Bowles has found the right terms here for us to deepen our investigation of the fourth anthology: Would not *dānadharma* follow *mokṣadharma* in "the proper syntactic order of the royal life"?[77] I have in mind, to begin with, that the *Mahābhārata* would be developing this "further instruction" for kings as a Brahmanical counterpart to the Buddhist (and not just Mahāyāna) *dānapāramitā*.

But it must be acknowledged that there could be such a thing as oversympathetic reading. The *Anuśāsanaparvan* lies before us as a virtual terra incognita. In resuming with the *Śāntiparvan* we have the good fortune of renewing our acquaintance with the Chicago *Mahābhārata* fresh with Fitzgerald's stimulating hypotheses, and with the excitement that it has returned as an old friend to stimulate us with new questions that can continue to be explored under Fitzgerald's thoughtful and judicious editorship.

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[77] Notes 69 and 74 (and following) above are preliminary ones toward raising this question.

III. RECENT/EARLY COMPANION PIECES

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

BHĪṢMA'S SOURCES

Nearing the end of the *Mahābhārata*'s *Śāntiparvan* and its closing *Mokṣadharma* sub-*parvan*, Bhīṣma is lying on his bed of arrows. Immersed in instructing Yudhiṣṭhira about virtually anything that might make this grieving king a reluctantly willing one after the terrible war, he comes to the story of Vyāsa and his son Śuka, and how the latter fulfilled his penchant for *mokṣa*, liberation. Toward the beginning of this tale, relating how Vyāsa looked when he performed his arduous tapas to beget Śuka, Bhīṣma pulls in a surprise witness:

> And by the splendor of his matted locks like the crest of a fire, he [Vyāsa] was seen to be blazing, possessed of immeasurable splendor. Lord Mārkaṇḍeya said this to me. He always told me the deeds of the gods here (Mbh 12.310.23–24).

Again, toward the end of the story, with Vyāsa understanding that his son has set forth on the 'supreme way' (*uttamām gatim*), "filled with affection, the father followed along behind" (320.18). Vyāsa himself, "having risen to that supreme way of great yoga" (320.20ab), now trails by only the 'bare moment' (*nimeṣāntaramātreṇa*; 320.20c) that Śuka's mokṣa has taken. But when he comes to the mountain his son has sundered, Śuka has "gone to the other side."[1] At this point, Bhīṣma once again clarifies his sources and the position of Vyāsa as author relative to them: "The Ṛṣis then repeated to [Vyāsa] that act of his son" (320.21cd). Bhīṣma thereby indicates who (beside Śuka) witnessed the wonder of Śuka's liberation, which Vyāsa had just missed, and thus how Bhīṣma could have gotten this missing moment of the tale. Vyāsa heard it from the witnessing Ṛṣis, who could have again included Mārkaṇḍeya, who, in turn, could have been among those who could have told this to Vyāsa, as well as the whole story to Bhīṣma. Finally, when Bhīṣma concludes the story, he reassures Yudhiṣṭhira with a double citation: "The Ṛṣi Nārada formerly told it to me, O king, and so did the great

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[1] I leave the metaphor to speak for itself here. For more extended discussion, see Hiltebeitel 2001a, chapter 8 § D.

yogin Vyāsa, line by line amid conversations" (*saṃjalpeṣu pade pade*; 320.40). Thus Nārada too could have been among the witnessing Ṛsis who told Vyāsa about his son's departure. Unlike Mārkaṇḍeya and the generic Ṛsis, however, Nārada and Vyāsa are both actors within the Śuka story. Bhīṣma is thus careful to show that his sources include not only such insider testimony as theirs, but, where necessary, that of out-side observers like Mārkaṇḍeya and the Ṛsis—celestial Ṛsis, that is: a category that would, however, also include not only Nārada but, from time to time, Vyāsa. We thus get the impression that while Vyāsa is one of Bhīṣma's sources,[2] Bhīṣma pulls the story together from varied sources particularly where it is necessary to "supplement" the author.

Bhīṣma's citation apparatus is certainly not typical of a Parry-Lordian oral epic, for which Albert Lord posits authorly anonymity and "the Tradition" itself as author (1960). Indeed, neither does the phrase "line by line" suggest improvisational oral formulaic verse. But of course we are not in the "main story," to which certain scholars, drawing on oral theory, have looked for their evidence of the *Mahābhārata*'s earliest oral strata. We are in the *Mokṣadharma* section of the *Śāntiparvan*, which is among those "didactic" tracts that such scholars deem to be literary and late.[3] There, as James L. Fitzgerald has argued, Bhīṣma seems to draw on some kind of library—whether oral or written[4]— that a "redactor" has "edited" into Bhīṣma's mouth as the bulk of a "*Mokṣadharma* anthology"[5]—leaving room also for eighteen segments "here and there" that Bhīṣma

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[2] Bhīṣma repeats Vyāsa's teachings to Śuka (12.224–247; Bedekar 1966: ccxiii–ccxv), narrates their father-son story (12.3 10–320), and cites him at several other points: 12.200.3: as an authoritative source on Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa, along with Nārada, Asita Devala, Vālmīki, and Mārkaṇḍeya; 247.1; 327–338 (*Nārāyaṇīya* citings); 13.18.1–3 (he recited Śiva's thousand and eight names on Mount Meru to obtain a son: i.e., Śuka); 13.25.5–12 (on Brahmanicide); 13.118–120 (story of the worm who became a Kṣatriya); 13.121–123 (conversation with Maitreya); 13.146.23 (composed the *Śatarudrīya*).

[3] For an overview, see Brockington 1998: 3, 18–28, 120–127.

[4] Fitzgerald admits that it is "necessary to bear in mind the uncertainty that exists about the nature of these 'texts' prior to their existence in a fixed text of the *Mahābhārata*. If the texts anthologized in the MDh come from an improvisational oral tradition, then the whole concept of the 'history' of these 'texts' is highly problematic, if not completely inappropriate" (Fitzgerald 1980: 331, n. 1). As I have indicated, however, oral theorists are not interested in Bhīṣma's orations.

[5] See Fitzgerald 1980: 279–280, positing "that there existed in the Brahman tradition a number of texts concerned with aspects of the mokṣa perspective that were neither Veda nor *sūtra*," "unquestionably by different authors," and that someone "collated [them] into an anthology."

asserts on his own authority, that is without attributing the substance
of the text to some sage or other like Bhṛgu or Manu, either by for-
mulaic introduction or by some statement within the text (Fitzgerald
1980: 320).

Fitzgerald (1980: 320–321) suggests that these eighteen units may be
"original contributions of the redactorial agent." Although I believe
Fitzgerald exaggerates the likelihood of a high percentage of preexist-
ing texts, and underestimates the creativity of the "redactorial agent,"
which was probably a group or committee, the line of inquiry remains
promising for the *Śāntiparvan*[6] and other portions of the *Mahabharata.*
Here, however, I am interested not so much in Bhīṣma's anthology as
his methods of citation; not so much in his bibliography as his foot-
notes. It must suffice for this essay to note that, as elsewhere in the
Mahābhārata, the two together describe an intertextual situation that
probably evokes the composition of written texts that would have been
known and used orally (see Narayana Rao 1993: 95).

Until recently (see now Brockington 2000), Fitzgerald and Annette
Mangels seem to be the only scholars to have given attention to
Bhīṣma's sources: Fitzgerald while focusing on the above-mentioned
anthology thesis; Mangels on the *Mahābhārata*'s narrative technique.
In his dissertation on the *Mokṣadharma*, Fitzgerald notes that Bhīṣma
often cites "old accounts" through an oft-repeated formulaic line:
atrāpy udāharantīmam itihāsaṃ purātanam; 'On this they recite/cite/
quote this old account.'[7] One can learn a good deal from these passages.
Counting slight variants,[8] in his *Śānti-* and *Anuśāsanaparvan* oration,
Bhīṣma uses (or quotes others using) the full-line formula eighty-eight
of the one hundred and six times it is used in the entire epic.[9] He also
sometimes precedes his references to *itihāsaṃ purātanam* with other

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[6] As Fitzgerald (1980: 76) observes, the *Rājadharma* subparvan of the *Śāntiparvan* is
more "strongly motivated" than the *Mokṣadharma* in terms of narrative momentum.

[7] The translators (Ganguli 1884–96; van Buitenen 1973; Fitzgerald 1980, etc.) have
taken *udāharanti* variously as "they cite," "they quote," "they narrate," "they recite,"
and *itihāsaṃ purātanam* as "old or ancient history, story, tale, legend, or account." It
appears to be best to keep a sense of ambiguity to the verb, which may deliberately
write orality into the text. For *itihāsaṃ*, "account" seems the best single term for its
neutrality.

[8] Replacing *api* eleven times with *eva*.

[9] There are eleven usages prior to the *Śāntiparvan*, seven in the *Śāntiparvan*
before Bhīṣma gets going, and none after he has finished in the *Anuśāsanaparvan*.
These and other such figures come from using Muneo Tokunaga's machine-readable
Mahābhārata text (1994).

tag phrases, most typically *atra te vartayiṣye'ham itihāsaṃ purātanam*,
'On this I will tell you an old account.'[10] Looking only so far as through
the *Śāntiparvan*, sometimes the "old account" goes unattributed, as
if it were something Bhīṣma knows first hand (e.g., 12.189.6; 263.2).
But most often (sixty-three times), it is a "dialogue" (*saṃvāda*). Yet it
can also be a story (*kathā*, 202.6; *ākhyānam*, 248.11), speech (*vacaḥ*;
168.8), discourse (*vādam*; 194.2), or "words" (*vākyāni*; 253.1).[11] And
it can be something that was first "proclaimed" (*proktam*)[12] or more
often "sung" (*gītam*).[13] Without calling it an "old account," Bhīṣma
also quotes *gāthā* verses that were "sung" (*gītāḥ*) by Brahmā about
royal treasuries (12.134.1), and an *upaniṣad* that was uttered by king
Yayāti (12.94.38). Most interesting are cases where the account is fur-
ther sourced. Bhīṣma quotes Dhṛtarāṣṭra quoting Nārada (12.124.18).
He recalls an "old account" sung by Maṇkin, who quotes Śuka and
in turn cites another "old account" sung by king Janaka of Videha,[14]
leading to the recollection of a quatrain-collection (*padasaṃcayam*)
of a certain Bodhya (12.171.4–57). He also tells the "old account" of
what Vyāsa told Śuka when asked about creation and the divisions of
time (12.224.6). The chronology of the citations is obscure but plau-
sible in these cases,[15] but it is baffling how Bhīṣma could have heard
an "old account" that the Brahman Indrota, a descendent of Śaunaka,
told to the Pāṇḍavas' descendant Janamejaya, which includes verses
sung by Yayāti (12.148.9) and Satyavat (148.14–15) and a quotation
of Manu (148.26).[16] Places can also be surprising. Bhīṣma heard the
"old account" of the Muni and the dog whose heart had gone human[17]
in Rāma Jāmadagnya's ascetic grove (*tapovane*), where it was told by

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[10] Mbh 12.168.28; 224.6; 288.2; 291.7; 298.3; and with variants: 146.2; 277.2;
13.40.2.

[11] Covering such ground in discussing the *Mahābhārata's* terms for stories and their
antiquating appeal to Vedic authority, see Gombach 2000: 109–122.

[12] Mbh 12.124.18, by Nārada; 227.2, by Ariṣṭanemi to Sagara. See Minkowski 1989:
402, 411–412 on *pra + vac/proktaḥ*, with its Vedic overtones, in "the sense of an
original utterance."

[13] Mbh 12.78.6 (the only case I can see with a refrain); 12.93.2; 170.2; 171.4; 171.55;
251.1; 268.3; 270.13.

[14] His aphoristic saying, "Unlimited is my wealth, of which nothing is mine. If Mithilā
burns, nothing of mine burns" (12.171.56)—also quoted at 12.17.18 and 268.4.

[15] I take up the case of Śuka in Hiltebeitel 2001a.

[16] See Belvalkar 1954: 939: there must be two Janamejayas.

[17] Mbh 12.117.10: *manuṣyavad gato bhāvaḥ*. On this wicked tale, see Hiltebeitel
2001a, Chapter 5.

some of the most excellent Ṛṣis (*yad uktaṃ ṛṣisattamaiḥ*; 12.117.1–2). And he heard the story (*kathā*) of Kṛṣṇa's power, and why he took animal forms, from Kaśyapa in the hermitage of Mārkaṇḍeya (reached by Bhīṣma during a hunt), amid "hosts of Munis seated by thousands" (12.202.4–6). The epic does not tell us when Bhīṣma visited Rāma Jāmadagnya's ascetic grove[18] or Mārkaṇḍeya's hermitage. Most expansively, when Yudhisthira asks to hear about the infallible Puṇḍarīkākṣa,[19] Bhīṣma replies that he heard about this topic (*artha*) when Rāma Jāmadagnya was speaking,[20] and from Nārada, Vyāsa, Asita Devala, Vālmīki, and Mārkaṇḍeya (12.200.3–5)! Let us make four observations: 1) as referenced, time and space are expansive; 2) Bhīṣma's citations, sources, and authorities have a certain Vedic ring to them;[21] 3) his sources tend to proliferate when he is expatiating on themes of *bhakti*, notably to include not only Mārkaṇḍeya and Nārada but Vālmīki; and 4) one need not accept the commonly held view that *bhakti* passages are "late."[22]

Fitzgerald also suggests that whenever Bhīṣma answers Yudhiṣṭhira's questions by citing his "old accounts" and numerous authorities, the combination "stand[s] out…as an overall frame" (Fitzgerald 1980: 281–282). Yet he limits his notion of a "frame" here to the "garland of Yudhisthira's questions" and Bhīṣma's often-oblique responses. Fitzgerald finds this frame too uncoordinated (p. 295), patternless (p. 322), and "thin and weak to be a text of any importance in its own right" (p. 293). But he does not explore its relation to the epic's encompassing frames:[23] Vaiśaṃpāyana's first public narration of the *Mahābhārata* at Janamejeya's snake sacrifice (the inner frame); Ugraśravas's retelling of the epic to the Ṛṣis of the Naimiṣa Forest (the outer frame); and Vyāsa's original teaching of the *Mahābhārata* to Śuka and his four other "disciples" (the outermost, or authorial,

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[18] Bhīṣma did not visit Rāma Jāmadagnya's hermitage when he fought him over Ambā; they met at Kurukṣetra (5.177–178), and in any case did not pause over stories.

[19] "The one with the eyes of the Puṇḍarīka Lotus," a name of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa.

[20] Or muttering, *jalpataḥ* (12.200.3).

[21] See notes 11 and 12 above, and note 26 below.

[22] Cf. note 2 above. Vālmīki is also mentioned among the coming-and-going celestial and sometimes Viṣṇu-attending Ṛṣis at 2.7.14, 3.83.102, 5.81.27, 99.11, and 13.18.7.

[23] Though he seems to be aware of the possibility: "A few of the framing passages do express an awareness of the rest of the collection…" and "coordination among the introductory frames" (Fitzgerald 1980: 294).

frame)—this third frame being indispensable to understanding all of the epic's other frames.[24]

Mangels, however, takes interest in Bhīṣma's citations against just this background. She diagrams these encompassing frames as a "box-structure" (*Schachtelstruktur*; Mangels 1994: 42–44) that has been affected, as will be noted, by late purāṇic "corrections" (p. 144). What interests her is these frames' relation to two long interior frame segments that she places within the same "box": the bard (*sūta*) Saṃjaya's war narrative, and Bhīṣma's post-war oration. As Mangels notes, in both cases the interior frame narration or oration is made possible by imparting the "divine eye" or *divya cakṣus* to the speaker: to Saṃjaya, by Vyāsa himself;[25] to Bhīṣma, by Kṛṣṇa with Vyāsa authoritatively present.[26] Noting that it is possible to obtain the divine eye on one's own by means of yoga, as Yudhisthira claims to have done,[27] Mangels takes Saṃjaya's and Bhīṣma's cases to show, contrastively, that, in not letting either of them get the divine eye on his own, the redactor (*Epiker*) indicates that he is not ready to risk leaving these characters answerable for vast stretches of text to the odium of fiction.[28] Indeed, when Bhīṣma obtains the divine eye, Nārada attests to all the ancient and celestial authorities Bhīṣma knows and can cite: he has seen the gods, gratified the divine Ṛṣis led by Bṛhaspati, learned variously from the Asuras' preceptor Uśanas, from such other Ṛṣis as Vasiṣṭha,

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[24] A point I make in Hiltebeitel 2001a. On the *Mahābhārata* frame stories, see also Witzel 1986; Minkowski 1989; Mangels 1994 (as cited below); Oberlies 1998; Reich 1998: 56–75; Hiltebeitel 1998b.

[25] See Mbh 6.2.9–13; 16.5–10.

[26] Mbh 12.52.15–22; see Mangels 1994: 99–100, 126, 148, Before Vyāsa's presence is mentioned, Kṛṣṇa has already told Yudhisthira that Bhīṣma knows past, present, and future (12.46.19); then, once we know that Vyāsa is there, Kṛṣṇa adds that he has bestowed on Bhīṣma from afar the "divine knowledge of seeing the triple-time" (*traikālyadarśanaṃ jñānaṃ divyam*) by means of their mutual meditation on each other (47.65). Moreover, Vyāsa hears from Kṛṣṇa that whatever Bhīṣma says "will stand on earth as if it were a declaration of the Veda" (*vedapravāda*), and that it will have "validity" (*pramāṇa*; 54.29–30).

[27] Mangels 1994: 137: by "the yoga of knowledge" (*jñānayogena*; 11.26,20). Actually, the point could be challenged: it is presumably still Vyāsa who tells us that Yudhisthira obtained the divine eye by yoga.

[28] Mangels 1994: 148. Cf. pp. 99–101 and 111 on Vyāsa's function as "Ordner," "einen ordnenden Geist" imparting his duties as author to authorize others' (Bhīṣma's, Saṃjaya's, Kṛṣṇa's...) fictions.

Cyavana, Sanatkumāra, Rama Jāmadagnya, and Mārkaṇḍeya, and from Indra.[29]

Mangels's main interest, however, is in further contrasting Saṃjaya and Bhīṣma. There are places where Saṃjaya seems to have the "divine eye" before Vyāsa gives it to him for the war narration.[30] He samples it briefly when Kṛṣṇa lets him see his theophany in the Kuru court.[31] He previews at least one of its powers when he discloses, with Vyāsa's blessing, Vāsudeva and Arjuna's "thought entire."[32] And most importantly for Mangels, he enters a trance to gauge for Dhṛtarāṣṭra the strength of the Pāṇḍava army.[33] For Mangels, the first two passages result from a bhakti overlay that subsumes Saṃjaya's older self-sufficient bardic powers under themes of the later purāṇic bardic tradition exemplified by Vyāsa and Vaiśampāyana. In these two instances the "little Sūta Saṃjaya" is pushed into the background[34] and subordinated through the "divine eye" itself—a "literary sediment of practical yoga technique" (Mangels 1994: 130), "a Buddhist pendant" (p. 137, n. 324), and a belated addition to make Saṃjaya's narration credible (pp. 117, 125, 131). But the third passage leads Mangels to "speculate"—in the name of a recovery of the original bard—on a thoroughgoing "correction" of the war books (p. 144). Meanwhile, in contrast to this recuperable bard overlain by bhakti stands Bhīṣma.[35] His provision with the divine eye, says Mangels, is doubtless done to achieve a connection with the dharma-texts (p. 99–100), and as a sign of the presence of "abstract authors" appearing in the narrated figures (p. 45)—a notion she relates

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[29] Mbh 12.38.7–13. The case of Indra's instruction is interesting. Whether it is at the same point in Bhīṣma's life or another, Bhīṣma not only learned from Indra but "formerly," when the gods were fighting the Asuras (6.21.9–11), he advised him, saying, "Those who seek victory conquer not so much by strength and heroism as by truth and non-cruelty (satyānṛśaṃsyābhyām), as also by dharma and enterprise." See similarly 6.15.38.

[30] See Belvalkar 1947: 329–331; Mangels 1994: 97–98, 107, 113, 142–144.

[31] Mbh 5.129.13; see Mangels 1994: 137.

[32] Mbh 5.65.7d. Mangels (1994: 142–143) takes Saṃjaya as adapting to a hierarchy here, generally viewing bhakti passages as overlay (pp. 36–38, 44–48, 52, 83–88, 99–100, 144, 148).

[33] Mbh 5.49.9–14: Saṃjaya heaves long sighs, faints, falls, and loses consciousness before replying. See Mangels 1994: 143.

[34] Mangels (1994: 143–144), for whom the "little Sūta" (pp. 107, 143) is Vyāsa's "protege" (Schützling; pp. 110, 123, 126); see further Mangels 1994: 26, 69–71, 97–129, 140–145.

[35] Saṃjaya's being a messenger (dūta) gives him a "home advantage" over Bhīṣma and other narrators (Mangels 1994: 117).

to a Brahmanical overlay concerned with dharma (pp. 44–45, 52). Mangels thus regards the divine eye to be a late literary effect in both cases, but only in Saṃjaya's does she argue that it is superfluous. Yet Bhīṣma also anticipates one of *his* uses of the divine eye before he gets it from Kṛṣṇa. Noting how *Mahābhārata* narrators cite other narrators (pp. 61–62, 65), Mangels recalls that midway through the war, Karṇa learns that Bhīṣma knows from Vyāsa, Nārada, and Keśava (6.117.9) that Karṇa is the son of Kuntī. Let us note that the two interior frames intersect here: it is Saṃjaya reporting.

While the contrast between Saṃjaya and Bhīṣma is certainly valuable, I do not think that either takes us back to a *pre-Mahābhārata* textual situation: a prior oral bardic war-narrative in the case of Saṃjaya, or a prior library in the case of Bhīṣma. But leaving these oral and literary excavations aside, it is possible to find in the *Mahābhārata* itself the source of Bhīṣma's main sources. They come from his time with his mother. Let us look at some key moments in the birth and early life of Bhīṣma, paying attention especially to the ways his story configures space and time and fashions the "chronotope" (Bakhtin 1981; Hiltebeitel & Kloetzli 2004) through which cosmological time descends into dynastic time (see Chart). A methodological point here: A. K. Ramanujan has a good impulse when he criticizes me for over-emphasizing divine-human connections at the expense of "the architectonic complexity of the *human* action of the epic" (Ramanujan 1991a: 434, n. 4)—so long as we are willing to explore where that complexity takes us *in its own terms*. The human action has *cosmological* complexity.

> There was once a king born of the Ikṣvāku lineage, a lord of the earth known as Mahābhiṣa, true-spoken and of true prowess. With a thousand Aśvamedhas and a hundred Vājapeyas, he satisfied Devendra; and then that lord obtained heaven, Then at some time the gods did homage to Brahmā. The royal Ṛṣis were there and king Mahābhiṣa (among them). Then Gaṅgā, best of rivers, approached the Grandfather. Her garment, radiant as the moon, was raised by the wind. (Mbh 1.91.1–4.)

That is the setting. An Ikṣvāku or Solar dynasty king, Mahābhiṣa, has left earth for heaven to join the royal Ṛṣis there. He has done this in the typically vast time of that place, measurable for now only by one of the epic's cunning narrative conventions:

Bhīṣma's Sources: Flow Chart / Star (*) Chart

Solar Line	Lunar Line	Gaṅgā ***	Vasus	Vasiṣṭha *
Mahābhiṣa to heaven *				
Sees celestial Gaṅgā's * lifted skirt ***				
		Muses about Mahābhiṣa		
Brahmā's curse: mortal birth, before Mahābhiṣa can return				
				Curses Vasus to be womb-born
Mahābhiṣa chooses to be son of >	Pratīpa	Sees the bedimmed (*) Vasus >	Cursed by Vasiṣṭha (*) for coming too close to him at dawn, to be born in a womb	
			Ask Gaṅgā to provide them an auspicious womb	
			Choose Pratīpa's son Śaṃtanu (not yet born) to sire them	
		Agrees to be Śaṃtanu's wife as it was "on her mind"	Insist Gaṅgā throw her sons in water so their restoration won't be "so long"	
		Stipulates Śaṃtanu will retain one son, >	Bhīṣma, for whom the Vasus each will supply 1/8 of their vīrya, yet cursing him to be sonless	

Table (cont.)

Solar Line	Lunar Line	Gaṅgā ***	Vasus	Vasiṣṭha *
		Appears to Pratīpa, sits on his right thigh, promting him to make her his daughter-in-law for his as-yet-unborn son		
	Pratīpa sires Śaṃtanu with his aged wife			
	Pratīpa tells Śaṃtanu to expect a beautiful woman whom he must not question			
	Śaṃtanu drinks Gaṅgā with his eyes (***), and marries her	Gaṅgā stays with Śaṃtanu for a *paryāya*		
	Gaṅgā drowns Śaṃtanu's first seven baby sons	Drowns her first seven sons,	First seven Vasus restored to heaven	
	Śaṃtanu questions Gaṅgā and baby Bhīṣma lives	but not Bhīṣma		
	Śaṃtanu hears from Gaṅgā about Vasus' descent, and asks for particulars about Bhīṣma: why he must dwell among humans	Gaṅgā tells why Bhīṣma has a special destiny on earth		

Table (*cont.*)

Solar Line	Lunar Line	Gaṅgā ***	Vasus	Vasiṣṭha *
			The Vasu Dyaus stole Vasiṣṭha's youth-extending cow for his wife to give to a human princess	Cursed Dyaus in particular to a long time among humans with no offspring or pleasure with women
		Gaṅgā takes Bhīṣma and disappears		
	Śaṃtanu meets Bhīṣma…>	Bhīṣma checks the waters of the Gaṅgā with his arrows		
		Gaṅgā reveals that Bhīṣma has studied the Vedas, etc., with Vasiṣṭha (*), Uśanas, Aṅgiras, and Rāma Jāmadagnya		
	With Śaṃtanu's boon, Bhīṣma picks time of death, and returns to Heaven/Sky at winter solstice			
…on solar time				

"at some time" (*tataḥ kadācit*), while Brahmā was receiving homage from the gods with Gaṅgā among them, her garment, as radiant as the moon, was raised by the wind (or by the wind god Vāyu) (*tasyā vāsaḥ samudbhūtam māruteṇa śaśiprabham*). The poets have introduced us to the luminous celestial Gaṅgā, her robe the Milky Way, and their metaphoric range is the night sky where there are not only rivers of stars but mighty winds,[36] and where Ṛṣis, royal and otherwise, are stars as well.[37] Now, as Gaṅgā's garment lifts,

> The host of gods then lowered their faces. But the royal Ṛṣi Mahābhiṣa looked at the river fearlessly. Mahābhiṣa was disdained (*apadhyāta*) by lord Brahmā,[38] who said, "Born among mortals, you shall again gain the worlds." (Mbh 1.9 1.5–6.)

In a fairly widespread interpolation (1.111*), Brahmā also curses Gaṅgā to join Mahābhiṣa in this double destiny. But the Poona Critical Edition does well to show that this is superfluous: as we shall see, Gaṅgā's descent will be voluntary and amorous, and is not to be accounted for by the insecurities of Brahmā. Mahābhiṣa is able to choose the king, Pratīpa of the Lunar dynasty, who will be his father, and it is curious that his karmic crossing from the Solar to the Lunar line comes not only after seeing Gaṅgā's lunar radiance, but with a curse that follows his unabashed glance up her skirt. Coming from the Solar line, with its more regularly luminous courses, Mahābhiṣa chooses his second royal destiny in the line that will be marked henceforth, through his descent, by its different kind of rhythmic waxing and waning time, and by the outcomes of his own desire.[39] Meanwhile,

> The river, best of streams, having seen the king fallen from his firmness, went away musing about him in her heart. Going on her path (*pathi*), she then saw the celestial Vasu gods, their energy (*ojas*) smitten with dejection, their figures bedimmed (*vidhvastavapuṣaḥ*). Having seen

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[36] As Vyāsa instructs Śuka, the celestial Gaṅgā is associated with the Parivaha wind, the sixth of seven winds. When it is "agitated," heavenly waters carry through the sky; it abides, having diffused the propitious water of the celestial Gaṅgā (315.46). This would seem to imply the diffusion of the celestial Gaṅgā or Milky Way by this wind, which has also to do with the obscuring of the sun and the rising of the moon (315.47–48).

[37] Mitchiner 1982; Hiltebeitel 1977a; 1998n.

[38] If we look back from a purāṇic perspective, there is an emerging irony here, since in purāṇic myth, Brahmā is often the prurient one disdained or punished for his gaze (see e.g., Dimmitt & van Buitenen 1978: 34–35, 171; Hiltebeitel 1999c: 68–76).

[39] Perhaps he even senses that a lunar line prince would have a better chance with Gaṅgā than a solar line one. On the solar and lunar dynasties, see Thapar 1991.

those forms (*rūpān*), then, the best of streams asked, "Why are your forms lost (*naṣṭarūpātaḥ*)? Is there tranquility among celestials?" The Vasu gods said to her, "O great river, we were vehemently cursed by the great-souled Vasiṣṭha for a small fault. Foolishly indeed, we all formerly came too close (*atyabhisṛtāḥ purā*) to Vasiṣṭha, that best of Ṛṣis, when he was seated concealed (*prachannam*) at twilight (*saṃdhyāṃ vasiṣṭham āsīnaṃ*)…" (Mbh 1.91.8–12.)

Saṃdhyāṃ (accusative) with the root *ās-* implies "seated at twilight prayers," but refers also just to "twilight" itself: *maybe* Vasiṣṭha was praying, but this can also be translated, "…when Vasiṣṭha was seated concealed at twilight." Since it has up to now been night, of the two "twilights," we must be talking about the dawn. Having started this story "at some time," we have moved on a little bit. The poets have made *vapus* ('figure') and *rūpa* ('form') interchangeable. Both could be translated '(beautiful) appearance'. What is happening at dawn, while Gaṅgā goes along on her celestial path, is that the Vasus not only lose energy due to a curse of Vasiṣṭha, but that their appearance has been "bedimmed": an astronomical meaning that Monier-Williams (1899: 969) gives for *vidhvasta*. This could be suggestive as applied to the "darkened" form/appearance of the chief Vasu of the story, Dyaus, the old Vedic "Father Sky," who will supply the primary divine substance of Bhīṣma in the story's resumption, which, as others have noted, is on some points rather different.[40] But first, why has Vasiṣṭha cursed the Vasus? The resumption will give us another answer, but this first one is most intriguing. Vasiṣṭha is interrupted while perhaps praying or at least doing something at dawn, of course; but more than this, he is "concealed," "hidden" (*prachannam*). This would mean that the Vasiṣṭha star, one of the seven in the constellation of the Seven Ṛṣis or Ursa Major, has become invisible at twilight.[41] Moreover, the Vasus "all formerly came too close"[42] to him at this twilight. It sounds like they nearly bumped into him. The resumption will tell us that when these things happen, Vasiṣṭha is at his hermitage on a side of Mt. Meru

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[40] Smith 1955: 91–96; Dumézil 1968: 178–180; van Buitenen 1973: 455, n. to 1.91.10.

[41] See Witzel 1999: 13–14 and 17, n. 14, clarifying that "when we actually look at the Big Dipper when it appears in the early evening even today; it moves towards the north pole, surpasses it and sets in the west" (Witzel 1999: 14). Cf. Parpola 1994: 222, 241–243.

[42] *Atyabhisṛta*: "having approached too much; having come too close" (Monier-Williams 1899: 17, citing Mbh 1.3854, the present verse). See van Buitenen 1973: 216: "we…passed by"; but "passed by" does not explain why Vasiṣṭha would get angry.

(1.93.6). Meru is the cosmic mountain by which celestial movements of the night sky are measured against alternately emerging earthly orientations (Kloetzli 1983; Hiltebeitel 1999a: 293; 2001a, Chapter 8).

The Vasus now add that Vasiṣṭha cursed them to be born in a womb, and that his curse cannot be thwarted. Unwilling to "enter an inauspicious human-female womb" (*mānuṣīṇāṃ jaṭharam…aśubham*), they ask Gaṅgā to become a human woman (*mānuṣī*) whose womb, we must assume, will for obvious reasons not be inauspicious. Gaṅgā agrees, and asks them who among mortals they choose as their begetter. The Vasus pick Pratīpa's son Śaṃtanu. Gaṅgā says, "Such is even my mind, sinless gods, as you say. I will do his pleasure; that is your desire" (1.91.17)—as Dumézil puts it, "La providence, on le voit, a bien fait les choses, puisqu'elle aura pour partenaire sur terre celui qui a quelque peu troublé son coeur" (Dumézil 1968: 179). The Vasus insist that Gaṅgā "must throw his [Śaṃtanu's (new)born sons into the water so that our restoration will not take so long a time, O triple-world-goer" (*yathā nacirakālaṃ no niṣkṛtiḥ syāt trilokage*; 91.18). What is not so long a time for the Vasus will now begin to be measurable in human years, with Gaṅgā linking the three worlds through which divine time is now channelled into human time. Again she agrees, but with the proviso that Śaṃtanu will retain one son. Each of the Vasus then imparts an eighth of his *vīrya* (energy/manliness/sperm), and Bhīṣma will thus be born from this collective energy [43] as "the son you and he desire" (91.20d). But, add the Vasus, Bhīṣma "shall not reproduce his lineage among mortals. Thus your son will be sonless, despite his possessing *vīrya*." With Gaṅgā's agreement on this further point, the "delighted" Vasus "went straight on as they intended" (9 1.21–22).

Gaṅgā then appears to Pratīpa out of the waters of the Ganges. Sitting on his right thigh, she invites him to make love to her. He has some scruples, but she has his attention. And because she chose his right thigh, suitable for children and daughters-in-law, rather than his left, where a wife would sit, he invites her to become his daughter-in-law instead. Agreeing, and thereby virtually assuring this apparently shrewd old king a son they *both* desire, Gaṅgā says,

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[43] The Vasus have put it "en cagnotte," "in a kitty," according to Dumézil 1968: 179.

So by devotion to you will I love (*bhajiṣyāmi*)[44] the famous Bhārata lineage (*kulam*). Whoever are the kings of the earth, you[45] are their refuge. I am unable to speak the qualities that are renowned of your lineage in even a hundred years; its straightness is peerless (*guṇā na hi mayā śakyā vaktum varṣa śatair api/kulasya ye vaḥ prathitās tat sādhutvam anuttamam*). (Mbh l.92.12c–13.)

Fusing her descent with the destiny of the Lunar dynasty, she declares that her love for its kings and their lineage will extend over measurable human years.

Telling Pratīpa the conditions he must impart to his son—who must never question anything Gaṅgā does (92.14)—Gaṅgā disappears (92.16). Even though Pratīpa and his wife are old, he "burns *tapas*" and "at a certain time" (*etasminn eva kāle*)[46] Mahābhiṣa is born as their son, coming to be called Śaṃtanu (92.17–18). Although his prior Solar dynasty identity is not specifically mentioned, his karmic carryover is now made explicit: "And remembering the imperishable worlds he had conquered by his own *karma*, Śaṃtanu was indeed a doer of meritorious *karma*" (*saṃsmaraṃś cākṣayāṃl lokān vijitān svena karmaṇā/puṇyakarmakṛd evāsīt śaṃtanuḥ kurusattama*; 92.19). We do not know, however, whether he remembers his moment of audacity in gazing up Gaṅgā's skirt.

Śaṃtanu becomes a young man, and Pratīpa, before parting for the forest, describes the beautiful woman who may approach his son and heir to the throne, and the conditions under which she will stay with him:

"She is not to be questioned by you as to who she is or whose she is. And whatever she does, she is not for you to question, sinless one. At my command, she is to be loved as she loves you." (Mbh 1.92.22–23b.)

And so once while he was hunting "along the Siddha- and Caraṇa-frequented Gaṅgā" (92.25cd),[47] young king Śaṃtanu

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[44] Share in/enjoy…

[45] Plural: your dynasty.

[46] This line-opener is used 48 times in the *Mahābhārata*, and by both Saṃjaya and Bhīṣma.

[47] Soon she will say similarly, "I am Gaṅgā, the daughter of Jahnu, frequented by the hosts of great Ṛṣis" (1.92.49ab). Together, the two passages would thus describe both her earthly and heavenly courses.

> saw a superb woman whose figure had an intensive glowing (*jājvalyamānāṃ vapuṣā*) that was like the splendor of a lotus, faultless everywhere, with nice teeth, adorned with divine ornaments, wearing a subtle cloth (*sūkṣmāmbaradharām*), alone, and radiant as the calyx of a lotus…As if drinking her with his eyes, the king was not satisfied (*pibann iva ca netrābhyāṃ nātṛpyata narādhipaḥ*). (Mbh 1.92.25d–28.)

Śaṃtanu is still fixed by the gaze that got him into trouble as Mahābhiṣa. But more than this, what is it to drink this woman with one's eyes and not be satisfied if not a reminder that she is a river of the stars? Their words of courtship include her Melusine-like requirements; and, as their joys unfold,

> by attachment to pleasure (*ratisaktatvād*), the king, seized by the qualities of this foremost woman (*uttamastrīguṇair hṛtaḥ*), was not aware of the many years, seasons, and months that passed (*saṃvatsarān ṛtūn māsān na bubodha bahūn gatān*) (Mbh 1.92.41).

Meanwhile, in what is "not so long a time" for the eight Vasus, Śaṃtanu sires them in Gaṅgā's womb, and she throws the first seven into the water, saying "I fulfill your wish" (92.43–44). Finally, with the eighth, Śaṃtanu protests and Gaṅgā lets the boy live. This child will come to be known as Bhīṣma. But, she says, "This stay (*vāsa*) of mine is now exhausted in accord with the agreement we made" (92.48cd)—a "stay of a round (*paryāya-vāsa*) [that] was done in the presence of the Vasus" (92,55ab). She has thus been with Śaṃtanu for a *paryāya*: a going or turning around; a revolving, revolution; a course, lapse, or expiration of time (Monier-Williams 1899: 605). She tells Śaṃtanu who she is, and briefly about Vasiṣṭha's curse of the Vasus, but Śaṃtanu wants to know more about all this, including a new question: what did Gaṅgadatta-Bhīṣma do to have to "dwell among humans" (93.2)? To answer this, Gaṅgā resumes the story of the Vasus' curse by Vasiṣṭha. Of these two narratives, I believe it is best to begin with the simple recognition that the two versions are meant to be read together, from which it will unfold that the second amplifies the first, but does not erase its meanings or allusions.

As already noted, we now learn that Vasiṣṭha's hermitage is on a side of Mount Meru (93.6). Gaṅgā also fills out what it might mean that the Vasus "all formerly came too close" to Vasiṣṭha: they stole his cow, a "choice milch-cow of every desire" (*sarvakāmadughāṃ varām*) who was born of Dakṣa's daughter Surabhī and the celestial Ṛṣi Kaśyapa, and who roved freely through that forest of ascetics, Munis, gods, and divine Ṛṣis. "At a certain time" (*kadācit*), the Vasus

and their wives came to that forest and "roamed everywhere," taking their delights. The wife of the Vasu Dyaus saw the beautiful cow and showed her to Dyaus, who knew that she belonged to Vasiṣṭha, and that a mortal who drank her milk would have firm youth for ten thousand years (93.18–19), Dyaus' wife[48] knew a deserving princess on earth[4948] for whom this cow and her calf would be just the right gift, and asked Dyaus to bring them quickly (93.21–25). So together with his brothers, Dyaus seized the cow. Gaṅgā also fills out what it might mean that Vasiṣṭha "was seated concealed at twilight." Charged by his wife to steal the cow, Dyaus "was unable to see the intense tapas of the Ṛṣi" (*ṛṣes tasya tapas tīvraṃ na śaśaka nirīkṣitum*; 93.27cd). Perhaps that relates to Vasiṣṭha's invisibility. But he was not seated, at least when the cow was stolen. He was out gathering fruits (93.28b). It is possible that Gaṅgā's resumption unpacks and narrativizes Vedic allusions in the first account: Twilight-Dawn (Uṣas) is a cow and has cows that are identified with her rays. With Agni, and with the Sun,[50] "the Vasiṣṭhas claim to have first awakened her with their hymns" (Macdonell 1898: 47); perhaps Dyaus, the Day-Sky,[51] makes off with Vasiṣṭha's ruddy-rayed bovine. In any case, back at the hermitage and missing the cow, Vasiṣṭha soon knew what had happened by his divine sight, and cursed the Vasus to take on human births (93.30c–35). But when the Vasus, knowing they were cursed, sought mitigation, he stipulated that the seven Vasu accomplices would "obtain release after a year," but that the chief perpetrator Dyaus would "dwell in the human world for a long time by his own karma" (...*vatsyati/dyaus tadā mānuṣe loke dīrghakālaṃ svakarmaṇā*; 93.37cd) and have no human offspring,...[and] forsake the enjoyment of women" (93.36–39d). Gaṅgā then recounts her promise to the Vasus, and concludes that only Dyaus "will dwell a long time in the human world" (*dyau...mānuṣe loke ciraṃ vatsyati*; 93.42cd). While Vasiṣṭha sets the terms of time in the story from above, Gaṅgā repeats them as they now bear on earthly matters. Bhīṣma, the son of a king who switched from the solar to the lunar dynasty, will live childless in the latter, and use the boon of

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[48] She does not seem to have any trait that would identify her as the Pṛthivī—Earth, Dyaus' Vedic wife.

[49] This is Jinavatī, daughter of king Uśīnara.

[50] See O'Flaherty 1981: 112–115, 179, 211 (ṚV 4.5.8–10; 1.92.4; 5.85.2).

[51] Vedic Dyaus means both 'heaven/sky' and 'day'. Uṣas is frequently identified as his daughter (Macdonell 1898: 21). I do not find persuasive Dumézil's attempt to link Bhīṣma with the Scandinavian god Haimdallr (Dumézil 1968: 182–190).

being able to choose the time of his own death (*svacchandamaraṇam*; 1.94.94c), given to him by his father, to postpone his death to the winter solstice, thereby getting back on solar time.

Meanwhile, however, Gaṅgā has one more surprise for Śaṃtanu. This king who had finally spoken out to keep his eighth son even though he knew it would mean losing his wife, is suddenly without them both:

> Having told this, the goddess disappeared right there (*tatraivāntaradhīyata*), and, having taken that boy, she thereupon went as she wished (*jagāmātha yathepsitam*)…And Śaṃtanu, afflicted with grief, went then to his own city. (Mbh 1.93.43, 45ab)

For Gaṅgā to disappear (*antar-adhīyata*)—literally, "to turn her mind to what is inner," "to vanish into herself"—in this manner conventional to the epic's gods and Ṛṣis, including the author, is of course to return to her own element, the waters of the Ganges. In going with her, Bhīṣma's disappearance is almost like the drowning of his brothers. But of course it is different too: he is alive, she has brought him with her, and he will return to Śaṃtanu to begin his long life on earth.

Vaiśampāyana lauds Śaṃtanu's pious rule, and resumes the story with the conventional re-start mechanism, which brings the flow of time back to the river: "At a certain time" (*kadācit*), hunting while "following the river Gaṅgā,[52] Śaṃtanu saw that the Bhāgīrathī had little water" (94.21). Let us note how this name Bhāgīrathī evokes a connection between Śaṃtanu and the Solar-line king Bhagīratha, who brings the heavenly Gaṅgā down to earth: Śaṃtanu will meet Bhīṣma in a context that implies the Gaṅgā's descent. Wondering why "this best of streams does not flow swiftly as before, he saw the occasion" (*nimittam*; 94.23):

> …a shapely large good-looking boy employing a divine weapon like the god Sacker of Cities was engaged with sharp arrows, having fully stopped the entire Gaṅgā (*kṛtsnāṃ gaṅgāṃ samāvṛtya śarais tīkṣṇair avasthitam*)! Having seen the river Gaṅgā obstructed with arrows in that one's vicinity, the king became amazed, having seen this superhuman feat (*karma dṛṣṭvātimānuṣam*). Śaṃtanu…did not recognize that son whom he had formerly seen only at birth. But he, having seen his father, bewildered him by illusion (*mohayāmāsa māyayā*), and then quickly, having totally confused him, disappeared right there (*tatraivāntaradhīyata*),

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[52] To follow the river probably means, as van Buitenen (1973: 223) has it, "downstream," along its course.

Having seen that wonder, king Śaṃtanu, suspecting it was his son, said to Gaṅgā, "Show (him)!" Gaṅgā then, assuming a beautiful form, taking that well-adorned boy by the right hand, caused him to appear. (Mbh 1 .94.21–29b)

The wonder of stopping the river with arrows is indeed amazing. One finds the recurrent epic image of "showers of arrows," with its implication of an equivalence between raindrops and arrows. But a river is not separate drops. Bhīṣma is, of course, shooting arrows into his mother, but it seems unlikely that we should connect this with the many tensions with women that run throughout his and his father's story. Rather, I think Randy Kloetzli has a keen insight; "The arrows of course are time (conceived as moments destroying motion/fluidity) and the Ganges is eternity…or motion which brings eternity down into time"; Gaṅgā descends as "the unifying fluid motion of time as motion which dynastically results in progeny, lineages, etc." (Kloetzli 2000). Bhīṣma's strange intervention marks the boundary over which celestial time and human time can cross in different ways, but in which dynastic time will henceforth play itself along with Gaṅgā's loving devotion, but without her or her son's lineal descent. For she will not rejoin her husband, and he will bear no offspring. Indeed, like mother like son; Bhīṣma has learned to "disappear then and there" exactly as Gaṅgā did a few verses earlier, and as other gods and sages do. And like her, he can be brought forth, presumably from her waters, holding her hand.

Where then has Gaṅgā taken Bhīṣma for his upbringing? We may now return to our opening question of Bhīṣma's sources. Gaṅgā said to Śaṃtanu,

"This is the eighth son, O king, whom you formerly sired in me. He is yours, tiger among men; take him to your home. The energetic one studied the Vedas and their limbs from Vasiṣṭha (*vedān adhijage sāṅgān vasiṣṭhād eva vīryavān*)…And whatever scripture (*śāstram*) Uśanas knows, that he knows entirely. And so too the son of Aṅgiras [= Bṛhaspati], revered by gods and demons—whatever scripture he knows, that too is wholly established in this one…together with its limbs and appendages. That Ṛṣi, unassailable by others, the scorching son of Jamadagni—whatever weapon Rāma [Jāmadagnya] knows, that too is established in him. This great archer, O king, skilled in artha and royal dharma (*rājadharmārthakovidam*), is your own[53] son, a hero given by me—take him home." (Mbh 1.94.31–36.)

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[53] *Nijam* could also be 'my own'.

The poets do not overstate the matter. But clearly, Bhīṣma has been brought up by the celestial Gaṅgā. She has taken him up to the stars, near Mount Meru where he would have learned his Veda from Vasiṣṭha.[54] Similarly, it would be through the same access given by his mother that Bhīṣma would have been able to learn the śāstras, their limbs and appendages, divine weapons, and *artha* and *rājadharma* from Uśanas, Bṛhaspati, and Rāma Jāmadagnya. It will be recalled that Nārada attests to a similar list of Bhīṣma's sources—Bṛhaspati, Uśanas, Vasiṣṭha, Cyavana, Sanatkumāra, Rāma Jāmadagnya, and Mārkaṇḍeya—at 12.38.7–13, when Bhīṣma gets the divine eye. Bhīṣma's time with his mother need not account for all the sources he cites in the *Śānti-* and *Anuśāsanaparvan*s. When he cites Dhṛtarāṣṭra, for instance, it would be an earthly recollection from later in his life. But this youthful education accounts for the time and place of many of Bhīṣma's sources. And it shows a certain consistency between the didactic frame of the *Śānti-* and *Anuśāsanaparvan*s and an important foundational narrative of the *Ādiparvan*.

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[54] Perhaps Vasiṣṭha's involvement in Bhīṣma's Vedic instruction implies a follow-up from his having cursed Dyaus to become incarnate in Bhīṣma, who has in effect recycled himself from heaven to earth to heaven, and now back to earth, courtesy of his triple-world-going mother Gaṅgā.

NAHUṢA IN THE SKIES: A HUMAN KING OF HEAVEN

As Mircea Eliade has observed, the ritual systems connected with the seasonal renovation of the New Year and the coronation of a king "pursue the same end—cosmic renewal. 'But the *renovation* accomplished at the coronation of a king had important consequences in the later history of humanity. On the one hand, the ceremonies become movable, break away from the rigid framework of the calendar; on the other, the king becomes in a manner responsible for the stability, the fecundity, and the prosperity of the entire Cosmos. This is as much as to say that universal renewal is no longer bound to the cosmic rhythm and is connected instead with historical persons and events.'"[1] There are also myths and legends, particularly about primal kings, which thematize this transition from "ontology" to "history."[2]

In India, as far as I can see, there is no counterpart to the widespread Indo-European pattern in which the primal kings represent, in sequence, the emergence of the three functions.[3] But there are two kings who come at least in the *Mahābhārata* to be associated with especially significant foundational events in the Kṛta Yuga. These are Nahuṣa and Yayāti, who from the Vedas through the Purāṇas were regarded as a stable father-son pair among the primal kings.[4] By the time of the *Mahābhārata*, they are placed with Nahuṣa's father Āyus near the beginnings of the Kuru dynasty, but with two main variants

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[1] Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 40–41, quoting from Eliade, "Dimensions religieuses du renouvellement cosmique," *Eranos-Jahrbuch* (Zurich, 1960), 28: 269 ff.

[2] See Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, pp. 108, 110.

[3] Most recently, William T. Magrath, "The Athenian King List and Indo-European Trifunctionality," *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 3 (1975): 173–74; Georges Dumézil, *From Myth to Fiction: The Saga of Hadingus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. vi–xi.

[4] Georges Dumézil, *The Destiny of a King* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 18, sums up the Vedic data; cf. A. A. Macdonell, ed., *Kātyāyana's Sarvānukramaṇī of the Rig Veda* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), p. 35, explaining the tradition that Manu Sāṃvarana, Nahuṣa, and Yayāti were seers of successive portions of ṚV 9.101 by linking them genetically. Inconsistencies in the names prior to Nahuṣa do not justify two Nahuṣa -Yayāti pairs; see V. G. Rahurkur, *The Seers of the Ṛg Veda* (Poona: University of Poona, 1964), pp. 226–29.

about their more distant forbears. In one tradition the list includes Atri, Soma (Moon), Budha (Mercury), and Purūravas (son of Budha and Manu's daughter Ilā)—thus drawing to their line the title "Lunar dynasty," which becomes standardized in the *Harivaṃśa* and Purāṇas[5] but is also well attested in the epic.[6] In the other, given twice in the epic's *Ādiparvan* (1.70.13–30; 90.7–9), Atri, Budha, and Soma are unmentioned, and Ilā, Manu's son, is both father and mother to Purūravas (1.70.16). It is therefore curious that the well-developed independent legends which the *Mahābhārata* and Purāṇas tell about Nahuṣa and Yayāti involve so little direct narrative continuity or cross-referential comment. As Michel Defourny has observed, their relationship plays no part in any version of the Yayāti story other than the one in the *Padma Purāṇa*,[7] and that is an account which freely alters the legend in ways which other versions totally ignore.[8] But Nahuṣa and Yayāti are not indifferent to each other. Thanks to the two recent studies of the Yayāti legend by Dumézil and Defourny,[9] we have a clear and complex picture of Yayāti that can enlighten us at several points about the story of his father.

The Nahuṣa Legend in Context

There are numerous references to Nahuṣa in the epic, and his name is known in the *Ṛg Veda*, though with no clear lore attached.[10] In addition to a brief résumé of his reign in the *Ādiparvan* (1.70.24–28), the

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[5] See Walter Ruben, Krishna: Konkordanz und Kommentar der Motive seines Heldenlebens (Istanbul, 1944), pp. 16–24.

[6] See 3.177.6 and 12.329.31 (on Nahuṣa); 5.147.3 ff. (on Yayāti); 3.147.3 (on Bhīma); 7.119.4–6 (on Sātyaki). All *Mahābhārata* citations are from the Poona Critical Edition; only *Mahābhārata* references are given without title reference.

[7] Michel Defourny "Le Mythe de Yayāti dans la littérature épique et purāṇique," (doctoral thesis, University of Liège, 1973), pp. 62–63, 229–30.

[8] See *ibid.*, pp. 52, 62–71.

[9] See nn. 4 and 7 above. The reader must consult these works, from which I can only summarize the following: Dumézil emphasizes Yayāti's role as a "first king," partitioning the earth among his five sons with one at the center, differentiating the three functions, and articulating a full complement of royal virtues; Defourny delineates the "the cosmic function" of Yayāti's royal role as mediator between *dharma* and *adharma*, Kṣatriyas and Brahmins, Devas and Asuras, and the three worlds of heaven, earth, and the Underworld.

[10] See n. 4 above, and bibliography and discussion in A. A. Macdonell and A. B. Keith, *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects* (1912; Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass 1967), 1: 438–39.

epic tells his story in three full-length narratives: a detailed, somewhat rambling and inconsistent account in the *Udyogaparvan* (5.11–17), a short prose version in the *Śāntiparvan* (12.329.29–41) that seems to show a hand bent on smoothing out inconsistencies and exalting brahmins,[11] and a Bhṛguized account in the *Anuśāsanaparvan* (13.101.44–103.37) bent on exalting Bhṛgu.[12] The *Āraṇyakaparvan* (3.176–78) also has recollections of the episode by Nahuṣa after his fall and the completion of his curse. The *Udyoga* and *Śānti* set the legend as the sequel to Indra's sin-ridden-slayings of Viśvarūpa and Vṛtra, and the *Anuśāsana*—probably implying that background—is told to illustrate the importance of ceremonially offering garlands, incense, *balis* (food offerings), and, above all, lights. Though I have discussed the legend elsewhere (see n. 11), it deserves a closer look. I shall confine myself to the *Mahābhārata*'s versions,"[13] and follow them together in their main narrative blocks.

Nahuṣa's earthly reign and selection as Indra's replacement. For reasons which vary, the human Nahuṣa is requested by the gods and Ṛṣis to "protect the kingdom in heaven" (5.11.4). In the *Udyoga* it is for his *śrī* (5.11.1), "beauty" or "prosperity" (in a king they go together); the *Śānti* mentions his dharma and connection with the Lunar dynasty (12.329.31) as apparent qualifications; and the *Anuśāsana* cites his tapas and the various rites (*karman*) he performed well both on earth and, for a time, in heaven (13.103.2–9). But his energies must be augmented before he can rule in heaven. In the *Udyoga,* he complains that he is too lacking in "power" (*balam*: 5.11.3 and 7; *śakti*: 5.11.3) to protect the gods, and all the gods and chief Ṛṣis promise that he will rule "aided by our *tapas*" (4). More specifically they say: "When gods,

[11] See my *The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1976), pp. 233–35, nn. 13–15, 17–19. I agree with Dumézil, *The Destiny of the Warrior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 25, that the *Udyoga* inconsistencies point to precious and "archaic" retentions. Opposed, see Adolf Holtzman, "Indra nach den Vorstellungen des *Mahābhārata*", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* [hereafter *ZDMG*] 22 (1878): 309–10; Holtzmann, "Der heilige Agastya nach den Erzählungen des Mahābhārata," *ZDMG* 34 (1890): 593.

[12] See V. S. Sukthankar, "Epic Studies, VI: The Bhṛgus and the Bhārata: A Text-Historical Study," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* (hereafter *ABORI*) 18 (1936): 49, 54–56; Holtzmann, "Agastya," p. 594.

[13] The story is first told in the *Mahābhārata* and is intimately connected with the epic; see my *Ritual of Battle*, pp. 232–37, 242–43, 279–80. The different epic variants also suggest textual developments within the epic. Purāṇic versions follow the epic in the main and add as a sort of doublet the story of Nahuṣa's brother Raji (both usurp Indra's throne); see Ruben (n. 5 above), pp. 22–24.

Dānavas, Ṛṣis, as also Rākṣasas, Gandharvas, and Bhūtas turn in the range of your eyesight [*cakṣurviṣayavartiṇam*], seeing them, you will receive their *tejas* and will come to possess *balam*" (6). Thus increased by *tejas* and *tapas* (16.24), he becomes *tejoharam,* a "seizer of *tejas*" (26). In the *Śānti,* the gods and Ṛṣis anoint Nahuṣa; and, "with five hundred lights on his forehead burning so that they robbed the *tejas* of all [*pañcabhiḥ śatairjyotiṣāṃ lalāṭe jvaladbhiḥ sarvatejoharais*], Nahuṣa protected heaven" (12.329.30). In the *Anuśāsana,* his position is made secure by a boon from Brahmā that "whoever crosses the path of my sight [*yo me dṛṣṭipatham gacchet*], he will be under my sway" (17).[14] There is no mention of robbing others' *tejas*, but Bhṛgu's ability to overcome Nahuṣa seems to be enhanced by the repeated insistence that Bhṛgu is *mahātejas,* "of great *tejas*" (102.14; 103.13 and 14), although he says it is by his *ojas,* "vigor, etc.," that he will overcome him (102.23). The qualities involved are remarkably consistent with the *Ādiparvan's* capsule summary: Nahuṣa "accomplished Indrahood having overcome the gods by *tejas* and *tapas,* as also by strength and *ojas*" (1.70.27).[15]

Nahuṣa's faults, his tyranny, and fall.—Nahuṣa's heavenly reign begins fairly well: he stabilizes the lokas in the *Śānti* (12.329.30) and, in the *Anuśāsana,* continues to perform the same good ceremonial *karman* as he had on earth. The *Udyoga* observes that upon obtaining heaven's throne he changed from one "of virtuous soul" (*dharmātmā*) to one "of sensuous soul" (*kāmātmā*; 5.11.8; see also 15.21), but his sports seem innocent enough until he covets the absent Indra's wife, Śacī. This is the initial miscalculation that leads to his downfall in both the *Udyoga* and *Śānti* versions, although the more detailed *Udyoga* adds that his new-found power makes him "terrible" (*raudra*; 14.14), "of terrible energy" (*ghorvīryaḥ*; 16.25) and "of terrible form" (*ghorarūpa*; 16.29).[16] In the *Anuśāsana*, where Śacī does not figure, overcome by ego and pride (13.102.12 and 22) and "deluded by the power of lordship" (28), Nahuṣa abandons his virtuous ceremonial

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[14] He also drinks *amṛta* (13.102.14), a boon with no echoes in the *Śānti* version.

[15] *Tejas* is the indispensible entry. *Tapas* functions as a subordinate motif to make Nahuṣa the rare (unique?) human who *succeeds* in winning heaven's throne by "asceticism"; see my "The Burning of the Forest," in *Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions,* ed. Bardwell L. Smith (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), p. 223, n. 45. On *ojas*, see 5.15.19 and notes.

[16] There is probably a play on Rudra-Śiva here; see. 5.12.8, Nahuṣa, saying it will be "well" (*śivam*) for the gods if he gets Śacī; see Viṣṇu's role, treated below.

acts (102.12; 103, 10–11). With no other motivation, the *Anuśāsana* moves right to the ultimate folly upon which all versions agree: he makes the Ṛṣis carry him.

The other two versions, however, get to this point only through Śacī. Most of the peculiarities of the *Udyoga* account have some connection with her story, and have been noted by Holtzmann. The *Udyoga* presents three journeys to find the vanished Indra, each one ostensibly to forestall Nahuṣa's advances upon Śacī. In the first, Indra has gone to "the end of the lokas" where, "overcome by his own sins, concealed, he dwelt in the waters, restless like a serpent"[17] (*ceṣṭamāna ivoragaḥ*; 5.10.43). Agni leads the gods to Viṣṇu (5.13.8), who prescribes an Aśvamedha to remove Indra's sin, and the gods (still headed by Agni?), preceptors, and Ṛṣis perform this rite *before* Nahuṣa has been deposed. Indra sees the invincible Nahuṣa and vanishes again (5.13.15–20). As Holtzmann has observed, this Aśvamedha changes nothing in the plot; in the *Śānti*, the Aśvamedha is prescribed by Viṣṇu *after* the fall of Nahuṣa, and is directly connected with Indra's return to his throne (12.329.39–41).[18] In the second, Indra has gone into a lake of heavenly five-colored lotuses to hide there in a lotus stalk, and Śacī is led there by the goddess Upaśruti (5.13.22–14.8), about whom more shall be said. And in the third Indra goes into a more nondescript lotus, where Agni, who has "taken on the wonderful appearance of a woman" (*strīveṣamadbhūtam*; 15.27) and been strengthened by Bṛhaspati's eulogies so as to be able to enter the waters, finally finds him. Holtzmann and Dumézil are probably right that the quest (or quests?) of Agni reflects an older theme than the quest of Upaśruti.[19] In particular, the two Agni-led visits are concerned with the requirements and preparations for Indra's return to his throne: in the first, the sin-cleansing Aśvamedha; in the second, Indra's alliances with other gods, including Agni, which will be discussed. These connections point to an earlier version of the cycle of Indra's dethronement and restoration. In *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.6.3.1–17, after defeating Viśvarūpa, that demon's successor Vṛtra "came to be possessed of Agni and

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[17] He has slain the Brahmin Viśvarūpa and used falsehood (*anṛta*) to slay Vṛtra; see my *Ritual of Battle*, p. 234 and n. 15.

[18] Holtzmann, "Indra," pp. 309–10; the *Udyoga's* placement, however, still prepares for Indra's reenthronement.

[19] *Ibid.*; Dumézil, *Destiny of the Warrior*, p. 125 and n. 23; cf. *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* 2.234: Indra, helped by Agni, "as a serpent got rid of its skin, . . . got rid of all his evil."

Soma" plus various qualities, and Indra did not become "what Indra now is" until all the *deva*s and the various qualities returned to him, whereupon he slew Vṛtra. In this and other Brāhmaṇa references to the Indra cycle, Nahuṣa does not appear?[20] It is in the *Mahābhārata* that he first assumes the role of Indra's replacement. It is thus significant that Nahuṣa's ouster is handled outside the two Agni-led quests; rather, it is from the journey led by Upaśruti that Śacī learns what to do about her tormenter. And in its streamlining of the story, that is enough for the *Śānti*, where there are only two journeys to find Indra: the first led by Upaśruti from which Śacī learns what to do about Nahuṣa, the second traveled by Śacī to the same place after Nahuṣa's fall to bring Indra to his Aśvamedha and reenthronement. As to the *Anuśāsana's* Bhṛguized version, it streamlined further by eliminating Śacī, Upaśruti, and any need to find Indra at all.

Where the Nahuṣa story is incorporated into the Indra cycle, its dynamics thus feature Śacī and Upaśruti very prominently. A few words are necessary on each. As seen earlier, his own power augmented by the *tejas* and/or *tapas* of the gods and Ṛṣis, Nahuṣa obtains the energy to absorb the *tejas* of any being who crosses his sight. His "poison sight" (*dṛṣṭiviṣam*) is mentioned several times, and the gods, "not looking [at him],[21] move about in hidden forms" (*gūḍharūpās*; 5.16.26; see also 16.30) to avoid it. Śacī, however, seems immune to his baleful gaze: when he becomes *kāmātmā* and devoted to pleasures, "even while the high-souled Nahuṣa was sporting about, the goddess, Sakra's beloved wife, came into his view" (*samprāptā darśanam*; 5.11.13). The matter of sight is reinforced in the next *śloka*: "having seen her" (*tāṃ saṃdṛśya*; 14), he covets her and asks why she does not serve him; and when she goes to Nahuṣa and requests delay to learn Indra's whereabouts, "having seen her endowed with youth and beauty" (12.32), Nahuṣa is overwhelmed with desire and anticipation. It is never stated that she is immune to his glance, but it is clear that she is unaffected. If the expression can be pardoned, there is more to Śacī than meets the eye: she functions in this story as the *śakti*.

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[20] Cf. *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 7.28: the gods temporarily exclude Indra from Soma for a skien of sins headed by slaying Viśvarūpa and Vṛtra.
[21] Nahuṣa's "poison sight" seems to require eye contact; see 13.103.18.

As to Upaśruti, her name means "hearing" or "listening" and has been translated as "Rumor"[22] and "Divination."[23] The latter rendering best meets the context. Kisari Mohan Ganguli has a note to this effect: "Divination was practiced by reference to the stars at night."[24] Upaśruti is invoked through the goddess Night (*devīṃ rātrīm; niśāṃ devīm*; 5.13.23 and 24), who is, at the time, "progressing on the Northern Course" (*pravṛttamuttarāyaṇe*; 23). Due to Śacī's "devotion to her husband and truth," she is able to "perform divination" (*sopaśrutimathākarot*; 24), that is, bring forth Divination personified from the night sky during the period of the sun's movement to the north, from winter to summer solstice. In this manner she is able to learn Indra's whereabouts in the far north, beyond the Himālaya, and to receive from her husband his *nīti* (5.15.2) on how to oust Nahuṣa.

Indra's "policy" is to take advantage of Nahuṣa in his lust and mounting arrogance: secretly Śacī should go to Nahuṣa and tell him she will be his if he comes to her "on a divine vehicle borne by Ṛṣis" (15.15). Śacī's clever elaboration of this advice and Nahuṣa's blundering reply must be followed closely. Śacī says: "Indra's conveyances were horses, elephants, as well as chariots. I wish your vehicle here to be unprecedented [*apurvam*; so also 12.329.16], O lord of gods, one which has been neither Viṣṇu's, Rudra's, the Asuras' nor the Rākṣasas'. Let the Ṛṣis, joined together, O lord, bear you with a palanquin [*śibikā*], O king. Surely that pleases me. You can't be [merely] equal to the Asuras and gods. Receive the *tejas* of all with your own energy by means of sight. No one possessing energy wishes to stand before you" (15.11–13). This novel idea delights Nahuṣa, who boasts of his ability to put all beings—including the Munis (15.16)—under his power. He then concludes with the promise: "Therefore I will do your bidding without doubt, O goddess. The Seven Ṛṣis will bear me, as also all the Brahmarṣis [*saptarṣayo māṃ vakṣyanti sarve brahmarṣayastathā*]. See our glorification and growth, O fair complexioned lady" (19).

This is the *Udyoga's* only specification that it is the Seven Ṛṣis who, along with the Brahmarṣis, bear Nahuṣa. Elsewhere the bearers

[22] Dumézil, *Destiny of the Warrior*, p. 124, n. 21, citing E. W. Hopkins, *Epic Mythology* (1915; New York, Biblo & Tannen, 1969), p. 130.

[23] Pratap Chandra Roy, ed. Kisari Mohan Ganguli, trans., *The Mahabharata,* vol. 4, *Udyoga Parva* (1884–96; New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970), p. 24; M. N. Dutt, trans., *A Prose English Translation. of the Mahābhārata* (Calcutta: H. C. Dass, 1895–1905), *Udyoga Parva*, p. 17; Holtzmann, "Indra," p. 309.

[24] Roy, ed., *Mahābhārata*, vol. 4, Udyoga Parva, p. 24.

are referred to as Ṛṣis (5.15.4; 12.20), Ṛṣis equal to Brahmā (17.14), Maharṣis (15.24; cf. 17.8), Devarṣis (16.21; also 17.8), and Munis (15.16; cf. 17.8–11). The *Śānti* refers only to Ṛṣis (12.329.36) and Maharṣis (37–38); the *Ādiparvan* mentions Ṛṣis (1.70.26); and the *Āraṇyaka* has Nahuṣa recall after ten thousand years as a serpent that he was drawn by a thousand brahmins (3.177.8).[25] The *Anuśāsana* does give Seven Ṛṣis, but only in a southern variant to Ṛṣis (13.102.11 and nn.). Yet despite such apparent diversity, G. S. Ghurye exaggerates when he says: "The whole episode leaves the question of the precise status of the Rishis quite nebulous."[26] It is surely significant that Nahuṣa specifies that it is the Seven Ṛṣis, along with the Brahmarṣis, at the very point when he is about to ride them.[27] Aside from the Brahmarṣis—usually "mental sons" of Brahmā and primal progenitors[28]—the other titles are either general or interchangeable. As Hopkins notes, the Seven Ṛṣis "are the most famous of all Ṛṣis groups," and "are sometimes implied by the word Devarṣis."[29] Nahuṣa's travesty is thus a transgression of dharma (5.15.24; 13.102.26) that is audacious in the extreme. Not only does he "despise brahmins" (3.176.13); as the *Ādiparvan* puts it, he treats the Ṛṣis "like animals" (*paśuvat*; 1.70.26). That they are "Divine Ṛṣis" makes the "offense" (*asatkāram*; 13.102.11: literally "doing what is counter to truth, order") even more improper—under Nahuṣa's reign the human becomes divine and the divine animal.

Nahuṣa now, "having made [the Ṛṣis his] bearers, roams the lokas" (5.16.25). After a certain time, and under circumstances which vary,[30] he angrily touches Agastya—who is not one of the Seven Ṛṣis[31]—with

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[25] The passage insists that Nahuṣa has not lost his memory (176.20), but it shows a persistent pattern of exalting brahmins; see 177.15 ff.

[26] G. S. Ghurye, *Two Brahmanical Institutions: Gotra and Charana* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1972), p. 120.

[27] Others do recognize the Seven Ṛṣis: see Hermann Jacobi, "Agastya," *Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Scribners, 1924–27), 1:181; V. S. Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Poona: Prasad Prakashan, 1957–59), s.v. "Nahuṣaḥ."

[28] Hopkins, p. 189; see also pp. 177, 181.

[29] *Ibid.*, pp. 177, 182.

[30] In the *Udyoga* he and the Ṛṣis argue (Holtzmann, "Agastya" p. 593; interpolation) over the authenticity of some Vedic mantras for "cow sprinkling" (5.17.9), Nahuṣa taking the ascetic position that they are inauthentic, contrary to his role as king of the sacrifice-requiring gods; cf. Dumézil, *Destiny of a King*, pp. 62–64, on Vasu Uparicara. In the *Anuśāsana* Agastya is prodded with Nahuṣa's goad (103.19), then kicked; the *Śānti* is without background.

[31] See Hopkins, p. 126; the usual list is Vasiṣṭha, Kaśyapa, Atri, Viśvāmitra, Gautama, Jamadagni, Bharadvāja.

his feet (12.329.38), or with his foot on the head (5.17.11; left foot: 13.103.20). He immediately becomes "deprived of *tejas* and divested of *śrī*" (5.17.12), the first the splendor which he robbed from all beings and the second the quality which in the *Udyoga* led to his rule in heaven. And Agastya, or else Bhṛgu whom the *Anuśāsana* has hidden in Agastya's matted-locks, curses Nahuṣa to become a serpent "on the earth's surface" (5.17.20; 13.103.22). The *Udyoga* and *Anuśāsana* remit the curse so that Nahuṣa can retain his memory and eventually be freed by his descendant Yudhiṣṭhira, whereas in the *Śānti* he is cursed to "become a serpent for as long as earth and her mountains shall remain" (12.329.38).[32] In either case, the punishment is appropriate. Nahuṣa, who had inverted earth and heaven, men and gods, the godly and the animal, commits the one last intolerable inversion of kicking a Ṛṣi in the head. As a result the man who became king of the gods becomes an animal.

The restoration of Indra. Each full account, including the *Anuśāsana* one, tells of Indra's restoration. The *Śānti* links it with the performance of the Aśvamedha (see above n. 18). In the *Anuśāsana*, Brahmā bids the gods anoint Indra (13.103.32–34). But the *Udyoga* is the most revealing. We are taken back to the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa version of the Indra cycle, where Agni, Soma, and the Devas come over to Indra from Vṛtra. Here in the epic, after Agni has found Indra in the lotus and been joined by Bṛhaspati, this threesome is met by Yama, "the old god Soma" (*purāṇo devaśca somo*), Varuṇa, and Kubera (5.16.27), a group which the passage refers to as the Lokapālas, "World Regents" (17.1).[33] Just as in the Brāhmaṇa, then, Indra is rejoined by Agni and Soma. The latter is an irregular Lokapāla whose inclusion, as well as the designation "old god," probably derive from the more ancient account. Indra promises these gods that if they help him topple Nahuṣa (which they never have to do: Agastya soon arrives to tell them that Nahuṣa is banished), they will obtain "high consecration" (16.30–31). Then he offers to Agni a part in the "Indrāgna" share of the sacrifice, to Varuṇa lordship over waters, to Kubera over Yakṣas and riches, and to Yama over the Pitṛs (32–34). Finally, when Agastya finishes his report on Nahuṣa's fall, he tells Indra: "Go forth to heaven, protect the lokas, O Śacīpati" (17.7).

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[32] Only in the *Āraṇyaka* does he become a "boa" (*ajagara*); usually it is *sarpa*, once *ahi* (13.102.26). *Nāga* is not used.

[33] On instability among Lokapālas (usually Indra is one), see Hopkins, pp. 149–51.

At this point, having recounted the epic's versions of the Nahuṣa story, one can appreciate its place in the Kuru dynasty prior to Yayāti. The two figures are in many respects opposites. Nahuṣa, a man, becomes king of the gods, and is cursed to become a serpent on the surface of the earth. Yayāti ascends to heaven only after the fulfillment of his earthly rule,[34] commits a less grievous offense, and is bounced; but he never touches the earth. Rather he reascends to heaven.[35] These contrasting destinies are bound up with the two kings' relations with the various categories of beings. The instability among classes which Yayāti does so much to stabilize (see n. 9) is exacerbated under Nahuṣa. Whereas Yayāti mediates between the worlds of Gods and Asuras, Nahuṣa becomes an "Indra" only to be cursed into a snake.[36] The snake form is often associated with Asuras, and in the Ṛg Veda particularly with Vṛtra,[37] so it is significant that after slaying Vṛtra, Indra also, in one of his Udyoga retreats, dwells concealed in the waters "restless like a snake" (10.43). Such interlocking themes do not stand alone in the epic, where Yayāti is a model for Yudhiṣṭhira[38] and Nahuṣa for bringers of chaos like Śalya[39] and usurpers like Duryodhana. The latter tie is the most intriguing here, for Duryodhana—like both Indra and Nahuṣa—becomes snakelike after losing his throne. It is after his army's defeat and, with the death of Śalya, the loss of his śrī,[40] that Duryodhana hides in a lake at Kurukṣetra to rest until, taunted by Yudhiṣṭhira, "sighing like a great snake in a hole" (śvabhre mahānāga iva śvasan; 9.31.33; see also 35; 5.71.23; 5.1;26.22), he emerges to fight his final mace duel with Bhīma.

These are symbolic connections rather than structural or narrative ones between the two sets of figures, but they are significant because they deal with two transitions in the Kuru dynasty: one between the Dvāpara and Kali Yugas marking the change from the "heroic age" to the "present," the other near the dawn of the Kṛta Yuga marking the

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[34] See Defourny (n. 7 above), p. 63: in the Padma Purāṇa Yayāti rejects heaven to conclude his earthly reign.

[35] See Dumézil, Destiny of a King. pp. 32–35.

[36] Nahuṣa named among the snakes (1.31.9; 5.101.9); see Hopkins, p. 24; S. A. Dange, Legends in the Mahābhārata (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1969), pp. 87–88.

[37] See A. A. Macdonell. Vedic Mythology (1898; New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974), p. 73.

[38] See my Ritual of Battle, pp. 275, 284, 289, 348.

[39] Ibid., pp. 241–43, 280–81.

[40] Ibid., pp. 213, 267.

transition between primal instability and the establishment of order. In this vein one more juxtaposition between the Nahuṣa and Yayāti stories is pertinent. Following Nahuṣa's misrule, Indra's return to the throne is marked by the establishment of the Lokapālas and, henceforth, the protection of the lokas. Cosmic disorder is followed by a fixing of cosmic order. Then, during Yayāti's reign, the earth is partitioned among Yayāti's five sons into four outlying regions and a center (1.82.5). One thus moves from the divine ordering of all the lokas to the human ordering of the earth. Indra's battle with Vṛtra and its various aftermaths are thus seen in a cosmogonic setting not only by the poets of the *Ṛg Veda*[41] but by those of the *Mahābhārata*. The differences, however, are major and can only be understood by a closer look at the cosmological themes underlying the Nahuṣa legend.

Nahuṣa, Agastya, and the Seven Ṛṣis

It is widely known that the Seven Ṛṣis are identified with the constellation Ursa Major or Big Dipper,[42] and it is also no secret that Agastya is identified with the star Canopus.[43] Both associations are well established by the time of the *Mahābhārata* (see nn. 42 and 43). Nor has it escaped the notice of scholars that the primal "history" of the Kuru dynasty, especially in its Lunar dynasty variant (see nn. 5 and 6), draws heavily from the heavenly bodies. Hopkins points to several ways in which the dynastic mythology "has been effected by the star cult," both concerning Nahuṣa[44] and, rather tentatively, Yayāti.[45] But

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[41] See W. Norman Brown, "The Creation Myth of the *Ṛg Veda*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (hereafter *JAOS*) 62 (1942): 95–98; Brown, "Theories of Creation the *Ṛg Veda*," *JAOS* 85 (1965): 23–34.

[42] See bibliography and discussion in Macdonnell and Keith (n. 10 above), 1.107.117, numerous authors noting ṚV 1.24.10 where *ṛkṣāḥ*, "bears," refers to stars and probably the Seven Ṛṣis. Ghurye (n. 26 above), pp. 111–21, argues that the bear identification is Indo-European, and that by 900–800 B.C. it was fixed in India as the Saptarṣi. See also *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 2.1.2.4, and Hopkins, pp. 181–85.

[43] See Ghurye, p. 123: "By 600 B.C."; see Hopkins, p. 185; Auguste Barth, *The Religions· of India* (1879–81; Varanasi: Chowkhamba, 1963), p. 23 and n. 2; H. Kern, trans. *The Bṛhat-Saṇhitā,* or, *Complete System of Natural Astrology of Varāhamihira* (London: Trübner, 1869), p. 82, n. 1.

[44] Nahuṣa's mother is Svarbhānu's (Rāhu, the eclipse demon's) daughter.

[45] The inclusion of Dhruva sometimes (1.70.28 and nn.) among Nahuṣa's sons beside five brothers whose names, like Yayāti's, can be related to the root *yā*, "to go," suggest they "may have been stars"; Hopkins, pp. 52–53.

when one pushes back from Nahuṣa's father Āyus to the three figures included in the lineage in its Lunar dynasty form, one finds Budha (Mercury), Soma (Moon), and Atri (one of the Seven Ṛṣis). Add to this that Bṛhaspati (Guru = Jupiter) and Kavi Uśanas (Śukra = Venus) are opposite numbers in the Yayāti legend, and the conclusion is inescapable that astronomical concerns were prominent at least at some point in the development of these legends.

As Hopkins notes, the epic recognizes Agastya and the Seven Ṛṣis as a special group in relation to the stars: they are mentioned at the head of a group who serve "as examples of those who became hermits…and eventually rose to heaven 'not as Nakṣatras but as clusters of lights'" (12.236.16 ff; *anakṣatrāh…jyotiṣāṃ gaṇāḥ*; 21). He remarks that "no difficulty is experienced in treating the seven [one could add Agastya] as at once persons and stars," and that they are "still affected by earthly struggles."[46] This is important, for many of the stories concerning such Ṛṣis should be read on more than one level. Their connections with the stars are not simply through postmortem etiologies. However, before turning to the particular roles of Agastya and the Seven in the Nahuṣa legend, a wider lens looks at the stars in the epic is advisable.

Pitṛs and Ṛṣis, as Hopkins notes,[47] appear as stars, a good reference being when Arjuna learns after his stay on Mount Mandara that the "self-refulgent worlds" (*lokānātmāprabhān*) of Rājarṣis, Siddhas, and heroes slain in battle are seen "in the form of stars on earth" (*tārārūpāṇi bhūtale*; 3.43.32–35). There are probably Vedic precedents for such ideas, and not only in connection with the Seven Ṛṣis.[48] But the best instance of such beliefs in the epic is bound up with Nahuṣa. One can now appreciate the connection drawn in the *Anuśāsana* between his story and the ceremonial offering of garlands, incense, *balis,* and lights. I cite, from remarks by Bhīṣma to Yudhiṣṭhira, the most pertinent verses:

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 182, 185.
⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 34; the stars are also a common simile for Kṣatriya gatherings, both in assembly and on the battlefield. Most interesting, the Pāṇḍavas after the Aśvamedha "shone, surrounded by the assembled kings [*mahipalaiḥ*; literally ['Earth-protectors']], like the planets among the hosts of stars" (*grahastaraganairiva*; 14.91.30). Can it be fortuitous that, if the Pāṇḍavas are five planets, their brother Karṇa represents the Sun, their heir Abhimanyu the Moon (i.e., seven of the nine *navagraha*s, presumably. omitting Rāhu and Ketu), and their wife Draupadī, among other things, the Earth?
⁴⁸ See Barth, p. 23.

> Light [*jyotis*] is described as *tejas* and brilliance [*prakāśa*], and as having upward movement. Therefore the gift of *tejas* increases the *tejas* of men. Dark is [the hell] Andhaṃtamas, and so too is the Dakṣiṇāyana. Therefore the Uttarāyaṇa is proclaimed for giving lights [*jyotirdānam*].... Since the gods have become endowed with *tejas,* splendor [*prabhā*], and are light-makers, and the Rākṣasas with darkness, therefore let lamplight (*dīpaḥ*) be given.... One who robs a lamp [*dīpahartā*] would become blind, roaming through the darkness, deprived of good splendor [*asuprabhaḥ*]. Offering lamps, one shines forth garlanded by lamps in heaven [*svargalokaḥ*].... Being the lustre of his lineage [*kuloddyota*], of purified soul, the man who is ever an offerer of lamps attains brilliance [*prakāśatvam*] and residence in the world of the stars [*jyotiṣāṃ caiva sālokyam*]. [13.101.45–53]

Although Bhīṣma and Yudhiṣṭhira converse at equal length about the other types of offerings, it is certainly "lights" which form the link with the Nahuṣa narrative. As king in heaven, Nahuṣa performed all such rites as have been mentioned, and more (102.6–9; 103.3–10). But when he stopped, "the sphere of his sacrifice was obstructed by Rākṣasas" (103.11). As just seen, the antidote to Rākṣasas and darkness is offering lamps. But there is more. The passage on lights draws together a number of terms that are found in the Nahuṣa story. Connections and equivalences are drawn between *jyotis*, meaning both light and star, *tejas,* and such other terms as *prakāsa* and *prabhā*, and lamps (*dīpa*). Now, whereas the passage warns against lamp stealing, Nahuṣa steals others' *tejas.* The *Śānti* says he has "five hundred *jyotis* [lights-lamps-stars] burning on his forehead"; this is much like being "garlanded by lamps in heaven." The lamp thief becomes blind and roams through the darkness deprived of good splendor (*asuprabhaḥ*); in the *Udyoga*, Agastya curses Nahuṣa to "fall from heaven divested of splendor" (*hataprabhaḥ*; 5.17.14–15).[49]

Such concordances are certainty illuminating. They open the Nahuṣa legend to three avenues of interpretation: ceremonial, allegorical, and soteriological.

Dipāvali, Agastyārghyadāna.—The passage on lights and lamps cannot help but remind one of Dīpāvali ("Row of Lamps") or Dīvāli. This great autumnal festival in which lamps are lit and (at least today) star-shaped lights are hung includes a number of ceremonies over its five-day span, and is integrated with a number of myths and legends.[50] Its

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[49] See also 13.102.27: Bhṛgu says Nahuṣa will fall having his "glitter" (*tviṣ*) destroyed.

[50] On Dīpāvali, see Johann Jacob Meyer, *Trilogie Altindischer Mächte und Feste der Vegetation*, pt. 2, *Bali* (Zurich: Max Niehaus, 1937); P. K. Gode, "Studies on the History

importance across castes marks it as one of the most important Hindu (also Jain) festivals, and on this level it can hardly be compared with the Agastyārghyadāna, one of a vast number of routine *vrata*s or observances. However, certain features of Dīvāli allow the comparison, once one observes that Agastya's appearance in the Nahuṣa legend refers to the same event as the ritual offering of an *arghya,* a water offering, to Agastya. Both refer to the rising of Agastya-Canopus, a star of the first magnitude and the second most brilliant star, after Sirius, in the southern skies. The epic Nahuṣa legends do not spell out this star identification any more than for the Seven Ṛṣis. But there are some broad hints. In the *Udyoga*, when Agastya comes (from the south) to tell Indra (who is in the far north) that Nahuṣa is finished, the text reads "the *tapas*-possessing lord Agastya became visible there" (*tapasvī tatra bhagavānagastyaḥ pratyadṛśyata*; 5.17.1)—a cumbersome expression if all one needed were "then Agastya got there." And the *Anuśāsana* is even more suggestive: instead of carrying Nahuṣa jointly, the (Seven) Ṛṣis bear him "in succession" (*paryāyaśva*; 13.102.13); "and so fell out the turn (*paryāya*) of Agastya" (14). *Paryāya*, "revolution, rotation," easily refers to the movement of the stars. As to the ritual, the offering of water to Agastya is done at the rising of Canopus. As the sixth-century astronomer Varāhamihira remarks, Agastya rises at different times at different latitudes,[51] but those mentioned for his worship are consistently in the month of Bhādrapada (August–September), and his appearance is correlated with the setting in of autumn after the close of the rains and the clearing of the waters.[52]

Bearing such facts in mind, there are two correlations between Dīvāli and its mythology and the ritual observance and mythology connected with the appearance of Agastya. First, the myths most prominently connected with both ceremonies concern victories over opponents of

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of Hindu Festivals: Some Notes on the History of the Dīvālī Festival (between ca. A.D. 50 and 1945)," *ABORI* 26 (1945): 216–62; M. M. Underhill, *The Hindu Religious Year* (Calcutta: Association Press, 1921), pp. 59–63; F. R. Allchin, *Neolithic Cattle Keepers of South India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. 127–30; P. V. Kane *History of Dharmaśāstra,* 2d ed. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1974), pp. 194–200; B. A. Gupte, "Divali-Folklore," *Indian Antiquary* 32 (1903): 237–39.

[51] Kern, trans., p. 83 (*Bṛhat-Saṃhitā* 7.14).

[52] See *ibid.*, pp. 80–85; Kane, pp. 255–56 (*Dharmaśāstra*, V, 1); Apte, *Dictionary, s.*v. "Agastyaḥ": Jacobi (n. 27 above), p. 181; on the rite itself, see *Matsya Purāṇa* 1.51.42–54. in Jamna Das Akhtar, ed., *The Matsya Puraṇam (*Dehli: Oriental Publishers, 1972), pp. 188–89.

Indra who have usurped the latter's throne.[53] At Dīvāli is celebrated Viṣṇu's victory over Bali, which makes possible Indra's reenthronement.[54] At the "rising" of Agastya, Nahuṣa is overthrown and Indra is restored. It seems likely that in each case the victory has some connection with the end of the rainy season. Viṣṇu's awakening at the end of the *varṣa* or "Rains" is said to occur on the eleventh day of the waxing moon of Kārttika (October–November),[55] but it is also associated with Dīvāli and, the triumph over Bali, celebrated just eleven days earlier on the first of the same month.[56] And as just noticed, the rising of Agastya is associated with the closing of the rains. Now, the rainy season is traditionally associated with ill omen and more particularly with snakes.[57] It is the latter form that Nahuṣa—whose name has other associations with snakes (see above, n. 36)—must take *after* Agastya appears, that is, after the rainy season closes. In this connection, Varāhamihira says that it is Indra's normal function to control the Nāgas during the *varṣa*: "The water which has been poured out at Indra's command by the snakes, whose bodies are wrapped in clouds, and thus has been stained by burning poison, becomes pure at the appearance of Agastya."[58] One would have to look further into this discrepancy of over a month in dating the end of the monsoon. It may reflect the regional origins of the two myths (see n. 59). But it seems likely that both myths refer to returns of Indra after a rainy season which—contrary to the norm—he did not supervise, and, in accord with the new season of *śarad*,[59] a cleansing not only of the waters but the skies and heavens.

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[53] On the similarity, see Sukumari Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 282; but her historicized explanation is pointless.

[54] I echo Meyer, pt. 2, pp. 18–21, 105–14, 186–93, 242–67, on the centrality of the Bali Myth for Dīvāli. Kane, p. 202 (*Dharmaśāstra*, V, 1), observes that in many Purāṇas Bali (like Nahuṣa) makes the gods lose their *tejas*.

[55] Underhill, p. 85.

[56] Garrett Jan Held, *The Mahābhārata: An Ethnological Study* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1935), pp. 194–95. There is thus also variance as to when to celebrate Viṣṇu's Vāmana (Dwarf) incarnation: at Dīvālī (*ibid.*, p. 192), or at Vāmana Jayanti, on Bhādrapada Śukla twelfth (Underhill, p. 76).

[57] Held, pp. 189–90.

[58] Kern, trans., p. 83 (Bṛhat-Saṁhitā 7.12).

[59] Here too are variant datings that correspond to those in the two myths: "the sultry season of two months succeeding the rains; in some parts of India comprising the months" Bhādra and Āsvina, in other places Āsvina and Kārttika, fluctuating thus from August to November"; Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (1899; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964) s.v. "*śarad.*"

The second correlation between Dīvāli and the Nahuṣa-Agastya cycle concerns the giving of lights and the Ancestors. The practice of lighting lamps to guide the Pitṛs on the *amāvāsya* or new moon night of Āśvina (the night before the celebration of the victory over Bali) is connected with the offering of *śrāddha*s—balls of rice meal to the Pitṛs—at the same juncture, and the release of the Pitṛs from Yama's realm to Svarga.[60] Meyer and Allchin even hold that Dīvāli shares the same prehistory as Hallow-e'en and the Christian feasts of All Souls and All Saints in an autumnal festival of the dead.[61] Similarly, we have seen the Nahuṣa legend connected in one account with the giving of lamps and the attainment of starlike brilliance in Svarga where one can shine forth as "the lustre of his lineage." These correspondences have not gone unnoticed. Kane cites the *Anuśāsana* passage and mentions that "some writers [he does not say who] regard these as a reference to the Dīvāli."[62] But as he says, no sure connection can be drawn. The *Anuśāsana* references to offering lamps certainly do not refer to the Agastyārghyadāna, a rite which seems to have no connection with the Pitṛs. But the authors of the *Anuśāsana* may well have noted parallels between the lore surrounding Agastya, Nahuṣa, and the Seven Ṛsis and the practices of Dīvāli,[63] and drawn them for a brief moment together.

Nahuṣa's palanquin. When Śacī determines to learn where Indra is, she invokes Upaśruti, Divination, through the goddess Night who is "progressing on the Uttarāyaṇa." Not only is Śacī thus enabled to find Indra north of the Himālaya. The Uttarāyaṇa is associated with the stars of the northern skies, and particularly with the Seven Ṛsis: as Hopkins notes, a name for the Uttarāyaṇa, is the *Vāsiṣṭhi kāṣṭhā*,[64] the "course of Vasiṣṭha," the ṛsi who stands at the head of the Seven. Since Indra tells Śacī to trap Nahuṣa during the Uttarāyaṇa, it is not surprising that when Nahuṣa agrees to do Śacī's bidding, it is the Seven Ṛsis whom he picks to carry him.

Our constellation of the Great Bear was known in India anciently as "the Bears," and at least by the time of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* as "the

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[60] Drawn from Gode, pp. 229, 250; Kane, pp. 197–98 (*Dharmaśāstra*, V. 1); Gupte, p. 238; Underhill, p. 60.

[61] Meyer, pt. 2, pp. 48–51, 235–42, 250–67; Alchin, pp. 127, 137.

[62] Kane, pp. 206–7 (*Dharmaśāstra*, V. 1).

[63] Gode, pp. 251–53, claims that Dīvāli practices can probably be traced back to around A.D. 50–100. This would be in plenty of time for the late-epic *Anuśāsana* to have drawn a connection.

[64] Hopkins, p. 182, a variant at 5.107.15 cf. 109.12.

Seven Ṛṣis" (see n. 42). But it was also seen "in the form of a wheeled carriage."[65] In the Nahuṣa story the "vehicle" is a *śibikā,* a palanquin, palkee, or litter (5.15.12; see also 3.176.13 and nn.). But the important point is that the *shape* of the Big Dipper suggests a means of conveyance, whether it be a carriage or litter or, as it is widely and anciently known in the west, a wain (cart) or wagon.[66] Only two scholars—the two Adolf Holtzmanns, uncle and nephew—have noted this connection, but without elaboration. The older Holtzmann remarked: "Die sieben Rischi sind noch am Himmel zu sehen, wie sie den Wagen des Nahuscha ziehen.... Daneben sieht man auch noch Nahuscha, wie er eben als Schlange von Wagen herabstürtzt."[67] At least one of the identifications is secure: the Seven Ṛṣis fit the story by the vehicular shape of the constellation. As to identifying Nahuṣa as "die Schlange," that is, the constellation Draco which is beside the Big Dipper, things are less certain. Nahuṣa's earthly destiny is a structurally significant aspect of the story, and as best I can determine Indian astrology does not recognize Draco as a snake.[68] But if the myth is not a simple allegorical star etiology, there are reasons to think a more complex cosmic allegory is involved.

The Nahuṣa story is set in a cosmic drama that carries along some of the cosmogonic implications of the slaying of Vṛtra. Without an Indra, heaven and the *trailokya* are in turmoil. As the *Anuśāsana* puts it, "the gods cannot subsist [*vartayitum*; literally, 'keep things turning'] without a king" (13.103.32). The human Nahuṣa only makes things worse. But his *asatkāra* is more than just the violation of *dharma* and of taxonomic classifications mentioned earlier. "Having made [the Seven Ṛṣis] his vehicle, he roams the *lokas*" (*yāti lokān*; 5.16.25). This

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[65] According to Śrīdhara Swāmin (ca. A.D. 1400) commenting on *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 12.2, as cited by H. T. Colebrooke, "On the Indian and Arabian Divisions of the Zodiack," *Asiatic Researches* 9 (1809): 323–76.

[66] Ghurye (n. 26 above), p. 112; E. J. Webb, *The Names of the Stars* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1952), p. 73; Henry C. King, *The Background of Astronomy* (London: Watts, 1957), pp. 37–42; Homer used a word for the constellation meaning either "wain" or "plough."

[67] Adolf Holtzmann (the elder), ed. and trans., *Indische Sagen,* reedited by Moriz Winternitz (1845–47 and 1854; Jena: Eugene Diederichs Verlag, 1921), p. 295, n. 74; arguing that the remission of Nahuṣa's curse is a late feature of the story, the younger Holtzmann, "Agastya," p. 594, said that the original myth saw "in Nahusha die Schlange neben dem Sternbilde des Wagens."

[68] See *Manual of the Administration of the Madras Presidency,* vol. 3, *Glossary* (Madras: Government Press 1893), p. 543, s.v. "Nakshatram," listing Draco with no corresponding Sanskrit name or identity.

must mean that he leads that constellation out of position, subjects it to his own whim. This is a disruption of the first magnitude, for the Seven Ṛṣis are the very symbols of cosmic stability and fidelity. On every *parvan* (full and new moon) they resort to Mount Meru (6.7.19) and are said to "sit around Dhruva" (12.126.25), the Pole Star.[69] With Vasiṣṭha's wife Arundhatī (a small eighth star beside the Vasiṣṭha star), they are regarded already in the *Baudhāyana Ghṛyasūtra* (1.5.12–14) as "so auspicious and the symbol of stability as to be invoked and worshipped by a newly-wed couple before the marriage-rites could come to an end."[70]

Astronomical literature, however, frequently does not mention the Seven Ṛṣis alone. Rather they are mentioned together with Agastya. An epic example of this has been noted, and Varāhamihira devotes successive chapters to them distinctly separate from his discussion of the Nakṣatras or "lunar mansions."[71] There are some indications that the Seven Ṛṣis and Agastya were thought of as having revolutions independent of the Nakṣatras.[72] All this points up again the significance of the *Anuśāsana* verse which identifies the rotation by which Agastya arrives as a *paryāya.* The *Udyoga* and *Anuśāsana* versions abound in references to temporal rhythms. Before Nahuṣa sees Śacī, "the Six Seasons in embodied form" serve him (5.11.12). Numerous gods speak of the need for Time (*kāla*) to delay Nahuṣa (5.12.26; 13.14.19–20; 15.1.9), and Nahuṣa grants the same (5.14.13). Then "a long time passed" (13.101.46) while Nahuṣa rode the Ṛṣis. Add to this such allusions to "turning" (root *vṛt*) as have been mentioned earlier. But the key is in the references to the Uttarāyaṇa (5.13.23–25; 13.101.46). For if the Seven Ṛṣis are associated with the northern skies, Agastya is associated with the southern.

When Agastya "becomes visible" before Indra to tell him about Nahuṣa, he is described as *tapasvī*, endowed with *tapas.* It is no doubt by his "heat" that he is more than a match for the king who robbed others' *tejas.* Already described as *ugra*, vigorous (related to *ojas*)[73] in

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[69] See Hopkins, pp. 181–82; their mythology, its relation to the Vedas, the Seven Prajāpatis, Manu and the Manvantaras, Indra, and their wives (in connection with themes of chastity, abstinence, infidelity) deserves a full study.

[70] Ghurye, pp. 118–19; see also Underhill, pp. 71–74, for related legends.

[71] Kern, trans., chap. 12 (Agastya, pp. 80–85) and chap. 13 (Seven Ṛṣis, pp. 85–87); see also Kane, p. 479 (*Dharmaśāstra*, V, 1).

[72] Colebrooke, pp. 361–62; Ebenezer Burgess, *Sūrya Siddhānta: A Textbook on Hindu Astronomy* (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1860), pp. 212–13, 220.

[73] Ghurye, pp. 123–24.

Ṛg Veda 1.179.6, he is at least by now the lone but brilliant star of the southern quarter. As such, he is able to redress the wrongs committed in the Uttarāyaṇa and right the balance of the cosmos. He is, moreover, a form of brilliance, even fire,[74] who emerges at the point in the Dakṣiṇāyana when the rainy season comes to an end. In this respect he is structurally the equivalent of Agni who, in the portions of the myth concerned with Indra's restoration, must enter the waters to find him.

In sum, we must occasionally look beyond our earthbound conceits and still familiar taxonomies to interpret a myth. And just to show that this celestial excursion has not been illusory, I must mention that there are at least two more Agastya legends that bear on similar themes.[75] In one, he prevents Mount Vindhya from growing, thus leaving the Sun still only one mountain, Meru, to traverse on its path (*Mbh* 3.102.1–15): he thus keeps North and South distinct and, again, rights the balance of the cosmos. And in the other he swallows the Ocean (3.102.16–108.19), a feat which has as its result that the Heavenly Gaṅgā—"a kind of Milky Way"[76]—will henceforth flow through the three worlds. This is probably echoed when Varāhamihira says of Agastya's great gulp: "It is he who made the sea shine as heaven, with dolphins for its white clouds, with precious stones for stars, with crystal for its moon, with its drained bottom for a serene harvest [*śarad*] sky, and with the radiant gems in the hoods of snakes for comets and planets."[77]

Devayāna, Pitṛyāna. By the time of the Sūtra period if not before, and particularly in connection with the *Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra*,

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[74] Kern, trans., p. 80, n. 1, derives Agastya from *aj, añj*, "to brighten"; Ghurye, p. 124, apparently agrees: "the effulgent one." Manfred Mayrhofer, *Kurzgefasstes etymologisches Wörterbuch der Altindischen* (Heidelburg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1953), s.v. "*agástiḥ*," favors a Dravidian origin from the flowering plant Agati gandiflora (Tamil *akatti*).

[75] One should keep in mind such cosmic and cosmogonic settings when dealing with the astounding feats of other Ṛṣis. As to the more earthbound side of Agastya's career and his ties with south India, see K. N. Sivaraja Pillai, *Agastya in the Tamil Land* (Mylapore: University of Madras, n.d.), p. 4: Agastya like Viṣṇu in the Vāmana-Bali myth is a dwarf! Jean Filliozat, "Agastya et la propogation du brahmanisme au Sud-Est Asiatique," *Adyar Library Bulletin, V. Raghavan Felicitation Volume* 31–32 (1967–68): 442–49.

[76] Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 113; see also Stella. Kramrisch, "The Indian Great Goddess," *History of Religions* 14 (1975): 242–43; this point was first made to me by Randy Kloetzli.

[77] Kern, trans., p. 81 (*Bṛhat-Saṃhitā* 12.5).

which Ghurye dates at about 400–500 B.C., the numerous Brahmin *gotra*s or lineages were reduced to forty-nine complexes. These in turn were subdivided into eight gotras said to descend from eight eponymous *pravara* Ṛṣis, or Ṛṣis to whom one made "invocation" (*pravara*), and the eight *gotra*s were the basis for the system of "sept-exogamy" or marriage outside one's "eponymous clan." The eight *pravara* Ṛṣis were the Seven plus Agastya,[78] who thus together represent the fabric of brahmindom.

Now as Ghurye mentions, this enumeration confronts an interesting variant which may be an elaboration, but which almost certainly has some relation to similar ideas found in Iran.[79] It is given clearly in *Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra* 2.9.23.4–5[80] (ca. 300 B.C. according to Ghurye) but without reference to the *pravara* Ṛṣis, alluded to by Patañjali (ca. 200 B.C.) with reference to them, and elaborated in the *Yājñavalkya Smṛti* (ca. A.D. 300) and the *Vāyu Purāṇa* (ca. A.D. 500).[81] I translate the passage from *Yājñavalkya* 3.184–88:[82]

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[78] Ghurye, pp. 7, 10, 13.

[79] Ghurye suspects an Indo-Iranian continuation (*ibid.*, pp. 108, 116–17, 121–23); the "Seven" stars of the Haptō .iringa (probably Ursa Major) are associated with the north and with 99,999 Fravashis (p. 117) or spirits of the righteous, whereas Fomalhaut, the star of the south (Canopus is not visible in Iran), "keeps watch over a mountain and facilitates the regular appearance of the sun" (p. 123). I am indebted to Bruce Lincoln for calling to my attention the following information and citations. The etymology for Haptō .iringa is probably "that which has seven signs": Avestan *hapta-*= Sanskrit *sapta-*; Av. *iringa-*=Skt. *liñga-*; see Christian Bartholomae, *Altiranisches Wörterbuch* (Strassburg, 1904), col. 1767. The constellation is associated with the *daēvas* just as in Hinduism it is linked with the *deva*s, but the *daēvas*, whom Zoroastrianism reckoned as demons rather than gods, are (along with other malevolent beings) kept in check at the gate of hell (which is in the north) by the Fravashis and watched over by the Haptō .iringa as the latter revolve around and thus guard the north. The twelve constellations of the zodiac also proceed "by the power and help" of tho Haptō .iringa; see *Dīnā-ī Maīnōg-ī Khirad* 49.15, trans. E. W. West, *Pahlavi Texts*, 3, Sacred Books of the East, vol. 24 (1885; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), pp. 91–92 and nn. 6 and 8.

[80] See Georg Bühler, *The Sacred Laws of the Āryas*, Sacred Books of the East, vols. 2 and 14 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1966), 2: 158.

[81] Ghurye, pp. 109–11. The dates Ghurye proposes fall toward the median of those advanced by other scholars; on the *Yājñavalkya Smṛti*, see Robert Lingat, *The Classical Law of India*, trans. J. Duncan M. Derrett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); pp. 99–100.

[82] Bapu Shastri Moghe, ed *Yājñavalkyasmṛti or the Institutes of Yajñavalkya with the Commentary Mitāksharā of Vijñāneshvara"* (Bombay: Janārdan Mahadev Gurjar, Remwadi, 1892), pp. 337–38.

The Pitṛyana is what is between the Ajavīthī[83] and Agastya [Canopus]. By it Agnihotrins, desirous of Svarga, go toward heaven [*divam*]. And those who are duly devoted to giving and endowed with the eight qualities,[84] they also, devoted to truth and religious observances, go by that path. There are eighty-eight thousand Munis, performers of domestic rites, who return again [to birth], having become seeds who promote the *dharma* [*bījabhūtā dharmapravartakaḥ*].

   Between the Seven Ṛṣis and the Nagavithi [see n. 83] are so many Munis too, free from all undertakings, abiding in Devaloka, Through *tapas,* chastity [*brahmacarya*], the abandonment of attachment, and through mental vigor, having gone there they remain until the dissolution of created things.[85]

As Ghurye says: "It is clear from this that the cosmic region lying between the Saptarshis or Ursa Major and the star Agastya or Canopus was conceived as the domain of all sages or Munis, i.e., the great sages, the ancestors of Brahmanic Aryandom."[86] Moreover, it is the position of these eight *pravara* Ṛṣis that delimits the two eschatological paths: the Devayāna and Pitṛyāna.

   The period when these soteriological statements were formulated is concurrent with the *Mahābhārata*. Considering the references in the Nahuṣa story to the Uttarāyaṇa and, in connection with Agastya's *paryāya*, the implicit reference to the Dakṣiṇāyana (the two of which form indispensable way stations within the Devayāna and Pitṛyāna, respectively),[87] there is no reason to think that the epic poets were uninformed by these ideas. *Mahābhārata* 2.11.34 probably knows a variant where it says that Brahma's *sabhā* (roughly, the Universe; see the full description) is visited by eighty thousand ascetics (Yatis) whose seed is drawn up, and by fifty thousand Ṛṣis who have begotten offspring. The "policy" by which Indra and Śacī cause Nahuṣa's fall is, ultimately, to have him foul up the very possibilities of salvation. The Devayāna is the path to *mokṣa* that proceeds by the Uttarāyaṇa. As Varāhamihira says, it is by the course of the Seven Ṛṣis that "the

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[83] Ajavīthi ("Goat's Road") and Nāgavīthī ("Serpent's Road") are subdivisions in the southern and northern skies by which the sun, moon, and planets move through various asterisms; see Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary.*

[84] Virtues enumerated by the commentator Vijñāneshvara; see Hopkins, p. 35.

[85] That is, according to Vijñāneshvara, they remain to the end of the *prākṛta-pralaya.*

[86] Ghurye, p. 110.

[87] On Devayāna and Pitṛyana and their connection with the Uttarāyaṇa and Dakṣiṇāyana see Paul Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads* (New York: Dover, 1966), pp. 334–38; Hopkins, p. 35.

northern region is, as it were, protected."[88] And the Pitṛyāna is not only the path of rebirth, but the path through the Dakṣiṇāyana by which the Ancestors can attain a relative fixity in Svarga or the worlds beyond, whether or not that fixity be permanent.[89] There is thus a connection between Nahuṣa's absorption of others' *tejas* and his disruption of the two paths. Nahuṣa destroys the mechanisms by which the Pitṛs, as well as the Ṛṣis, can shine in heaven. Thus the *Anuśāsana* concludes its account: "Having died [*pretya*], a giver of lights obtains celestial sight. And givers of lights become indeed resplendent as the full moon. As many as there are twinkles [or winks] in an eye, so many years does a man who is a light-giver glow [*jvalate*], possessing beauty and wealth" (13.103.36–37). It is also significant that Agastya is a Ṛṣi who has a special connection with the Pitṛs: he is one of those about whom the tale is told[90] that, because in his ascetic life he sired no children, he once came upon his forebears hanging upside down in a cave, demanding offspring. When he finally has a son, Agastya frees his Pitṛs to "attain the worlds they desired" (3.97.26). He thus stands as a paradoxical model of the *karmakāṇḍa*, just as the Seven Ṛṣis and their wives, the Kṛttikās or Pleiades, stand, despite their significance as models of marital fidelity (see n. 70), as paradoxical models of *brahmacarya* and the *jñānakāṇḍa*, prevented by their distance from each other in the heavens from having sexual relations.[91]

These remarks point to a final contrast between Nahuṣa and Yayāti. It is certainly likely that the Nahuṣa narrative represents an effort to synthesize Upaniṣadic soteriology with epic concerns about how the origins of the world in the Kṛta Yuga are related to the founding of the Lunar dynasty. One can only speculate on what elements of the Nahuṣa story might be pre-epic. No doubt some traits are old, as the

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[88] Kern, trans., p. 85 [*Bṛhat-Saṃhitā*, 13.1]; compare the analogous situation, *mutatis mutandis,* in Iran, n. 79 above.

[89] For the complexities and ambiguities on this point, see David M. Knipe, "Sapiṇḍīkaraṇa: The Hindu Rite of Entry into Heaven," mimeographed, from the author: the deceased migrates from lower to higher worlds until, after three generations, he can join the "remote ancestor's who are dispersed to the four quarters of the transcendent region beyond these worlds" (p. 16). However it is never forgotten that "unlike the gods, the *pitaraḥ* are themselves subject to repeated death" (p. 13). See now Knipe 1977.

[90] 3.94.11–97; compare 1.13 and 41–53, story of Jaratkāru.

[91] Thus *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 6.1.2.2–5; Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 94–103.

Ṛg Veda already knows him as a primal king. All one can say is that his story is adapted in the epic to the mythology of the Indra cycle and the Upaniṣadic doctrine. We thus have a coalescence of what J.A.B. van Buitenen has called Upaniṣadic and Baronial lore.[92] The example he discusses concerns Yayāti, and as van Buitenen shows, Yayāti is presented as an authority on rebirth. He is "a guide who knows the country" (*kṣetrajña*; 1.84.12) and an authority on the movement between lokas (1.83.3; 84.13–16). But I think Yayāti may be the choice as such an authority on transmigration for another reason besides his being "about to go through it."[93] It is Yayāti's reign that has stabilized the relations between the different lokas and among the different castes, particularly the Brahmins and Kṣatriyas. In contrast, it is in connection with the legend of his father Nahuṣa that Kṣatriya and brahmin lore were synthesized to depict not only a chaos of the lokas and an intolerable breach of Kṣatriya-Brahmin protocol, but an overthrow of the divine order and a menace to the proper functioning of the postmortem routes. What the two legends in fact present are the *three* destinies mentioned in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 6.2.15–16 and developed in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5.10.1–7: the Devayāna and Pitṛyāna in the Nahuṣa legend, and the animal fate of the wicked, "who do not know these two ways" (Br. Ār. Up. 6.2.16), in the Yayāti legend (1.84.10; 85.10–11 and 19–20). How appropriate yet paradoxical it is that whereas Nahuṣa suffers the fate delineated by Yayāti, Yayāti, who travels by the Devayāna (1.83.9), obtains the reward Nahuṣa had almost effaced.

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[92] J.A.B. van Buitenen, "Some Notes on the Uttara-Yāyata," *Adyar Library Bulletin, V. Raghavan Felicitation Volume* 31–32 (1967–68): 632–35.

[93] *Ibid.*, p. 631.

KṚṢṆA IN THE *MAHĀBHĀRATA*:
THE DEATH OF KARṆA

Whatever one makes of a few slight references to Kṛṣna in texts that are probably older than the *Mahābhārata*, and of the many efforts to imagine him prior to his literary debut *in* the epic, the *Mahābhārata* is the first text to portray him as both divine and human, and to conceive of his humanity and divinity on a forceful and complex scale. From his almost casual introduction in the epic's first book as a knowing bystander at the wedding of Draupadī[1] to his death—along with the deaths of all his kinsmen—as the outcome of a drunken clan brawl in book 16, one can trace Kṛṣna's epic involvement through an arc. Along this arc, his prominence reaches its peak from books 5 to 11: from the *Udyogaparvan*, or "Book of War Preparations," through the *Strīparvan*, or "Book of the Women," that ends the war with the epic's mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters mourning over their slain menfolk. These central books give Kṛṣna the role of ringmaster on the text's center stage.

To select a passage representative of Kṛṣna along this curve, it seems best to catch him at its top. The one selected for translation here describes his involvements in the killing of the Kaurava hero Karṇa: a continuous narrative from the last five *adhyāya*s ("chapters," "lessons," or "readings") at the end of the *Karṇaparvan* (*Mahābhārata* 8.65.16—69.43), the book in which Karṇa is—for two days, the sixteenth and seventeenth in the eighteen-day Kurukṣetra war—the marshal and virtually the last hope of the Kaurava army.[2] The passage exemplifies the

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[1] See Hiltebeitel ([1976] 1990), 81–85.

[2] Much has been written recently on Karṇa in the *Mahābhārata*, mostly involving comparison with other myths and epics in fascinatingly different ways—most remarkably, three doctoral dissertations: McGrath (2001), seeking an "archaic" Karṇa to exemplify pre-*Mahābhārata* features of Indo-European heroism; Adarkar (2001), examining the question of literary character around Karṇa; and Greer (2002), exploring how Karṇa is knotted into the *Mahābhārata's* literary "net"—an image similarly used by Adarkar (189). Adarkar and Greer are to me the most persuasive and stimulating. See also Biardeau (2002, 1:743–754, 993–1119; 2:116–119, 219–229, 271–387, 523–532); Woods (2001, 43–46); Jarow (1999). For earlier treatments, see Dumézil

forcefulness and complexity of Kṛṣna's wider epic portrayal; it reveals
the depth and intricacy of his being God, and of the epic's delineation
of *bhakti;* and it is a famous episode rich in its subsequent Sanskrit
and vernacular unfoldings.[3]

The passage is also illustrative of the textual issues that bear upon
strategies of reading and interpreting the *Mahābhārata.* I present it on
the assumption that *this* epic is a work of written literature, and not
a product of oral composition. Although many hold the latter view in
one form or another, for this passage it must suffice to mention the
work of Mary Carol Smith, who argues on the basis of a preponder-
ance of irregular metric features in this segment and throughout much
of the *Karṇaparvan* that it preserves signs of archaic oral composition.[4]
While it is important to recognize metric variation and to appreciate
that it would enhance recitation *from* the text, it is clear that by the
time the *Mahābhārata* was composed, its authors used varied meters
for stylistic effects, including juxtaposition and archaization. What
needs to be stressed—since it has been trivialized by so many modern
interpreters inclined to see some kind of pristine oral core behind its
literary "monstrosity"—is that the *Mahābhārata* was written to move
people, that it succeeded in doing so, and that what it has to say about
Kṛṣna is vital to both the authorial motivation and the text's success.
Kṛṣna's divinity is not a literary after-effect.[5]

Whatever may have preceded the *Mahābhārata* orally, culti-
cally, or in other unknown forms, the Poona Critical Edition of the
Mahābhārata shows that for about two millennia, the work that has
moved people has been a book, and in that sense one can speak of all

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(1968, 124–144); Biardeau (1975–76, 173–174; 1976–77, 143–146; 1978, 129–130,
170–175; 1978–79, 147–151; 1979–80, 171–174; 1980–81, 223–227); Biardeau and
Péterfalvi (1985, 1986); Hiltebeitel (1980a, 1982a); Shulman (1985, 380–387); and
Adarkar (2001, 48–56) (a review).

[3] Especially the Sanskrit play *Karṇabhāra*, ascribed to Bhāsa, on which see
Miller (1991), and the *terukkūttu*-style Tamil play *Karṇamōkṣam*, attributed to
Pukalēntippuluvar, on which see de Bruin (1998, 1999); Hiltebeitel (1988, 395–413).
On other south Indian treatments of Karṇa, see Shulman (1985, 380, 387–400). On
Mahābhārata folk epic traditions on Karṇa in North India, see Sax (2000, 2002,
157–185); Hiltebeitel (1999a, 102–103 [in the Rajasthani *Pābūjī*] and 121–262 [in the
Hindi *Ālhā*]). See further Adarkar, 2001, 43–45.

[4] See Smith (1972, 1992). Most of the epic (about 90 percent) is in *śloka* verses of
two sixteen-syllable lines, while most of the rest is in *triṣṭubh* verses, regularly of four
eleven-syllable lines. Smith has argued that *triṣṭubh*s form the epic's "core" and irregular
*triṣṭubh*s its "nucleus" (1972, 65).

[5] See Hiltebeitel (2005c, 98–107); on the notion of "literary monstrosity," see Hilte-
beitel (2001a, 1).

its audiences as *readers*.[6] Moreover, the manuscript evidence reveals the beginning of a literary history. The Poona Critical Edition makes this history sufficiently accessible through its apparatus for one to get a reasonable purchase on the flavor of what is stable and what has been "improved." In the passage translated here, for instance, one can see that it is carefully constructed. It shows artistry: in framing devices; in its play of tropes, especially irony; in the juxtaposition of Vedic and Purāṇic allusions; in the swirl of affinities between heroes and deities:[7] and in the orchestration of epithets. It also requires of us a sense of pacing: an awareness of what has come before it and of what will follow it. One is alerted to the epic's wider representations of authorship, audience, and character.[8] Noteworthy is the positioning of characters at key moments in their unfolding: not only the principal opponent, Karṇa, but the deepening portrayals—indeed, the "character development"—of the side-characters Yudhiṣṭhira and Dhṛtarāṣṭra. On the other hand, some of the main characters—Arjuna, Śalya, and Kṛṣṇa, for example—do nothing surprising in this segment. Indeed, as Yudhiṣṭhira tells Kṛṣṇa in bringing the scene to closure, all Kṛṣṇa had to do 'to make things turn out right' was to act *in* character. By this time in the war Yudhiṣṭhira knows almost as much about Kṛṣṇa's doings as the reader.

A. *Immediate Setting and Wider-Background*

The preparations for the final fight between Arjuna and Karṇa begin with a passage (8.63.30–62) in which the two heroes' divine fathers, Indra (king of the gods and storm god) and Sūrya (the sun god), lead the gods and demons, other celestials, and various classes of beings, incarnate texts, and cosmic entities in declaring their preferences in the incipient duel. In the course of this side-taking, Indra reminds Brahmā and Śiva that Arjuna's victory is certain (*dhruva;* 50): Arjuna

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[6] As A. K. Ramanujan has so nicely put it, "no Hindu ever reads the *Mahābhārata* for the first time" (1991a, 419), and "in India…no one ever reads the *Rāmāyaṇa* or the *Mahābhārata* for the first time" (1991b, 46). See Hiltebeitel (2000). See now chapter 2.

[7] Karṇa is like Rudra (65.36), but so is Arjuna, who must be reminded of the ways he is like Rudra, Kṛṣṇa, and Indra (65.18–20). Arjuna is like Indra (65.37), but then so is Karṇa, fallen and beheaded, "one whose acts equaled those of the god of a thousand eyes" (i.e., Indra; 67.37).

[8] On authorship, see Hiltebeitel (2001a, 32–91, 278–322); on character, see Adarkar (2001); on reader response, see Greer (2002).

and Kṛṣṇa are the invincible "two Kṛṣṇas" and are the ancient Ṛṣis Nara and Nārāyaṇa (53–54). Since Kṛṣṇa, who joins Indra's son Arjuna on the chariot, is ultimately Viṣṇu incarnate, Indra hereby invokes the sanction of the epic's three most supreme deities, Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Brahmā, in effect anticipating the classical doctrine of the *trimūrti*, or "three forms," of the Hindu godhead.[9] Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa as "the two Kṛṣṇa on one chariot" have behind them their further paired identities not only as Nara and Nārāyaṇa but as the Vedic "friends" Indra and Viṣṇu. The passage evokes all these associations, and makes the last the most mysterious.

The pivotal character of this duel is thus underlined by the attention drawn to all the divine and cosmic agencies that converge not only to witness it but also to have some kind of substantial part in its unfolding. Its decisiveness can be measured by the fact that it is the only duel in the *Mahābhārata* war in which divinities choose sides, as they do not only in the Iliad, repeatedly, but just before the climactic chariot duel between Cúchulainn and the "horn-skinned" Fer Diad in the *Táin Bó Cúalnge*.[10] Yet to appreciate that the result is already known on high is only to begin to register that the death of Karṇa is probably the most overdetermined event in the Mahābhārata war—indeed, in the entire *Mahābhārata*. Karṇa is beset by a skein of fatalities that unravels to bring upon him a gathering sense of doom. As we find him in his final scene, he is left to imagine—and readers, too, insofar as they sympathize and forget for a moment, like him, that his defeat is divinely certain—that had it not been for these fatalities, he *could* have defeated Arjuna; had it not been . . . for Kṛṣṇa, whose divinity Karṇa himself does not fail to recognize.[11] Indeed, given what the same reader comes to know about not only Kṛṣṇa but about Vyāsa, the author, Karṇa really didn't stand a chance.[12] Yet it is typical of God, authors, and texts to leave openings, and, as we shall see, it is never quite that straightforward.

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[9] See Biardeau (2002, 1:432; 2:318).

[10] See Hiltebeitel (1982a, 106). The extensive parallels between these episodes in the Irish and Indian epics remain to me an intriguing puzzle. See now chapter 16.

[11] Karṇa recognizes Kṛṣṇa as "the creator of the universe [*sraṣṭo jagatas*]" (8.22.49) even as he tries to counteract him by demanding Śalya as his charioteer; see Hiltebeitel (1982a, 89; 1984, 9).

[12] See Hiltebeitel (2001a, 59); Vyāsa drops in on the battlefield to prevent Yudhiṣṭhira from fighting Karṇa (7.158.51–62) thus keeping Yudhiṣṭhira "in character" and appearing to save his life and kingship but, more important, steering matters, like Kṛṣṇa, to assure that the decisive duel will be between Arjuna and Karṇa.

B. *Opening the Book on a Hero's Life*

Around Karṇa's life, one can discern two framing passages: one (at 1.104) that virtually introduces him by his birth;[13] the other (at 12.1–5) that ends all narration of his life with a stark and knowing postmortem. The debut birth passage is jewel-like in its glimpses into facets of Karṇa's destiny that problematize themselves as his story unfolds, particularly in the more fully developed birth narration in book 3, at the point when Indra robs him of his natural-born armor and earrings. Full of possibilities but also signs of danger, the debut birth passage contrasts with Nārada's sad but knowing obituary at the beginning of book 12. Both passages, however, leave out what they wish among the many forces that stack up against Karṇa. I will concentrate on these fatalities as they close in upon him, filling out the picture between these frames, especially as it relates to Kṛṣṇa. The skein of occurrences, as best I can reconstruct it from the Critical Edition,[14] includes the following thirteen episodes, all of which are significant for the death passage in one way or another. As we shall see, Nārada's postmortem will also describe further episodes, showing that the list that follows is incomplete. In introducing the main passage here, however, I will concentrate primarily on episodes 7, 11, and 13 in this sequence, since they have the most to do directly with Kṛṣṇa.

> 1. Karṇa is abandoned at birth by his mother Kuntī (1.104; 3.297–98).
>   2 and 3. Karṇa is doubly cursed. First, after he has inattentively killed a brahmin's cow, the Brahmin curses him: may the earth swallow his wheel at a time of greatest peril. Second, after he has pretended to be a Brahmin in order to obtain a Brahmā-weapon from the brahmin weapon-master Rāma Jāmadagnya, the latter curses him: may he forget the weapon at the time he will be killed (8.29; 12·3, especially verse 31).
>   4. Although Karṇa exhibits matchless valor at a tournament of arms, the appearance of his low-caste *sūta* father brings ridicule upon him. Duryodhana, however, sees a formidable ally in Karṇa and appoints him king of Aṅga.
>   5. The snake Aśvasena escapes the Fire (Agni)-feeding slaughter, by Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, of almost all the creatures at Khāṇḍava Forest and

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[13] Prior to this, he is described only in a partly formulaic verse (1.63.82), the last line of which occurs two other times (1.104.11ab, 1.126.2ab): "The great chariot-warrior Karṇa was begotten by Sūrya on the virgin Kuntī; his face alight with earrings, he wore natural-born armor [*sahajaṃ kavacaṃ vibhrat kuṇḍaloddyotitānanaḥ*]."

[14] Thus leaving out Draupadī's rejecting Karṇa as a suitor.

enters Karṇa's quiver, becoming a snake arrow determined to kill Arjuna in revenge (1.218).

6. Arjuna swears he will kill Karṇa after the humiliation of Draupadī at the dice match (2.68.32–36).

7. Karṇa is possessed by Naraka Bhauma (3.240.19).

8. Indra, disguised as a brahmin, begs the gift of Karṇa's natural-born earrings and armor, which make Karṇa immortal; Karṇa, not fooled by the disguise but bound by his vow of gifting, flays his body, earning the name Vaikartana, "the flayed," and gives the earrings and armor in exchange for Indra's infallible spear that will kill whomever it strikes but can be used by Karṇa only once, whereupon it will return to Indra (3.284–94).

9. Śalya, king of Madra, promises Yudhiṣṭhira he will destroy Karṇa's energy, or *tejas* (5.8).

10. During a Kaurava war-meeting, Karṇa recalls (reveals?)[15] the fraud of pretending he was a brahmin to Rāma Jāmadagnya, but reassures Duryodhana, "That weapon is still completely with me." But Bhīṣma, knowing better, says Karṇa lost his *dharma* and *tapas* when he lied to "the blameless lord Rāma" for that weapon. Karṇa now decides for the first time to lay down his weapons until Bhīṣma has fallen (5.61).

11. Karṇa rejects the temptations offered by Kṛṣṇa and Kuntī (5.138–144).

12. Asked by Duryodhana to rank his warriors before battle, Bhīṣma says, "Because of Rāma's curse and the brahmin's speech [*abhiśāpāc ca rāmasya brāhmaṇasya ca bhāṣanāt*]," he rates Karṇa only "half a warrior." Here Bhīṣma mentions the double curse, and Karṇa makes his second refusal to fight until Bhīṣma is slain (5.165). Karṇa's life is so disjointed at this point that van Buitenen was led to admit, mistakenly, in a note on this verse: "Rāma's curse: this incident is unknown to me; at any rate it is probably Bala-Rāma" (1978, 555)!

13. Karṇa uses up the never-failing spear against Ghaṭotkaca (7.154–158).

14. Arjuna kills Karṇa (8.65–68).

After the fatalities at 2 and 3, which occur together, it does not seem possible to determine their order in relation to the fatalities at 4, 5, and 7. Unlike Yudhiṣṭhira and Arjuna, who as winning heroes are the

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[15] It is possible to infer, as Biardeau does (2002, 1:745), that the Kauravas would not know about Rāma Jāmadagnya's curse when Karṇa says in book 3 that, after befriending Duryodhana and studying archery with Droṇa at Hāstinapura, he obtained "the fourfold canon of weapons [*astragamaṃ caturvidham*]" from Droṇa, Kṛpa, and Rāma (3.293.15–17). Indeed, Karṇa does not even seem to tell Sūrya of the curse when he tells him he obtained weapons from Rāma Jāmadagnya (3.286.8). So this could be where Bhīṣma learns about it. However, by the time Karṇa and Bhīṣma reconcile, after Bhīṣma's fall, Bhīṣma reveals that he has learned about Karṇa's birth from Nārada, Vyāsa, and Kṛṣṇa (6.116.9), so he also could have heard about the curses from one or more of these as well—and, of course, done so earlier.

subject of consecutive narrative, Karṇa is the subject of a fragmented countertext—what David Quint calls a loser's epic of resistance[16]—that the poets leave readers to piece together from segments where he is part of the main story and patches where he is the subject of selective memories—not only others' memories but his own.[17] Indeed, because it is so fragmented, I had to abandon an original intention of arranging Karṇa's fatalities in the order of their mention in the text rather than in the reconstructed order of their occurrence in his life. Yet some order emerges when we recognize that most of Karṇa's troubles cluster around three connections: those with his mother, Kuntī, those with Brahmins (including Indra disguised as one), and those with Kṛṣṇa. Karṇa's debut passage, which mentions events in his life up to his obtaining Indra's spear in exchange for his own armor and earrings, occurs before Kṛṣṇa enters the *Mahābhārata*, which he does at the wedding of Draupadī. But by the time Karṇa and Indra actually make this exchange, it is the last year of the Pāṇḍavas' exile, and Kṛṣṇa has become involved. Nonetheless, even the opening passage anticipates that Kṛṣṇa will be the son of Kuntī's young brother Vasudeva, and thus her nephew (at least in terms of her family of birth). Accordingly, Karṇa is not only the unknown elder brother of the Pāṇḍavas; still more hiddenly, he is, as much as Arjuna, a cross cousin of Kṛṣṇa—known from the start to Kuntī, soon known to Kṛṣṇa, and eventually known to Karṇa himself. As far as I can recall, this relationship goes unmentioned. But it points up one facet of a deep and largely unexpressed rapport between Karṇa and Kṛṣṇa that we must explore.

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[16] See Quint (1993, 11): "episodic dismemberment of narrative" in stories with no place to go; "deliberately disconnected and aimless" stories, over and against the "master narratives" (15) of "epic triumphalism" (41).

[17] A telling instance occurs shortly before Karṇa's duel with Arjuna, when he suddenly remembers the brahmin's curse concerning the wheel after first recalling the curse of Rāma Jāmadagnya: "'Your wheel will fall into a hole', a brahmin told me, 'while you are fighting in battle fearful in dire straits'. Therefore I fear mightily because of the brahmin's utterance" (8.29.31–32b). According to Nārada, this curse would have preceded Rāma's, since it was provoked soon after Rāma had accepted Karṇa as his disciple. In Karṇa's account, its abruptness has a surreal quality, as if his memory were itself fragmentary, like his story. The Critical Edition shows the likelihood that later Norhern redactors edited around this passage to bring it into line with more consecutive narrative and with the more orderly version later told by Nārada. Cf. 3.42.20, where Arjuna (whose memory is also often spotty) gets a strong hint as to Karṇa's siring by Sūrya. Just after Arjuna has obtained the Pāśupata weapon from Śiva, Yama gives him his staff-weapon and says, "Karṇa, who is a particle of my father, the god who sends heat to all the worlds, the mighty Karṇa will be slain by you, Dhanaṃjaya."

C. *Karṇa Is Possessed by Naraka Bhauma (Episode 7)*

During the epic's seventh book, in which Droṇa marshals the Kaurava army, Kṛṣṇa saves Arjuna by intercepting a weapon intended for him, receiving it on his chest. Arjuna protests that when Kṛṣṇa agreed to drive Arjuna's chariot, he vowed to be a noncombatant. Kṛṣṇa then explains his intervention by telling a "secret of old." This weapon just hurled by Bhagadatta, king of Prāgjyotiṣa (Assam), was the Vaiṣṇava weapon, and no one else could have neutralized it. Bhagadatta got it from the former Prāgjyotiṣa king Naraka Bhauma, "Naraka the son of Earth," who got it from Kṛṣṇa's fourth (*caturthi*) form (*mūrti*).[18] Pṛthivī (Earth) had requested the Vaiṣṇava weapon for her son Naraka to make him invincible by gods and demons. After Kṛṣṇa had killed Naraka,[19] the weapon passed on to Bhagadatta, whom Arjuna, says Kṛṣṇa, should now "divest of that supreme weapon as I formerly slew Naraka" (7.28.16–35).

   Naraka Bhauma would thus seem to have gotten his weapon long, long ago; but when did Kṛṣṇa kill him? If a sequence in the *Nārāyaṇīya* is to be taken as implying consecutiveness, Kṛṣṇa killed Naraka after Kṛṣṇa and his Yādava clan had moved to Dvārakā, and before the killing of Jarāsaṃdha, an event that occurs near the beginning of book 2.[20] Kṛṣṇa's slaying of Naraka is first recalled at the beginning of book 3. When Kṛṣṇa first visits the Pāṇḍavas in the forest and is enraged at their exile, Arjuna calms him by reciting his past deeds; among

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[18]   Indeed, Kṛṣṇa's secret story is deeper still. He continues: "Eternally engaged in protecting [*trāṇa*] the worlds, I have four forms. Dividing my own self here, I bestow the worlds' welfare. One form, stationed on earth, does the practice of *tapas*. Another beholds the right and wrong done in the universe. Another, having resorted to the human world, performs action. The fourth, however, lies in sleep for a thousand years. My form that awakens at the end of a thousand years gives at that time the best of boons to those worthy of boons. Pṛthivī [Earth], having known that time to have arrived, then asked me for a boon for the sake of Naraka. Listen to it" (7.28.23–27). A similar terminology is used in a devotional section of *Śāntiparvan* called the *Nārāyaṇīya*, where Nara, Nārāyaṇa, Hari, and Kṛṣṇa are said to be the four forms [*caturmūrti*] of Nārāyaṇa, "born into the house of Dharma" (12.322.2ab; see 326.13; 332.19; 335.1). It is not certain, however, how one might correlate the "four forms" in the two texts, and I leave the topic in the hope of discussing it elsewhere.

[19]   It is not clear how Kṛṣṇa overcomes Naraka's alleged invincibility. Perhaps as a man Kṛṣṇa is neither *deva* nor *asura*.

[20]   See 12.326.82–89; Dvārakā is mentioned at 12.326.84–85. See *Harivaṃśa* 91.4–92: Kṛṣṇa comes from Dvārakā against Naraka riding with his wife, Satyabhāmā, on his divine "mount," the great bird Garuḍa! On the *Nārāyaṇīya*, see note 18 here.

them are the following: "You slew Naraka Bhauma taking the two jew-
eled earrings [*nihatya narakaṃ bhaumam āhṛtya maṇikuṇḍale*]….
The Mauravas and Pāśas have been set down, Nisunda and Naraka
slain; the road to Prāgjyotiṣa city has again been made secure [*kṛtaḥ
kṣemaḥ punaḥ panthā puraṃ prāgjyotiṣa prati*]."²¹ And this victory is
soon recalled in other passages that laud Kṛṣṇa's past deeds, three of
them in book 5.²²

    In addition to getting the Vaiṣṇava weapon from his mother Earth,
Naraka Bhauma thus stole Aditi's earrings, which Kṛṣṇa killed him to
retrieve. The epic does not say what Kṛṣṇa did with these earrings. But
in what appears to be the first full account in the *Harivaṃśa* (91.5–92),
once Kṛṣṇa slew her son Naraka, Bhūmi (Earth) picked up the ear-
rings and gave them to Kṛṣṇa, saying, "Even given by you, Govinda,
so this one is made to fall by you; as you desire, so you are like a
child at play with his toys. Protect these two earrings, O God, and his
children."²³ Kṛṣṇa then gave the earrings to Indra on Mount Meru,
and he and Indra then returned them to Aditi (*HV* 92.46–56). But
now one may recall that Karṇa's earrings were once Aditi's to give
to Sūrya (3.291.16–23). If they are the same earrings that Sūrya then
gave to Karṇa, Sūrya must have gotten them from Aditi after they
were recovered from Naraka. But that would seem difficult to square
with Karṇa's being born with them, which would seem to have been
earlier than Kṛṣṇa could have retrieved them. For if Kṛṣṇa carries out
this mission after having settled the Yādavas in Dvārakā, he must have
slain Naraka and retrieved the earrings after his childhood, and thus
apparently fairly recently. So, more likely, Sūrya would have gotten

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²¹ 3.13.16ab and 26. Between these verses Arjuna also recalls that Kṛṣṇa, as Viṣṇu,
is the son of Aditi and younger brother of Indra (23), perhaps suggesting that the
earrings link these stories.

²² The gods had been unable to wrest the earrings from the robber [*dasyu*] Naraka
in "Prāgjyotiṣa, the terrible invincible fort city of the Asuras [*durgaṃ puraṃ ghoram
asurāṇāṃ asahyam*]"*;* when Kṛṣṇa succeeded, they gave him the boons of no fatigue in
battle, the ability to step on water and air, and impenetrability to weapons (5.47.74–81).
Further, Kṛṣṇa slew Naraka, and other foes such as Kaṃsa and Śiśupāla, "as if in play
[*krīḍann iva*]" (5.66.4); "having cut the nooses of Muru," slain Naraka Bhauma, taken
the jeweled earrings, various other gems, and sixteen thousand women [to become his
wives, according to the *Harivaṃśa*, he obtained his Śārṅga bow (5.155.8–9; *Harivaṃśa*
92.18–35). The speakers in these passages are Arjuna as reported by Saṃjaya, Saṃjaya,
and Vaiśampāyana, respectively. Dhṛtarāṣṭra also knows of the killing of Naraka and
Muru among Kṛṣṇa's feats (7.10.5) and the *Nārāyaṇīya*, in an ancient prophetic voice,
foretells it as a future act of Nārāyaṇa-Kṛṣṇa (12.326.83–85).

²³ *Harivaṃśa* 91.59 and 1083* (the middle line about the toys being an interpolation).

a different pair of Aditi's earrings directly from her, as her son, and imparted them to Karṇa. By the time Indra has gotten the latter earrings from Karṇa, Aditi has already gotten back Naraka's earrings, and we are in the dark as to what Indra then did with Karṇa's.

So if Aditi's jewelry were all that connected Karṇa and Naraka, the two pairs of earrings would be a dead end. But there is more that connects Naraka and Karṇa. Both are born virtually immortal: Karṇa with his earrings made of *amṛta*; Naraka with a boon of immortality. Each rules with some question of illegitimacy: Karṇa, the low-caste *sūta*'s son, rules Aṅga as a gift of Duryodhana; Naraka is a demon named "Hell" who menaces the gods. Their countries are both to the east: Aṅga is to the east of Madhyadeśa, the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas' "middle land"; Prāgjyotiṣa means "lighted from the east" or "eastern/ eastward light." Along with retrieving the stolen earrings, Kṛṣṇa comes from Dvārakā in the west to "make safe the road to Prāgjyotiṣa, the Eastward Light."[24] Karṇa worships the morning sun at such lengths that his back gets burnt. Naraka's full name, Naraka Bhauma, can mean "Hell on Earth," as in the story of Yayāti, who is bounced from heaven;[25] afterward, this "Hell on Earth" is his destination.[26] Karṇa's life becomes a kind of hell on earth. Indeed, this Earth defines both their mothers. Naraka's is Bhūmi or Pṛthivī, Earth herself; Karṇa's is Pṛthā, "Broad (like the Earth)." This affinity is so tangible that Pāṇḍav Līlā folklore makes Bhūmi and Kuntī sisters, with Kuntī as Mother Earth's *elder* sister! Mother Earth's son Bhaumāsura (Earthly Demon, a fitting shorthand for Naraka) is thus Karṇa's cousin, as is Kṛṣṇa. He is also the father of Bhagadatta, who agrees to help Arjuna find the path to the underworld when Arjuna bribes him with golden earrings![27] It is as if there were an implicit micromyth linking two pairs of solar earrings with demonic realms to the east that capture them, and from

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[24] Perhaps it is significant that he comes with Satyabhāmā, whose name means "light of truth (Biardeau, 2002, 1:910).

[25] *Mahābhārata* 1.85.3–9, 187.6–7; see Dumézil (1973, 30–37). See the story of Somaka, who sacrificed his only son to get all his wives pregnant with sons. It worked, but when he died and found that his priest had gone to Naraka for officiating, he decided not to leave hell without him (3.128)—Somaka negotiates this with Yama Dharmarāja in a story told to Yudhiṣṭhira, who faces a similar quandary at the end of the *Mahābhārata.*

[26] Biardeau (2002, 1:683), sees Naraka as "the asura who gives his name to the hell reserved for men."

[27] See Sax (2002, 71–74). Bhagadatta seems to have become a brahmin in this story. Kuntī's great old age is a recurrent theme in Pāṇḍav Līlā folklore; see 144, 154.

which they must be retrieved for a way to be opened.[28] Karṇa and Naraka do not have parallel careers, but it is as if they were drawn from the same metonymic gene pool and the same stock of cosmological images.

Moreover, there is an actual fusion between Naraka and Karṇa. Shortly before Indra robs Karṇa's earrings, the despairing Duryodhana, determined to fast to death, is spirited to the underworld realm of demons[29] by a *kṛtyā*—a female personification of black magic, or *abhicāra*[30]—whom the demons have sent for him. There Duryodhana's demon hosts tell him that Naraka has possessed Karṇa: "the *soul* [*ātman*] of the slain Naraka resides in the form of Karṇa [*karṇamūrtim upāśritaḥ*]" (3·240.19ab). Indeed, it is "knowing this" that Indra will now rob Karṇa of his earrings (20—21)! For as we learn further from the epic's main narrator, Vaiśampāyana, Karṇa's possession by Naraka has intensified Karṇa's cruelty in his determination to kill Arjuna: "Karṇa too, his mind and soul possessed by the inner soul of Naraka [*āviṣṭacittātmā narakasyāntarātmanā*], then set his cruel mind [*krūram akarot sa matiṃ tadā*] on Arjuna's death" (32). Indeed, not only has Naraka possessed Karṇa; Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and Kṛpa have also now been possessed by Dānavas and the Saṃśaptakas have been possessed by Rākṣasas (33–34)—all, it would seem, within the same recent time frame that includes Karṇa's possession by Naraka. It would appear that Naraka's affinities with Karṇa have drawn Naraka to possess Karṇa as a means of revenge against Kṛṣṇa, his slayer.

Yet if Karṇa is demonically possessed from at least this time to his death,[31] as would seem to be implied, this fusion will have its

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[28] I use the term *micromyth* in the sense defined by Doniger (1998, 88): "an imaginary text, a scholarly construct that contains the basic elements from which all possible variants could be created."

[29] They are terrible (*raudra*) *daitya*s and *dānava*s who dwell in Pātala or Rasātala (3.239.18 and 25), not in Naraka (hell); see note 25 and 26 here.

[30] See Hiltebeitel (2001a, 190–91), noting that Draupadī has *kṛtyā* traits; and so does Kuntī, with her *abhicāra mantra* from Durvāsas. On *abhicāra*, see further Türstig (1985).

[31] Karṇa has a modified demonic nature in the Draupadī cult Terukkūttu (a point missed in Hiltebeitel, 1988, 400); see de Bruin (1999, 294–296, 315). It comes to him at birth from the demon Tāṇācuraṇ, the "gift-demon" or "liberal *asura*" (295), no doubt a fabulous transformation (a thousand heads, two thousand earrings) of Naraka. Karṇa's being demonic from birth could be pertinent, as de Bruin suggests, to his "black, 'demonic' side" at Draupadī's disrobing (294). And of course even in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, Naraka *could* have possessed Karṇa by then.

limits.[32] As the epic ends, Yudhiṣṭhira will find Duryodhana in Heaven, and, rather than reside there with his former enemy, he will demand to be with his loved ones, even if they are in Hell, Naraka. There Yudhiṣṭhira's presence redeems them all, and of Karṇa, in particular, Vaiśaṃpāyana says: "Nor was the truth-speaking hero Karṇa, O King, long worthy of Naraka [*narakārhaś ciram*]" (18.3.36cd). So Karṇa was no more worthy of hell than of the demon who possessed him.

D. *Karṇa's Temptations by Kṛṣṇa and Kuntī (Episode 11)*

As a series of failed negotiations gives way to full preparation for war, Kṛṣṇa, the last negotiator to find peace beyond reach, saves for the end of his embassy a conversation with Karṇa. Once Kṛṣṇa leaves, Karṇa is also approached by Kuntī. These two conversations take Karṇa into the depths of his predicament, confront him with his own truths, and reveal that, no matter how many forces work against him and no matter how base he has at times been or how possessed he might become, he is a great hero and a good man. As Kṛṣṇa will put it—with terrible irony—after Karṇa's death: "He who announced Kṛṣṇā [Draupadī] won by dice, the vilest of good men [*satpuruṣādhamaḥ*]—today the earth drinks that *sūta's* son's blood" (8.69.17).)

Kṛṣṇa takes Karṇa on Kṛṣṇa's chariot out from the Kaurava capital, and tells him he is legally a son of Pāṇḍu (5.138.1–9). That being so, he offers to consecrate him king and promises, rather shockingly, that even "Draupadī will come to you at the sixth time" (9, 15, 18). Karṇa says he doesn't doubt that Kṛṣṇa speaks "out of friendship and affection, and so as a friend [you] have my best interests at heart" (139.1). Their surprising friendship on Kṛṣṇa's chariot resonates with other epic pairings between charioteers and warriors: in particular, the contrast between the Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna as friends on Arjuna's chariot and Śalya and Karṇa as antagonists on Karṇa's chariot.[33] Karṇa

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[32] If the case of Nala is a *Mahābhārata* parallel, such possession is an off-and-on matter; see Hiltebeitel (2001a, 220–236); Biardeau (2002, 2:516): Karṇa, "possédé par l'*asura* Naraka, ne lui a pas plus cédé que Nala n'a cédé au Kali."

[33] See Adarkar (2001, 96 n. 36). We learn at the end of this exchange that Saṃjaya has come too (5.141.48), which explains how he can narrate the dialogue to Dhṛtarāṣṭra and not need the "divine eye," which he gets only later from Vyāsa (6.2.9–13), to narrate the war. But when does Saṃjaya tell this to Dhṛtarāṣṭra? Clearly, he and Dhṛtarāṣṭra know things about Karṇa that they will keep from Duryodhana.

knows details about his birth beyond what Kṛṣṇa tells him, suggesting he already knows he is Kuntī's son. He will remain loyal to Duryodhana and continue to cast his lot with the *sūta*s, who have loved, raised, and married him into their lineage (3–16). It is thus for the best, he tells Puruṣottama,[34] that they suppress their conversation, for if Yudhiṣṭhira were to know Karṇa as his elder brother, he would not accept the kingdom; and if Karṇa were to accept it he would give it to Duryodhana. Better, he says, that "Yudhiṣṭhira be king forever, he who has Hṛṣīkeśa for his guide [*netā*],[35] Dhanaṃjaya as his warrior" (20–23, 57). Karṇa foresees that Duryodhana will now perform a great "sacrifice of weapons" at which Kṛṣṇa will be witness and the Adhvaryu (ringmaster) priest (29). He admits that he now "burns from the karma" of his harsh words (*kaṭukāni*) to the Pāṇḍavas, uttered to please Duryodhana (45), and we must grant that these would include his insults to Draupadī.[36] He asks the Lotus-Eyed one that the kṣatriyas, "old in learning and old in days," may by death in battle ascend to heaven "on the Kuru field, holiest even in the triple world" (52–54.)—a favor Kṛṣṇa grants (140.16–20). Karṇa's worship of the Sun thus does not eclipse his deeper acknowledgment of Kṛṣṇa bhakti. Kṛṣṇa smiles, then laughs and asks, "Does this offer of a kingdom not even tempt you?"[37] With Karṇa's resolution, the Pāṇḍavas' victory is now certain beyond a doubt (140.1–3). Karṇa asks Kṛṣṇa why "you wish to bewilder me [*māṃ...sammohayitum icchasi*]" when you already know my answer, and admits that he is among the Kauravas bringing destruction to the earth (141.1–2). After their final words, Karṇa, having "clasped Mādhava tightly," descends from his chariot, and Kṛṣṇa speeds back to the Pāṇḍavas (47–49).

The Kaurava elder Vidura now goes to Kuntī and tells her he can't sleep (142.1–9). "Sick with woe herself," Kuntī broods over Karṇa's obstinacy and the danger he poses to the Pāṇḍavas (17). Recalling her

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[34] 5.139.20b. Uses of this name for Kṛṣṇa play between its ordinary resonance as "best of men" and its theological import as Kṛṣṇa's highest divine name, equivalent to God or Supreme Being (see Kṛṣṇa's explanation of his *uttamaḥ puruṣaḥ*, or "supreme spirit," in *Bhagavad Gītā* 15.17).

[35] Arjuna follows Kṛṣṇa's "lead." Kṛṣṇa is "guide" as Hṛṣīkeśa, "master of the senses"; the name also can mean "he whose hair bristles with joy" (Biardeau, 2002, 1:595).

[36] See Hiltebeitel (1981, 101–103). On the night before he takes command of the Kaurava army, Karṇa even shares regrets with Duryodhana, "recalling the pain they had caused Kṛṣṇā [Draupadī] at the dicing" (8.1.7).

[37] Literally, "burn you" (*tapet*). Kṛṣṇa would be able to explain his silence on this exchange as a promise to Karṇa, but no one ever asks.

vulnerabilities at his conception, she asks herself "Why should this *kānīna* [son of an unmarried girl], who has returned to me as a son, not do my word that is so salutary for his brothers?" (25). Kuntī is right that Karṇa would be covered by the law's retrospective intent regarding unwed mothers. But she would get no support from *The Laws of Manu* (9.160) on the crucial point of Karṇa's status as inheritor of the kingdom: a *kānīna* is one of six types of sons "who are *relatives but not heirs*"![38] Karṇa would not inherit the kingdom, but of course Yudhiṣṭhira would "give" it to him, as Karṇa has just said to Kṛṣṇa. Yet Kuntī is drawing on another resonant theme here: sons should listen to their mothers. Indeed, she is used to having her sons take her word as absolute command, for it was she who once told them "Share it all equally," when she thought they were coming back with alms and instead they were talking about a "girl" just like she once was herself, Draupadī, whom Arjuna had just won in marriage.[39] So Kuntī goes to the Gaṅgā to find Karṇa. There she hears him reciting and stands behind him, waiting for him to finish. While he faces east with his arms raised, she stands in the shade of his upper garment like a withered garland of lotuses, hurting from the sunburn. At last, "having prayed up to the burning of his back [*āpṛṣṭhatāpāj japtvā*] he turned around, and seeing Kuntī he saluted her with joined palms, as was proper, this proud man of great *tejas*, the best of *dharma's* upholders" (30). It is a precise evocation both of the *tejas* Śalya has sworn to destroy, and of the conditions under which Karṇa, while praying, gives boons "to Brahmins especially, and always to all who are good [*sarveṣāṃ sarvadā satām*]" (3.286.6cd).[40] So we know that Kuntī might have done best had she come to make her request with a brahmin. It would now be sometime in the early afternoon, and she has, moreover, waited until Karṇa has finished his prayers. So he need give her nothing. Perhaps she knows all this and waits to make it clear that she is not trying to trap him. By the end he will make her a great gift of his own devising.

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[38] Olivelle (2005a, 199): See *The Laws of Manu* 9.172.

[39] See Hiltebeitel (1988, 200).

[40] See 1.104.14–17: While growing up, "he worshiped Āditya (the Sun) up to the burning of his back [*āpṛṣṭhatāpād ādityam upatasthe*], at which time while muttering prayer [*yasmin kāle japan aste*] there was nothing the great-souled hero, true to his word, would not give at that time to Brahmins [*nādeyam brāmaṇeṣvāsīt tasmin kāle*]."

Kuntī tells Karṇa he was her first-born, a *kānīna*; about Sūrya being his father, the earrings, armor, and so forth (143.2–5)—nothing new to him, but perhaps she doesn't know that. Then she gets to the point: "It is not proper, son, especially for you, that, without knowing your brothers, you serve the Dhārtarāṣṭras from delusion [*mohād*]. In decisions about men's *dharma, this* is the fruit of *dharma*, son—that his father, and one-eyed mother too,[41] are satisfied" (6–7). Is she saying that as the fruit of *her dharma* Karṇa should satisfy *her*? In any case, she tells how splendid it would be if Karṇa joined forces with Arjuna and the rest, and concludes: "Endowed with virtues, eldest and best among relations who are the best, you will no longer be called '*sūta*'s son.' You are a heroic *Pārtha*" (12). An elitist, Kuntī appeals to what can only be Karṇa's sorest spot. And just at this point Karṇa hears "a voice [that] issued from Sūrya, difficult to transgress, affectionate, and uttered like a father: 'Kuntī has spoken the truth, Karṇa, do your mother's word'" (5.144.1–2b). Unlike the Pāṇḍavas, who have *only* their mother's word to obey when she orders them to share equally,[42] Karṇa hears his mother's command reinforced by his father's. This is a lot of pressure from these absentee parents, but "Karṇa's thought did not waver, for he was firm in truth" (3). He tells Kuntī he does not doubt her word; it would be his gateway to *dharma* to carry out her command (*niyoga*).

> But by casting me away, the wrong you have done me, destructive of fame and glory, is irreversible.... When there was time to act, you did not show me this crying out [*anukrośa*]. And now you have summoned me, whom you have denied the sacraments. You never acted in my interest like a mother, and now, here you are, enlightening me solely in your own interest! (4–8)

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[41] Van Buitenen has a note (1975, 553): "Nīlakaṇṭha: 'having eyes only for her son,' but I suspect an idiom here: a mother without her husband, the son's father."

[42] "Mother Kuntī's orders" are nicely thematized in the Pāṇḍav Līlās of Garhwal; see Sax (2002, 71), and especially (153–155) where Arjuna follows them to find out who Draupadī and Kuntī really are: the two chief "hags" (*panchali*, "bird"—Hindi *pakṣī*, and evoking Draupadī's name Pāñcāli) among the sixty-four *yoginīs* who have determined the outcome of the *Mahābhārata* war! Indeed, as this episode reflects, the Pāṇḍavas end up marrying a woman rather like their mother, pushed to do so by Kuntī's unintended word that she utters absent the higher word of the Pāṇḍavas' deceased father. See Ramanujan (1991a, 437), on "autonomous action complexes" that can move from one character to others (I would add, "especially within a family"); so that "once set into motion, the act chooses its personae, constitutes its agents"; characters are "not quite 'fixed,' or 'finite' as they are open to past lives as well as other lives around them" (440).

He will not do her bidding; he will fight her sons with all his strength. But her effort will not be vain: he will spare her other four sons in battle and only seek to kill Arjuna; whether it is he or Arjuna who dies, five will survive. Why does Karṇa say this? It is, he says, "while trying to persevere in the conduct of noncruelty that befits a good man [*ānṛśaṃsyam atho vṛttaṃ rakṣan satpuruṣocitam*]" (144.19ab). To Kuntī's self-serving "crying out" (*anukrośa*), Karṇa responds with "noncruelty" (*ānṛśaṃsya*)! It is these two virtues, especially befitting of a king, that Yudhiṣṭhira spends a lifetime learning to put together.[43] But in this impasse, the two cannot be one—unless they are implicitly one in Karṇa. "Having heard Karṇa's answer, Kuntī shuddered from sorrow." But her closing words are remorseless. Embracing Karṇa, recognizing that his words mean destruction for the Kauravas and that "fate is all-powerful," she says:

> promise your commitment to that pledge you have given [*tvayā…dattaṃ tat pratijānīhi saṃgarapratimocanam*], enemy-plougher, for the safety [*abhayam*] of your four brothers. Good health and good luck.… Pleased, Karṇa saluted her [*tāṃ karṇo 'bhyavadat prītas*]. Then they both went their separate ways. (24–26)

It is an iconic moment, this "pleased" salute, for he has made his sad amends with God and his mother.

E. *Karṇa Uses Up the Never-Failing Spear (Episode 13)*

Indra gave Karṇa the never-failing spear in exchange for his golden armor and earrings. In the terrible night battle after the fourteenth day of war, Bhīma's half-Rākṣasa son Ghaṭotkaca wreaks havoc. The Kauravas panic and, in a surprisingly brief appeal, press Karṇa to use the spear against him (7.154.48–50). Caught in the moment, Karṇa hurls it and kills Ghaṭotkaca, but the spear is gone: "that resplendent spear soared aloft in the night entering the intervals of the constellations [*nakṣatrāṇām antarāṇy āviśanti*]" (51–57)—to disappear, one assumes, into the nighttime outer space where Indra awaits its return to his hand.[44] The Kauravas rejoice (62–63). But the poets are not interested in the weapon's fate or even the fall of Ghaṭotkaca, who as

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[43] See Hiltebeitel (2001a, 202–214, 230–231, 268–277; Lath 1990).
[44] See 3.294.24–25.

Dhṛtarāṣṭra soon realizes, "was as insignificant as straw [*tṛṇabhūtam*]" (158.10d); they are interested in the import of Karṇa's wasting this weapon, and, with that, in imagining what might have been otherwise.

The Pāṇḍavas weep over the death of Bhīma's son (155.1)—until Kṛṣṇa shocks them: "But Vāsudeva was filled with great delight. As if agitating, he shouted leonine shouts, Bhārata, and shouting great shouts he embraced Phālguna. Shouting great shouts and tying the reins, he danced wrapped with joy like a tree shaken by the wind" (155.2–3). Kṛṣṇa's joy mounts until Arjuna, finding that it looks unseemly, asks, "If it is not a secret…Madhusūdana, tell me what has removed your gravity today; I think the levity of your action, Janārdana, is like the drying up of the ocean or the creeping along [*visarpaṇam*] of Mount Meru" (9c-10).[45] Kṛṣṇa replies that Karṇa was invincible with his never-failing spear. From the time he got it for his armor and earrings, which also made him invincible, he

> always thought you were slain in battle, but even with it gone he can only be slain by you.… He has now become human [*so 'dya mānuṣatām prāpto*].… There will be only one means [*eko hi yogo*] to his death, in an opening brought on by his own inattentiveness. In that difficult situation, you should kill him when his chariot-wheel is sunk. I will signal you beforehand. (23, 2.7e, 28)

So Kṛṣṇa knows Karṇa's whole story in advance, from the two curses on. Having found the means (*yogais*; 29) to kill other wicked foes, Kṛṣṇa implies that it was he who was behind the staying of Ghaṭotkaca—a Rākṣasa, moreover, who hated brahmins and sacrifices and violated dharma; had Karṇa not killed him, Kṛṣṇa would have had to do it himself "for the sake of the establishment of *dharma*,[46] my imperishable vow" (156.25–28). Kṛṣṇa must conjure up generic Rākṣasa traits here to justify killing Ghaṭotkaca, whose epic profile and stories hardly support the charge that he hated brahmins and the rest.

Dhṛtarāṣṭra soon recalls that Kṛṣṇa did indeed dispatch Ghaṭotkaca to nullify Karṇa's spear. He has just heard Saṃjaya narrate those very events (7.148.21–52): with Karṇa blazing like the Sun at night,

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[45] In effect, the simile suggests that Kṛṣṇa looks like the pivot of the universe turning into a snake.

[46] Echoing *Bhagavad Gītā* 4.7–8 with the phrase *dharmasaṃsthāpanārtham* (156.28c).

Yudhiṣṭhira had urged Arjuna to fight him, but Kṛṣṇa had said that
so long as Karṇa still held Indra's spear, it was not yet time for that
(34). Kṛṣṇa had convinced Arjuna that Ghaṭotkaca should fight
Karṇa, and then told Ghaṭotkaca to use the advantages Rākṣasas have
at night (51–52). So now, recalling that Arjuna had vowed to meet
any challenge, Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks why didn't Karṇa challenge Arjuna
while he *had* the spear? What was wrong with Duryodhana's intelli-
gence (*buddhi*) and counselors? "Vāsudeva has cheated Karṇa of that
spear through Ghaṭotkaca. As a *bilva* fruit would be snatched from the
hand of a withered arm by a stronger man, so the never failing spear
has become a failure [*śaktir amoghā sā moghī bhūtā*] in Ghaṭotkaca"
(157.3–5, 6c-7). Saṃjaya replies that Kṛṣṇa has just saved Arjuna with
another of his yogas: "Having known what Karṇa wished to do, king,
the slayer of Madhu commanded the lord of Rākṣasas to duel with
Karṇa.... That spear would have killed Kaunteya like a tree hit by a
thunderbolt" (11, 16).[47] Hearing Saṃjaya tell him that Dhṛtarāṣṭra's
own "bad counsel" (12) is in part to blame, Dhṛtarāṣṭra tries to shift
the blame to Saṃjaya: "Why was this great goal also neglected by
you, Gāvalgaṇi; why weren't you wise to it, greatly wise one?" (18).
Saṃjaya says he was always in the inner circle where it was resolved
every night: Karṇa should use the spear against Arjuna; or if Arjuna
falls, kill Kṛṣṇa; or kill Kṛṣṇa even before Arjuna, since he is the root
of all the Pāṇḍavas' successes (19–26). Daily they would awake with
this resolution (*buddhi*)

> regarding the immeasurable Hṛṣīkeśa, lord of the thirty gods, but at the
> time of battle it was confounded [*vyamuhyata*]; and Keśava also always
> protected Arjuna.... He never wished to place him facing the *sūta's*
> son in battle.... That is how the never-failing spear was made a failure.
> (27–29)

Not only that, Saṃjaya heard Kṛṣṇa tell his kinsman Sātyaki that it was
he himself who baffled Karṇa's plan for the spear:

> I confused [*mohayāmi*] Rādheya...I do not regard my father, mother,
> yourselves, my brothers, or my breaths [as] so worthy of protection as
> Bībhatsu[48] in battle.... So it was that the Rākṣasa was sent by me to fight

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[47] Note that Kṛṣṇa will then dance "wrapped with joy like a tree shaken by the
wind," as just cited.

[48] Implying recognition of Arjuna's reluctance to kill Karṇa as requiring this pro-
tection?

Karṇa; surely there was no other to withstand Karṇa in a battle at night. (36, 40, 43)

Dhṛtarāṣṭra is now all the more dissatisfied with the Kauravas, and tells Saṃjaya "and you especially, son [*tāta tava viśeṣataḥ*]," did not see to it that Karṇa hurled the spear "at Phālguna or the son of Devakī":(158.1–3). Saṃjaya repeats that Karṇa went to battle every day with that advice,

> but when morning came, king, Karṇa's and the other warriors' intelligence was destroyed by divine destiny [*daivataiḥ...buddhir naśyate*]. I think fate [*daivam*] is supreme, since Karṇa, with that [spear] in hand, did not kill Pārtha or Kṛṣṇa the son of Devakī in battle. That spear held in his hand was raised like the Night of Time! Karṇa was a lord who possessed an intelligence afflicted by fate [*daivopahata buddhitvān*]. Confused by the gods' illusion [*mohito deva-māyayā*],[49] he did not release that Vāsavī [weapon of Vāsava, Indra] for death's sake into Devakī's son Kṛṣṇa or into Pārtha. (6–9)

Dhṛtarāṣṭra is then given the last word, speaking in the second person, perhaps as if to all of us: "You are destroyed by fate, by your own intelligence, and by Keśava; the Vāsavī is gone, having slain Ghaṭotkacha who was as insignificant as straw" (10); and with no more to say on the matter, he asks Saṃjaya, So what happened next...?

The passage takes us to new and uncharted depths. There have been hints elsewhere that although Karṇa offers his devotions to Sūrya by day, the power that links him to Sūrya is strongest at night.[50] After debating every night how to use the spear, it is now in the dead of night when Karṇa burns fiercest with his "spear raised like the Night of Time"—probably an image of the *pralaya*, in which, after seven suns desiccate and burn the triple world, they leave not much, if any, time for night, until they bring on the cosmic night known as the night of Brahmā.[51] It is the power of Rākṣasas at night that provides Kṛṣṇa with

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[49] The same prase—*mohito devamāyayā*—will refer to Indra's deception of Karṇa in Nārada's postmortem, the passage next cited.

[50] E.g., "the radiant one [Sūrya] showed himself [to Karṇa] at night, at the end of a dream" (3.284.8ab) to warn him about Indra. As we shall see, Sūrya will take his son Karṇa back to himself as he descends into night. It seems Karṇa seeks to draw strength from Sūrya with his prayers up to the early afternoon, and is weakest—as Kṛṣṇa knows—when the sun sets; see Biardeau (2002, 2:345).

[51] From a different angle, see Biardeau (1976–77, 143–145; 1978, 173–174 [Karṇa as the errant Sun of the *pralaya*]; 2002, 2:531–532 [the apocalyptic face of Sūrya]).

the pretext to order Ghaṭotkaca to his death as the means to extract the spear, which sails off into the night sky.

It is also, I believe, a revelation that Karṇa and the Kauravas consider the option of killing Kṛṣṇa. Could Karṇa—and this never-failing spear—really have done that? We are left to ponder the death of God. And what did Karṇa think of this option? We do not have his words. Maybe he was a *Sūryabhakta* only pro tem, and only by default.[52] We could imagine he only listened to such advice, determined as he was to fight only Arjuna, and lifted by Kṛṣṇa's friendship and his promise of heaven for the Kṣatriyas who would die at Kurukṣetra. And then, too, Karṇa would know that Kṛṣṇa was his cousin, the son of his mother's younger brother. But he also knows more than that, as does the reader. This is one of those passages that confirms Madeleine Biardeau's insight into the importance of the poets' contextual use of epithets, and in particular the selective and intensified uses of the name Devakīputra, "Son of Devakī"—closing with three usages in seven verses—to underscore that the *daiva* has been the play of Kṛṣṇa from the day his mother Devakī bore him.[53]

The passage is thus artful in unfolding Kṛṣṇa's relation to fate: that when all is said and done, he *is* fate, but never without ambiguity.[54] If

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[52] See Biardeau (2002, 1:752): "Peut-être sa piété pour Sūrya—sa longue louange d'adoration quotidienne an dieu—lui cache-t-elle Viṣṇu?"

[53] Biardeau argues that the poets use Kṛṣṇa's name Devakīputra to evoke his double association with divine fate and divine play as a linguistic play on the two roots *div*-: one (alternately *dyu*-) behind associations with the gods (*deva*), the day sky (Dyaus), and fate (*daiva*), the other behind the play of dicing (*dyūta, devana*). The name's occurrence in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.17.6 also provides Kṛṣṇa's sole anchor in the Vedic revelation. See Biardeau (2002, 1:405, 574 and n. 4; 2:319, 358 n. 37)—she does not highlight the usages in this particular passage (see her summary of it: 2:226–228).

[54] See Matilal (1991) on Kṛṣṇa's non-omnipotence (notably 414–415): "as the inner manipulator of every being, [Kṛṣṇa] would bring about the intended destruction"; but "courses of certain events cannot be stopped. All that Kṛṣṇa was able to do was to salvage justice at the end of the battle." Cf. Woods (2001, 39–58, 146), and notably (54): although he is the "master magician [*māyavin*]," Kṛṣṇa is "in the final analysis…himself…a product of this *māyā*." Indeed, the author, the Island-Born Kṛṣṇa Vyāsa, works hand in hand with Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva to shape the illusions and fates of epic characters (see Hiltebeitel, 2001a, 90–91, and note 12 here), often tipping his hand of *authorial* omnipotence, as when he tells Dhṛtarāṣṭra: "Still, the character [*śīla*] that is born in a man at his birth, that, they say, great king, does not leave him before he dies" (3.9.10; van Buitenen, 1975, 236; see Woods, 2001, 57)—to which Dhṛtarāṣṭra replies that he blames fate (*vidhi;* 3.10.1) rather than himself for all that has happened up to this point, and all that will inevitably follow. Vyāsa can only agree while complicating matters

Dhṛtarāṣṭra says he thinks fate (*daiva*) is supreme and that Karṇa's *buddhi* was "afflicted by *daiva*," it is uncertain whether "his *buddhi* was destroyed by destiny," as seems smoothest in the translation just given, or "by divinities" (*daivataiḥ*), which looks odd but is at least equally accurate. Similarly, when Dhṛtarāṣṭra says Karṇa was *mohito devamāyayā*, does he mean Karṇa was "confused by the gods' illusion," as translated earlier, or "confused by the illusion of the god?" We know that it is really the latter.

F. *Toward Karṇa's Death*

Taken in isolation and looked at sequentially, these three moments in the life of Karṇa appear to have little in common, other than that among the fatalities that drive things toward his death, they are the three that have the most to do with Kṛṣṇa. Nonetheless, they do align the hero toward this end by tracing his affinities and connections in three different spheres: the first in the realm of the demonic; the second in the human domain of family and friends; and the third in relation to God. In that, we might say there is some movement.

As the final duel with Arjuna takes shape, Karṇa recognizes Kṛṣṇa as "the creator of the universe [*sraṣṭo jagatas*]" (8.22.49) even as he tries to counteract him by demanding Śalya as his charioteer.[55] More than any other Kaurava or Kaurava partisan, Karṇa is not just the Pāṇḍavas' problem but Kṛṣṇa's. All the other great Kaurava heroes either make their pact with death with Yudhiṣṭhira or pose just momentary challenges to Arjuna. Only Karṇa is possessed by a demon whom Kṛṣṇa has slain. Only Karṇa meets with Kṛṣṇa alone. Only in foreseeing Karṇa's death does Kṛṣṇa do such a dance. Flawed and demonically possessed as Karṇa may be, more than any foe Kṛṣṇa finds the means to kill, Karṇa inspires admiration, affection, and a wish for things to have gone otherwise, as is ultimately expressed by Kuntī and Yudhiṣṭhira. That Karṇa does inspire such things thus deepens Kṛṣṇa's problem with him, and the reader's problem with Kṛṣṇa. Says Kṛṣṇa, losing his spear made Karṇa human. Until then, like Kṛṣṇa, was he divine? For

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further. See Biardeau (2002, 1:405): "le *daiva* reste imprévisible et Kṛṣṇa lui-même doit s'y conformer"—as with his absence from the dice match.

[55] See Hiltebeitel (1982a, 89; 1984, 9); see note 11 here.

readers he was always more human than divine. Or perhaps one could better say, more than being divine, or for that matter demonic, he was always human. Approaching this point from other astute angles, Aditya Adarkar sees Karṇa having the "psychological strength of a child who has been raised by loving parents" (2001, 187)—that is, of course, his foster parents; Madeleine Biardeau, savoring his boastfulness, or "rodomontade," says that it is Karṇa's possession by a demon that humanizes him (2002, 11, 119–20); while for Patricia Greer, "he uniquely represents the audience" (2002, 58).

G. *Postmortem*

Once Karṇa is killed and his identity as the Pāṇḍavas' eldest brother is revealed to them, it is left to the great Kṛṣṇa bhakta Nārada to give some narrative form to Karṇa's life. He does this in response to a tortured question of Yudhiṣṭhira that opens Yudhiṣṭhira's lengthy postwar grieving in the *Śānti* and *Anuśāsana Parvan*s: "Why did the Earth swallow his wheel in battle? Why was my brother cursed?" (12.1.43a–44a). After unveiling a number of hitherto untold tales,[56] Nārada closes with words steeped in irony that are nonetheless an elegy.

> To secure your[57] welfare the chief of the gods begged of Karṇa the divine natural-born and supremely radiant earrings, and also the natural-born

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[56] Before Karṇa went to Rāma Jāmadagnya, he sought instructions in weapons from Droṇa, but was denied them because he was a *sūta* (12.2.9–13). Then, some time after the double curse by the two brahmins (the second being Rāma Jāmadagnya), while serving as a charioteer (*rathin*) for Duryodhana at the *svayaṃvara* ("self-choice" marriage ceremony) of the princess of Kaliṅga, Karṇa helped Duryodhana abduct the bride after she snubbed Duryodhana; Karṇa fought off all the other kings, including Śiśupāla, Jarāsaṃdha, Śṛṅgala, and Aśoka (12.4.2–21; 6–7 on these defeated kings). Third, Jarāsaṃdha wanted to test the might Karṇa had shown at Kaliṅga, and challenged him to a wrestling match; Karṇa ruptured the seam that held Jarāsaṃdha's body together (later to be split fully by Bhīma). Gratified with Karṇa's prowess Jarāsaṃdha gave him the city of Mālinī, and, after this, Karṇa "became king of the Aṅgas" (55.1–7)—presumably the tournament at which Duryodhana appointed Karṇa to the Aṅga throne would have come after the bout with Jarāsaṃdha, but Nārada does not mention that episode. It is then, once he has told these stories, that Nārada now strings together other later episodes in the postmortem elegy now quoted. On the possible Buddhist allusions in these stories linking Karṇa, Jarāsaṃdha, and Duryodhana with Aśoka and Kaliṅga, see Biardeau (2002, 2:54, 527–532, 757). See also Hiltebeitel (2005b, 118).

[57] He is speaking to Yudhiṣṭhira.

armor, and he was confused by the god's illusion [*mohito devamāyayā*].[58] Deprived of those earrings and natural-born armor, he was killed in battle by Vijaya while Vāsudeva watched. Because of the curse of the high-souled brahmin Rāma, because he granted Kuntī's wish, because of Śatakratu's[59] illusion, because of Bhīṣma's contempt while tallying the warriors that he was but half a chariot warrior,[60] because of Śalya's destruction of his *tejas*, and by the lead[61] of Vāsudeva, Karṇa Vaikartana, of brilliance equal to the sun's, was slain in battle by the Gāṇḍīva bowman while he had received divine weapons from Rudra, the king of the gods, Yama, Varuṇa, Kubera, and Droṇa, and also the high-souled Kṛpa. So your brother was cursed and also deceived by many [*evaṃ śaptas tava bhrātā bahubhiś cāpi vañcitaḥ*]. Do not grieve. That tiger among men surely gained death in battle (12.5.8–15).

H. *The Death of Karṇa*

Following some preliminary fighting and some last-minute thoughts of reconciliation, the duel between Karṇa and Arjuna begins. The two warriors range against each other like elephants or mountains, each urged on by his allies, until Bhīma goads Arjuna into doing better, offering to kill Karṇa himself with his mace if Arjuna is not up to the task (65.1–15). We pick up from there, with Kṛṣṇa prodding Arjuna further by offering to lend him his discus. (*Triṣṭubh* verses are rendered line by line and numbered sequentially; *śloka* portions are rendered in paragraph and numbered as units.)[62]

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[58] See the discussion of *mohito devamāyayā* at the end of the section before the previous one. Following Tokunaga ([1991] 1994), these are the only two usages of this phrase in the *Mahābhārata*.

[59] Śatakratu is Indra, the god of a hundred sacrifices.

[60] 5.165.6: When asked by Duryodhana to rank his warriors before battle, Bhīṣma had belittled Karṇa in this fashion, leading Karṇa to reply in kind and refuse to fight until Bhīṣma was slain (11, 27)—this being the second time a provocation from Bhīṣma leads Karṇa to vow not to fight until Bhīṣma's fall; see 5.61.12–13. When Bhīṣma has fallen and accepted Karṇa's gestures of reconciliation, he tells Karṇa that he used harsh words as "occasion for the destruction [of your] *tejas* [*tejo-vadhanimittam*]" (6.117.10)—that is, to the same end as Śalya (as mentioned by Nārada here next); see Hiltebeitel (2001a, 267): Karṇa learns here (6.117.9) that Bhīṣma knows him to be Kuntī's son from Vyāsa, Nārada, and Keśava. See Adarkar (2001, 213). See episodes 10 and 12 in the list of fatalities in section B.

[61] *Nayena*; see Kṛṣṇa as *netṛ*, "guide" or "leader" (at note 35 here), from the same root *ni-*, "to lead." See further Biardeau (1978–79, 150; 2002, 1:872).

[62] On these meters see note 4 here.

65.16. Then, having seen the chariot and arrows thwarted, Vāsudeva[63] also spoke to Pārtha,[64] "What is this, Kirīṭin,[65] that Karṇa has now crushed your weapons with his weapons?

Why are you stupefied? Are you not attentive? The joyful Kurus are dancing! Honoring Karṇa, surely they all saw your weapon downed by his weapons.

With the resolution that has destroyed the weapon of darkness from *yuga* to *yuga*, and also, in wars, terrible Rākṣasas and Asuras sprung from pride,[66] with that resolution of yours, slay the *sūta*'s son.[67]

Or with that razor-edged Sudarśana[68] entrusted[69] by me, cut off the head of this foe by force, just as Śakra[70] did with the thunderbolt to the foe Namuci.[71]

20. And with the strength by which you completely satisfied the lord who took the form of a hunter,[72] regaining that firmness, hero, kill the *sūta*'s son together with his followers.

Then bestow the abundant earth with her belt of oceans, towns, and villages, and her host of foes destroyed, on the king.[73] Obtain unequalled fame, Pārtha."

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[63] Kṛṣṇa, "son of Vasudeva"; also one of the most theologically charged of Kṛṣṇa's names; for Hudson (1996, 68), "God who dwells in all things and in whom all things dwell," citing *Bhagavad Gītā* 7.1–19, the last verse of which uses this name (one of four such usages in the *Gītā*). Names and titles will be glossed here for their first appearance only.

[64] Son of Pṛthā: here and throughout this passage, Arjuna; though it could also refer to Yudhiṣṭhira or Bhīma. It would also be an implicit name for Karṇa as Pṛthā's hidden firstborn son.

[65] Arjuna: the one who wears the diadem, a tiara, on his head.

[66] *Dambhodbhāvaś cāsurās*; Dambodbhava is a "prideful" Asura slain by Nara and Nārāyaṇa (*Mahābhārata* 5.94). Kṛṣṇa is rekindling Arjuna's awareness that he is Nara.

[67] Karṇa.

[68] "Of beautiful aspect," Kṛṣṇa's *cakra*, or discus.

[69] It could be that *nisṛṣta* means "hurled [by me]," but the imperative is directed at Arjuna.

[70] Indra.

[71] On this and further allusions to Indra's conquests of the demons Namuci and Vṛtra; see note 211 here.

[72] Śiva, who took the guise of a mountain hunter (*kirāṭa*) when Arjuna sought the Pāśupata weapon from him (*Mahābhārata* 3.40–41).

[73] Yudhiṣṭhira.

Challenged by Bhīma and Janārdana,[74] remembering himself, considering his mettle,[75] and having understood about the coming of the great-souled one,[76] he spoke purposefully to Keśava.[77]

"I will bring forth this great fierce weapon for the good of the world, for the destruction of the *sūta*'s son. May you—and also the gods, Brahmā, Bhava,[78] and all who know Brahman—permit me to use it."

Thus invoking the invincible Brahmā weapon that was manageable only by the mind, he brought it forth. Then the many-splendored one shrouded all the regions and the intermediate points with missiles. The Bhārata bull also released high-speed arrows numerously by the hundreds.

25. In the midst of combat Vaikartana[79] also released hosts of arrows by thousands. Resounding, they approached the Pāṇḍava like torrents of rain released by Parjanya.[80]

And having struck Bhīmasena and Janārdana and Kirīṭin too with three arrows each, of inhuman feats and terrible might, he roared awfully with a great sound.

Having seen Bhīma and Janārdana struck with Karṇa's arrows, Kirīṭin could not bear it, and again Pārtha drew out eighteen arrows.

Having pierced Suṣena[81] with one arrow and Śalya with four and Karṇa with three, he then hit Sabhāpati,[82] clad in golden armor, with ten that were well released.

The headless, armless prince then fell without horse, driver, or banner from the front of his chariot, his luster demolished, like a *śāla* tree cut down with axes.

30. Having again struck Karṇa with three, eight, twelve, and fourteen arrows, having slain four hundred tuskers equipped with weapons, he slew eight hundred chariot warriors, a thousand horses and horsemen and eight thousand brave foot-soldiers.

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[74] Kṛṣṇa, "tormentor of people," a name often used when Kṛṣṇa is awesome, overwhelming, and frightening.

[75] His *sattva*: goodness, higher nature.

[76] Ganguli, *Karna Parva* ([1884–96] 1970, 7:361), takes this as Arjuna "calling to mind the object for which he had come into the world." But *mahātmana*s seems to refer to Kṛṣṇa rather than Arjuna.

[77] Kṛṣṇa, as having attractive hair.

[78] Śiva.

[79] Karṇa; on this name see episode 8 in section B.

[80] Usually a name for Indra, *parjanya* could also mean a rain cloud.

[81] One of Karṇa's sons.

[82] A little-known warrior on the Kaurava side.

Then, having seen those two fighting at the battlefront, desirous of seeing those two foremost foe-slaying heroes Karṇa and Pārtha, the folk[83] stationed in heaven and stationed on earth stood still, restraining their vehicles.

Then the Pāṇḍava's bowstring, forcefully overdrawn, was cut off. In that moment the *sūta*'s son then cut Pārtha with a hundred small shafts,

like sloughed snakes, sharp, rinsed in sesame oil, winged with feathers. He pierced Vāsudeva with fifty arrows. In that interval the Somakas[84] fled.

Then, having quickly shaken his bowstring, having dispersed those arrows of Ādhiratha,[85] filled with rage at having his limbs wounded by Karṇa's arrows, Pārtha caught hold of the Somakas in battle.

In the sky no birds flew at the spread of darkness that was quickened by the weapon.

35. Pārtha forcibly pierced Śalya's armor with ten arrows, laughing. Then he pierced Karṇa with a well-released dozen, having again struck him with seven.

Hard-struck by those feathered arrows of fierce speed impelled with great force from Pārtha's bow, with his body bathed in the wounds of his cut limbs, his arrow drawn, Karṇa shone like Rudra.[86]

Then Ādhiratha pierced Dhanaṃjaya,[87] who was like the ruler of the gods, with three arrows. Then he sped forth five arrows burning like snakes; they wished to strike upon Acyuta.[88]

Well-released, having pierced Puruṣottama's[89] gold-decked armor, they fell down; very fast, they speedily drove into the earth, and, having bathed,[90] returned toward Karṇa.

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[83] *Jana*, "folk" or "people" of heaven and earth, translated throughout, rather for lack of anything better, as "folk."

[84] Pāṇḍava allies, a branch of the Pañcālas, Draupadī's people.

[85] Karṇa, as adoptive son of the *sūta* Ādhiratha.

[86] Numerous northern texts add "at play in the middle of the crematorium during the terrible hour, his limbs wet with blood (*prakrīḍamāno 'yaṃ śmaśānamadhye/ raudre muhūrte rudhirārdragātraḥ*)" (8.1072*).

[87] Arjuna, "Winner of wealth."

[88] Kṛṣṇa, "the unfallen."

[89] Kṛṣṇa as "best of men" or "supreme male," God; see note 34 here.

[90] Ganguli, *Karna Parva* [1884–96] 1970, 7:268): "(in the waters of the Bhogavati in the nether region)."

With five well-released swift shafts, Dhanaṃjaya of the great horses cut them each into three pieces; partisans of the son of Takṣaka,[91] they fell down on the earth.

40. Then the diadem-crowned one[92] blazed forth with wrath, like Agni burning dry wood. He then pierced Karṇa at his vital points[93] with many blazing, fatal arrows drawn to the ear and released. Karṇa trembled from the pain, but from firmness, he whose firmness was beyond measure stood his ground.

Then, while Dhanaṃjaya was angry, the intermediary and cardinal points, the solar nimbus, and the chariot of Karṇa became invisible, O King, covered with the streams of arrows like a cloud covered with rain and fog.

The single hero Savyasācin,[94] bull of the Kurus, then led to destruction in battle all the wheel-protectors, foot-protectors, the vanguard and rear guard, the foe-destroyers approved by Duryodhana,

the accumulated two thousand most excellent fine chariot-warriors, prime heroes of the Kurus, the charioteers and the horses with the chariots, all in an instant.

Then, deserting Karṇa, your remaining Kuru sons fled, abandoning the slain and those wounded with arrows, and wailing sons and fathers.

45. Seeing himself abandoned by the fear-ridden Kurus and the region everywhere emptied, Karṇa did not waver there, Bhārata,[95] but rushed at the defiant Arjuna.

66.1. Then, going beyond the range of the fall of arrows, the Kurus, staying at a distance, their army broken, saw Dhanaṃjaya's weapon raising on all sides the shimmer of lightning.

Quickly released then in the great tumult by the angry Pārtha for the destruction of Karṇa, that weapon of Arjuna, expansive like the sky, its sound unbounded, devoured the heroes.

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[91] Takṣaka is a prominent *nāga*, or snake, and the arrows are thus snake arrows.
[92] Arjuna.
[93] *Marmāṇi*. These are an important topic in Indian medicine and martial arts.
[94] Arjuna, "left-handed archer," "one who draws with the left hand."
[95] Saṃjaya is addressing Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

By a foe-annihilating Atharvan weapon[96] of great power obtained from Rāma,[97] Karṇa destroyed that burning weapon of Arjuna and struck Pārtha with keen arrows.

Then the pounding became very great between that Arjuna and Ādhiratha, O King, the two striking one another with arrows like two elephants with the fierce blows of their tusks.[98]

5. Then Karṇa, wishing to remove Phālguna's[99] head in battle, aimed the foe-slaying serpent-mouthed arrow that was well-sharpened, burning, terrible, well-rubbed in battle, so long kept secret with Pārtha as its object,

ever-worshiped, bedded in sandalwood powder and lying in a golden quiver, of great venom,[100] blazing, and born in the lineage of Airāvata.[101]

Having seen Vaikartana, his arrow aimed, the high-souled Madra king[102] said to him, "This arrow will not reach his neck, Karṇa. Having marked distinctly, fix a head-destroying arrow!"

Thereupon, his eyes reddened with wrath, Karṇa said to Śalya, holding the arrow in check, "Karṇa does not fix an arrow twice, Śalya. Those like me are not given to deceit."

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[96] Probably released with a *mantra* from the *Atharva Veda.*

[97] Rāma Jāmadagnya; see episodes 2–3 in section B.

[98] Here, the Critical Edition notes two mainly Northern insertions: the first (App. 1, no. 39, of four *triṣṭubh*s) tells of such fighting that heavenly beings applaud; the second (App. 1, no. 40, of five *triṣṭubh*s, five *śloka* lines, and one more *triṣṭubh*) tells how the snake Aśvasena, who, unlike his mother, survived the burning of Khāṇḍava Forest, flies out of the underworld into the sky to see the battle, and, to avenge Arjuna's killing his mother, enters Karṇa's quiver in the form of an arrow (l. 12: *śararūpadhārī*)—this in seeming contradiction to what is noted elsewhere (see episode 5 in section B) and, just below, that Karṇa has long worshiped this snake arrow kept in his quiver. The net of arrows from the two combatants spreads darkness. Apsaras (nymphs) come to fan the heroes in their fatigue, and Indra and Sūrya brush their sons' faces. Then, as Karṇa realizes he cannot defeat Arjuna, he recalls the arrow in his quiver.

[99] Arjuna's: Phālguna is a Vedic name for Indra and a spring month.

[100] Here and throughout this segment, "poison" is always that of a serpent, and thus "venom."

[101] Airāvata is another prominent *nāga*. Star passages 8.1083* and 1084* are inserted here. (A so-called star passage is deemed an interpolation in the Critical Edition's apparatus.) In the first, a *triṣṭubh*, the world regents and Śakra wail at the filling of the sky with meteors, when the arrow in snake form is fixed to Karṇa's bow; in the second, a half-*triṣṭubh*, Karṇa did not know that Aśvasena had entered his quiver with the aid of *yogabāla*, "*yoga* power."

[102] Śalya; this would seem to be one of the points where he seeks to undermine Karṇa's *tejas;* see episode 9 in section B.

Having so spoken, he shot that snaky arrow that he had worshiped for many years. "Phālguna, you are slain," he said. So hastening, he sent it forth strengthened.

10–11. Having seen that snake aimed by Karṇa, Mādhava,[103] the best of the strong, stepped powerfully on the chariot with his two feet. When the chariot was immersed in the earth, the horses went to their knees. Then the arrow struck that insightful one's diadem.[104]

With rage and great pains at discharging that powerful weapon, the *sūta*'s son thus struck off Arjuna's head-ornament—celebrated through the earth, sky, heaven, and the waters—from his head.

Having the brilliance of the planets, fire, moon, and sun, adorned with nets of jewels, pearls, and gold, it was carefully made with austerity for the sake of Puraṃdara[105] by the inciter of the world himself.[106]

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[103] Kṛṣṇa, as named after another month in spring.

[104] Vaidya (1954, 695–696), as editor of the *Karṇaparvan* for the Critical Edition, includes these stanzas (10–11) "most reluctantly," arguing that doing so "is not fully justifiable. All the same, they are included, on the sole consideration that their contents are supported by all the MSS." His main argument is that the manuscripts agree in "substance" but not in form; Śāradā/Kaśmīrī manuscripts in *śloka*s, which provide his reconstituted text, "have parallel versions," some of them "shorter" and in *triṣṭubh*s, in central and southern groups of texts—notably 8.1089*, which he regards as the southern *triṣṭubh* stanza that "first introduced" the theme, which northern versions then took up, modifying the meter. Vaidya can thus argue that the *śloka*s are metrical "misfits," that without them there would be no break and that the "ballad-form" of the duel "would improve" with their absence. Opening on to what he recognizes as "higher criticism" and speaking "from the rationalistic point of view" (of which his "I do not think that Śalya played treacherous with Karṇa" is further instance), his "explanation is that the subject-matter of these stanzas was introduced…at a considerably late stage, to glorify the divine power of Kṛṣṇa, when the Kṛṣṇa-cult influenced the redactors of the Epic." But there is no reason to think that the Kṛṣṇa cult was late in influencing the epic. Vaidya's "first introduced" *triṣṭubh* could thus indeed be "original":

> Having seen that blazing [arrow] rushing forward moving in the air, the chief hero of the Vṛṣṇi lineage, having forcefully pressed down on the chariot's wheel, caused it to sink five finger-breadths, a hero indeed. (8.1089*)

Indeed, this *triṣṭubh* stanza eliminates the second *śloka*'s doubling in advance of the arrow's hitting Arjuna's diadem. The Critical Edition's standing preference for the Northern Śāradā/Kaśmīrī manuscripts may account for Vaidya's choice of the poorer text and his overlooking the better explanation, in support of which it may be noted that this Southern verse appears quite prominently among Southern recension manuscripts in the Malayālam group (otherwise it appears only in Grantha manuscripts and two Telugu manuscripts), which should probably have provided the editors with testimony of equal value to that of the Śāradā/Kaśmīrī manuscripts (see Hiltebeitel, 2006a, 252–53).

[105] Indra.

[106] *Bhuvanasya sūnunā*; the reference is not clear to me. If the translation is right, it would suggest the sun god, which seems incongruous here, given Sūrya's favoritism for Karṇa. *Sūnu* could also mean "son," giving us "son of the world" or "son of the

Having beauty of great worth, bringing fear to foes, and fragrant, it kindled exceeding joy. The lord of the gods, favorably minded, gave it himself to Kirīṭin when he had attacked the gods' enemies.[107]

15. What Vṛṣa[108] forcibly struck off with the snake was unassailable by the protectors known as Hara, the Lord of Waters, and Ākhaṇḍala;[109] by the foremost darts, the thunderbolt, the noose, and the Pināka bow;[110] and even by the foremost gods.[111]

Torn off by that best of arrows, that supreme diadem of Pārtha's, burning with the fire of venom,[112] radiant, dear over the earth, fell like the blazing sun from the Asta Mountain.[113]

The snake then[114] forcibly struck off the diadem adorned with many jewels from Arjuna's head like great Indra's thunderbolt striking a lofty tree-bearing summit, with fine sprouts and flowers, from a mountain.

As the earth, sky, heaven, and waters appear agitated by the wind, just so was the sound among the worlds then. Perturbed folk strove and stumbled.

Then Arjuna, standing unperturbed, having bound up his hair with a white cloth, shone with his head so arranged like Udaya Mountain[115] with the sun at full radiance.

20. Then, sped from Karṇa's arms, the serpentine arrow, the great snake who had made enmity with Arjuna, of great radiance like sun or fire, having struck down the diadem, arose.[116]

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earth"—which do not readily explain themselves either. The Vulgate and numerous texts have *vibhunā svayaṃbhuvā*, "by the self-born lord," probably Brahmā, who could be meant here in either case.

[107] While residing in Indra's heaven, Arjuna received the diadem from Indra (3.171.5) after he had defeated some foes of the gods.

[108] Karṇa.

[109] Śiva, Varuṇa, and Indra, respectively.

[110] Śiva's bow.

[111] Vaidya (1954, 696), says the verse is "one of the so-called Kūṭaślokas [purposefully enigmatic verses] commented on by Vimalabodha." A Northern insert adds: "That wicked-natured [*duṣṭabhāva*] snake…swept away the diadem from Arjuna's head, and it fell to the earth" (8.1093*-1094*).

[112] From the snake.

[113] The western Sunset Mountain.

[114] The verse reads repetitively. Perhaps "then" (*tatas*) suggests ongoing description rather than "next."

[115] The Sunrise Mountain.

[116] Here a patch of inserts: 1098*: the snake urges Karṇa to shoot him again, and Karṇa asks who this fierce-formed snake is; 1102*: the snake reveals his enmity for Arjuna; 1103*: even if Indra protects him, he will go to the land of the fathers; 1104*:

It said to him,[117] "Know him[118] to have committed an offense against me, Kṛṣṇa, an hostility now born of the death of my mother." Then Kṛṣṇa said to Pārtha in battle, "Slay the great snake who has made enmity with you."

Thus addressed by Madhusūdana,[119] the wielder of the Gāṇḍīva bow,[120] whose bow was fierce to foes, said, "Who now is my snake who has come on his own into the mouth of Garuḍa?"[121]

Kṛṣṇa said, "When you were holding the bow invigorating the god of variegated luster at Khāṇḍava,[122] this multiform snake went to the sky, his body cut by arrows. His mother was slain."[123]

Then Jiṣṇu,[124] eschewing leftovers,[125] cut the snake moving in the sky, as if flying upward, with six keen arrows. His body cut, he fell on the earth.[126]

25. At that time, with ten stone-whetted peacock-feathered shafts, Karṇa struck that foremost hero among men, Dhanaṃjaya, who was glancing obliquely.

Then Arjuna, delivering with twelve keen arrows released from the ear, quickly released an arrow stretched fully to his ear, its speed equal to venom.

The foremost of arrows, well-released, having riven Karṇa's armor, as if driving out his breath, having drunk his blood, entered the earth smeared with bloody feathers.

Karṇa will not, he says, rely on another's might to win victory, or shoot the same weapon twice; 1105*: he will continue using his own weapons; 1106*: the snake, unable to bear these words, resumes the form of an arrow determined to kill Arjuna on his own.

[117] Presumably, though it would seem unexpectedly, the snake addresses Kṛṣṇa.

[118] Arjuna.

[119] Kṛṣṇa as "destroyer of Madhu," one of two demons Viṣṇu slays upon awakening from his cosmic sleep. The epic poets frequently use the name where Kṛṣṇa is linked with killing.

[120] Gāṇḍīva is the name of Arjuna's bow.

[121] Viṣṇu's heavenly bird-mount and a proverbial devourer of snakes.

[122] Feeding Agni (Fire) at the Khāṇḍava Forest. Here and in what follows, see episode 5 in section B.

[123] At 8.1114* Kṛṣṇa adds that Arjuna should now remember him and shoot him from the sky.

[124] Arjuna, "the victorious," and a name connecting him, at least to the ear, with Viṣṇu.

[125] Leftovers (*śeṣān*) may evoke the great world-snake, Śeṣa.

[126] At 8.1115* is added: "When that snake had been slain by Kirīṭin, the lord Puruṣottama, himself of mighty arms, O king, quickly lifted up [*samujjahāra*] the chariot from the surface of the earth with his two arms."

Then Vṛṣa, angry at the fall of that arrow, like a great snake beaten with a rod, as one acting quickly, released the finest arrows like a snake of great venom spewing the ultimate venom.

He pierced Janārdana with twelve arrows, and Arjuna too with ninety-nine; and again, having pierced the Pāṇḍava with a terrible arrow, Karṇa roared aloud and laughed.

30. The Pāṇḍava paid no heed to his joy. Knowing about the vital points, he then cut his vital points. Having the prowess of Indra he struck the foe with feathered arrows even as Indra struck Bala[127] with energy.

Then Arjuna released on Karṇa ninety-nine arrows that were like death's rod.[128] His body, severely pained by those arrows, trembled like a mountain riven by a thunderbolt.

That one's head-ornament, adorned with gold, precious jewels, and the finest diamonds, was pierced by Dhanaṃjaya with feathered arrows and fell down on the earth, as did his fine earrings.

His fine and shining very costly armor, carefully made by the best of craftsmen working for a very long time, the Pāṇḍava cut in a moment into many pieces with his arrows.[129]

Thereupon, angered, he[130] pierced the armorless one with fine arrows, four of them. Struck forcibly by his foe, Karṇa trembled exceedingly, like a sick person with bile, phlegm, wind, and wounds.

35. With whetted arrows released from the circle of his great bow discharged with care and action, and with strength, Arjuna chopped at Karṇa with many of the best arrows, and so too speedily cut his vital points.

Hard-struck by Pārtha's feathered arrows of fierce speed and varied sharp points, Karṇa shone like a mountain reddened with ores of red chalk flowing with cascades of red water.[131]

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[127] A demon.

[128] *Antakadaṇḍasaṃnibhāḥ.* Antaka is death as the Finisher, and a name for Śiva and Yama. The *daṇḍa* is the rod of punishment.

[129] These earrings and armor have replaced Karṇa's originals, which he gave to Indra.

[130] Arjuna.

[131] App. 1, no. 41, of six *triṣṭubh*s, comes here: Arjuna hits Karṇa with another deadly arrow; Karṇa reels. Arjuna prefers not to kill him while he is in distress. Kṛṣṇa then rebukes him: no warrior of mettle lets a foe regain his strength; kill him as Indra slew the (largely Vedic) demon Namuci. Arjuna says "So be it," honors Janārdana, and strikes Karṇa with arrows as Indra did Saṃvara, another of his Vedic foes.

Kirīṭin then covered Karṇa and his horses and chariot with calf-toothed arrows, Bhārata, and, with every care, he shrouded the regions with arrows feathered with purified gold.

Covered by those calf-toothed arrows, the broad and thick-chested Ādhiratha shone like a well-flowered *aśoka*, *palāśa*, or *śālmāli* tree, or a mountain furnished with *spandana* and sandalwood trees.

With those arrows manifoldly sticking to his body, Karṇa shone in battle, O King, like a great mountain[132] possessing auspicious Karṇikāra flowers amid ridges and glens filled with trees.

40. He dispatched hosts of arrows with his bow; Karṇa shone radiating masses of arrows like the sun facing the Asta Mountain, its blood-red disc beaming crimson.

Having assailed the regions, keen-pointed arrows released from Arjuna's arms scattered the blazing arrows like mighty snakes released from the bend of Ādhiratha's son's arms.[133]

Then his wheel fell into the earth. When his chariot was reeling from the brahmin's curse and the weapon obtained from Rāma no longer shone, the *sūta*'s son was agitated in battle.

Not tolerating those misfortunes, he shook his hands reviling,[134] saying, "Dharma protects those eminent in dharma, so those who know dharma always say. But now it is sunk[135] for me. It does not protect its devotees. I think dharma does not always protect."[136]

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[132] I follow those manuscripts (the Vulgate and others) that have *mahāgiri* rather than the Critical Edition's *mahendra* (Indra) here, since it better fits the simile.

[133] Here comes a series of inserts: 1120*: Recovering his *dhairyam*, firmness, Karṇa hits Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa with ten and twelve snakelike arrows; 1121*: Dhanaṃjaya shoots an iron weapon that is like venom, fire, and Indra's thunderbolt; then (more widely attested than the previous or following): "Invisible Kāla (Time), O king, because of the curse of the brahmin, indicating the death of Karṇa, speaking, said, 'The earth is swallowing your wheel,' when the time for Karṇa's death had arrived. The great Brahmā weapon was destroyed in his mind which the great-souled Bhārgava had given him. The earth swallowed the left wheel. O hero among men, when that time for death had arrived, the chariot then whirled about, O lord of men, from the curse of that best of brahmins" (8.1122* and 1123*). Alternately, the Southern recension's *triṣṭubh*s make Kāla the presence of death that comes with the earth's swallowing the left wheel, and causes the chariot to reel because of the curse (1124* and 1125*).

[134] Yudhiṣṭhira censures *dharma* at the end of the *Mahābhārata* with the same verb (*vi-garh-*; 18.2.50c); see Hiltebeitel (2001a, 274).

[135] The verb seems to combine *dharma* with the sunken wheel, implying a *dharmacakra* or "wheel of *dharma*."

[136] See Halbfass (1988, 318; see 325, 329–330) on *dharma* as that which "protects its protectors." See Hiltebeitel (2001a, 203–205).

So saying, shaken from the injury to his vital points by the fall of
Arjuna's weapons, unsteady in his actions, his charioteer and horses
staggering, he again and again censured *dharma.*

45–50. Then Karṇa pierced Pārtha in battle with three fiercely sped
arrows, and wounded him with seven. Then Arjuna released seven-
teen sharp-edged unswerving ones that were like fire and terrible as
Indra's thunderbolt. Having pierced him with terrible speed, they fell
on the earth's surface. Shaken to the core, Karṇa displayed motion
with power. Thereupon, steadying with strength, he invoked a Brahmā
weapon. Seeing it, Arjuna summoned an Indra weapon. Having blessed
the Gāṇḍīva bow and arrows, Dhanaṃjaya released showers of arrows
like Indra releasing rains. Then those energized high-potency arrows
released from Pārtha's chariot appeared in the vicinity of Karṇa's
chariot.

51–56. The great chariot warrior Karṇa then baffled those shot in
front of him. When the weapon was destroyed, the Vṛṣṇi hero[137] then
said, "Release the foremost weapon, Pārtha. Karṇa swallows arrows."
And Arjuna, having intoned the Brahmā weapon, thereupon fixed it.
When Arjuna had then shrouded Karṇa and roamed about, Karṇa,
angered, cut his bowstring with well-sharpened arrows. Putting on
and polishing another bowstring, the Pāṇḍava filled Karṇa with blaz-
ing arrows by the thousands. Between the cutting of his bow and his
attention to restringing it in battle, it was so quick that Karṇa did
not perceive it. That was like a wonder. Rādheya[138] counteracted
Savyasācin's weapons with weapons. Displaying his own prowess, he
did better than Pārtha.

57–65. Then Kṛṣṇa, having seen Arjuna tormented by Karṇa's
weapon, considering, said to Pārtha, "Use a superior weapon." Then
Dhanaṃjaya, having blessed another iron-made divine arrow that
looked like fire and was equal to a serpent's venom, taking hold
of a Raudra weapon,[139] desired to shoot. Then the earth swallowed

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[137] Kṛṣṇa, who comes from the Vṛṣṇi clan of the Yādavas.

[138] Karṇa as the son of the *sūta* Adhiratha's wife Rādhā. Here begins a series of
pointed and increasingly ironic uses of epithets, beginning with only the narrator
Saṃjaya juxtaposing Karṇa as son of Rādhā with Arjuna as Pārtha, son of Pṛthā or
Kuntī, when, of course, both are sons of Kuntī. Soon the two combatants are calling
each other by these pregnant names, *as is Kṛṣṇa, who knows what the names conceal.*

[139] A weapon of Rudra-Śiva, possibly his Pāśupata weapon; see Hiltebeitel (1982a,
107).

Rādheya's wheel in the great fight.[140] Then Rādheya, his wheel swallowed, wept tears out of wrath, and said to Arjuna, "O Pāṇḍava, forebear a bit. Having seen this wheel of mine swallowed by fate, Pārtha, abandon the intention practiced by cowards. As kings do not attack a king, Arjuna, so heroes do not attack in combat one with disheveled hair, one facing away, a brahmin, one with joined palms, one who has come for refuge, one whose weapon is lowered, one also who has gone to ruin, one without arrows, one whose armor has fallen, or whose weapon has fallen or broken. You are a hero, Kaunteya.[141] Therefore, forebear a bit, Dhanaṃjaya, while I draw this wheel out of the earth. Standing on your chariot, you cannot slay me standing ill-equipped on the earth. I fear neither from Vāsudeva nor from you, Pāṇḍaveya.[142] Surely you are a Kṣatriya, one who shows compassion, an increaser of a great lineage. Recalling instruction about *dharma*, forebear a bit, Pāṇḍava."

67.1. Then Vāsudeva, standing on the chariot, said, "Luckily you remember *dharma* here, Rādheya! Sunk in disasters, when it comes to renouncing life, those who are base blame fate, not their misdeeds, whatever they are.

Having led Draupadī singly clad into the hall—you, along with Suyodhana,[143] Duḥśāsana, and Śakuni, the son of Subala[144]—your *dharma* did not become evident there, Karṇa.

3–5. When the dice-knowing Śakuni vanquished the dice-ignorant Kaunteya Yudhiṣṭhira in the hall, where did your *dharma* go then?[145] When Kṛṣṇā[146] was having her period, standing under Duḥśāsana's power, you laughed in the hall, Karṇa. Where did your *dharma* go

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[140] 8.1130*: Karṇa descends (*avatīrya*) to try to lift the wheel, but instead raises the earth four fingers.
[141] Son of Kuntī (see note 139 here). Although Arjuna doesn't know it, Karṇa is appealing to him—with what looks like intended irony—as his co-uterine brother.
[142] Arjuna, a metrically longer way of saying Pāṇḍava.
[143] Duryodhana as "easy to combat"; see Biardeau (2002, 1:886 n. 4, 900).
[144] Duḥśāsana, the second oldest Kaurava, who tried to disrobe Draupadī after she was gambled away, and Śakuni, the dicing master whose trickery won her, have been, along with Karṇa, who ordered her disrobing, Duryodhana's inner circle; see note 36 here.
[145] In inserts, Kṛṣṇa adds: Where was your *dharma* when Duryodhana ordered the poisoning of Bhīma (8.1142*); or at the lacquer house (1143*)? when the time in the forest was over and the Pāṇḍavas were not given back their kingdom (1144*)?
[146] Draupadī, the Dark Woman.

then?[147] Again, Karṇa, covetous of kingship, you summoned the Pāṇḍava, relying on the Gāndhāra king.[148] Where did your *dharma* go then?"[149]

6–11.   When Rādheya was addressed this way by Vāsudeva, his sharp anger fixed on the Pāṇḍava, remembering things about Dhanaṃjaya. At his anger, rays of luminous energy[150] appeared from every pore, O Mahārāja. That was like a wonder. Having perceived him then, Karṇa again showered a Brahmā weapon on Dhanaṃjaya, and made an attempt to abandon his chariot.[151] Covering that weapon with his own weapon, the Pāṇḍava attacked. Kaunteya then, having aimed at Karṇa, released another arrow that was dear to Jātavedas.[152] It blazed forth harshly. Karṇa then appeased the fire with a Varuṇa weapon,[153] and with clouds he made all the regions shrouded with darkness. But the unfazed energetic Pāṇḍaveya, within Rādheya's sight, then dispelled the clouds with a Vāyu weapon,[154]

and with arrows, the best of elephant girth-cords[155] adorned with gold, pearls, gems, and diamonds, very beautiful, highly exempt from the quality of darkness, made with care by the best craftsmen with time and effort,

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[147] At 8.1145* Kṛṣṇa adds: And when you insulted Draupadī, saying, "Your husbands are in Hell; choose another"?

[148] Śakuni, to do the dicing.

[149] Other additions: or when Abhimanyu was encircled? (8.1146*); Why go on with false words? You now speak for virtue, but it won't save your life. The Pāṇḍavas will regain their kingdom like Nala, and the Kurus will meet destruction (1147*); Karṇa hangs his head in shame, his lips quiver with rage, but he continues to fight. Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna to dispatch him (1148*).

[150] *Tejas*.

[151] At 8.1150*, Arjuna also uses a showery Brahmā weapon on Karṇa.

[152] Agni.

[153] A watery weapon, Varuṇa being god of waters.

[154] A windy weapon of the wind god. App. 1, no. 42, now adds, beginning with four *śloka*s, the rest in *triṣṭubh*s: Karṇa aims a fiery arrow making the gods weep and the Pāṇḍavas despair. It hits Arjuna's chest like a mighty snake penetrating an anthill. He reels. His grip loosens on Gāṇḍīva; "Obtaining that interval, the great chariot warrior Vṛṣa, wishing to extricate his chariot's wheel that had been swallowed by the earth, leapt from his chariot and seized it with his two hands. But by fate he did not succeed, even with his great strength. Then Kirīṭin, the high-souled radiant Arjuna, recovering his senses, took up the Prāñjalika, an arrow like the rod of Yama. Then Vāsudeva said to Pārtha, 'Sever the head of this enemy under refuge before Vṛṣa climbs back onto his chariot.' Just so, having honored that lord's word, he took up that blazing razor-pointed arrow and struck the elephant girth-cord bright as the spotless sun (on Karṇa's flagstaff) while the great chariot warrior's chariot-wheel was still sunk." (ll. 17–30)

[155] The emblem on Karṇa's chariot flag, as in the passage in the previous note.

always bringing strength to your army, which terrorized enemies, of adorable form, as celebrated in the world as the sun, its light equal to the sun, moon, and fire.

Then the high-souled Kirīṭin, engrossed with the keen, gold-feathered, razor-sharp arrow of Ādhiratha, cut off the great chariot warrior Ādhiratha's flagstaff that was radiant with prosperity.[156]

15. O worthy friend,[157] the Kurus' fame, *dharma*, victory, hearts, and all things dear then fell with that banner; and there was a great sigh, "Alas."[158]

Thereupon the Pāṇḍava, to kill Karṇa quickly, took out from his quiver an Añjalika[159] that was like a rod of fire and the thunderbolt of the great Indra, its fine ray like the thousand-rayed sun's, able to pierce the vital points, smeared with flesh and blood, resembling Vaiṣvānara,[160] very precious, a destroyer of the lives of men, horses, and elephants, measuring three cubits and six feet, of straight course and fierce speed,

its radiance equal to the thousand-eyed god's[161] thunderbolt, exceedingly unbearable like the one who eats whole corpses,[162] resembling the Pināka bow and Nārāyaṇa's discus, frightful, destructive of those bearing life.[163]

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[156] Or royal splendor, *śrī*.

[157] *Māriṣa*. Saṃjaya addresses Dhṛtarāṣṭra with a certain intimacy from time to time.

[158] At 8.1152* it adds, "The Kurus lost hope of victory at the sight of the flagstaff's fall."

[159] An unusual weapon for the *coup de grâce*, named after "the *añjali*, the gesture of salutation with semi-closed hands raised to the bowed forehead…that denotes reverence, benediction, and friendship, as when…Arjuna joins his hands in the *añjali* at Kṛṣṇa's bedside (5.7.7) in the scene where he secures Kṛṣṇa's friendship (*sakhyam;* 10) and his service as charioteer" (Hiltebeitel, 1982a, 108). Its use is mentioned four other times in the *Mahābhārata*: the Pāṇḍavas shoot *añjalikas* against the Magadha elephant forces (6.58.31); Bhīṣma likewise against the Pāṇḍavas (104.30); and Ghaṭotkaca uses one twice, first against Aśvatthāman (7.31.93) and then against Karṇa (50.78). According to Ganguli, *Bhishma Parva* (1970, 5:173), they are "arrows with crescent-shaped heads." See further note 165 here, and, in the background, Karṇa's welcoming and farewell "salutes" to Kuntī, discussed in section D.

[160] Agni, as "belonging to all men."

[161] Indra's.

[162] Agni.

[163] Southern and a few Northern texts continue with ten *triṣṭubh* lines (8.1154*): Seeing this weapon able to defeat the gods and Asuras, the Ṛṣis cried out: "May it be for the well-being of the universe [*svasti jagat syād*]" (1. 7).

Having joined Gāṇḍīva with this supreme great weapon, knowing mantras, having drawn, he said aloud, "If I have performed austerities, satisfied my gurus, and heard what is desired from friends,

20. "by that truth[164] may this great weapon, an arrow of incomparable firmness, destroying bodies, taking away lives, and hard-hearted, may this well-bitten arrow be invincible upon my foe Karṇa."

So uttering, Dhanaṃjaya released that terrible arrow for the death of Karṇa, as fierce as a sorceress of the Atharva-Aṅgirasas,[165] blazing, irresistible in battle even by death.

Highly thrilled, Kirīṭin said, "May this arrow of mine be the bearer of victory. Vengeful,[166] splendid as the sun and moon, reaching Karṇa, may it lead him to Yama."

With that choicest of victory-bearing arrows whose radiance was equal to the sun and moon, the diadem-crowned one, of thrilled aspect, vengeful,[167] his bow drawn, halted his foe.[168]

Of radiance like the risen sun, like the sun moving midway in the autumn sky, that marshal's[169] head fell on the earth like the red-disked sun from Asta Mountain.[170]

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[164] As Arjuna's "act of truth," or *satyakriyā*, ends on the note that he has "heard what is desired from friends (*mayā yadiṣṭaṃ suhṛdāṃ tathā śrutam*)" (67.20ab), it "brings its final focus onto the theme of friendship…[and] especially his friendship with Kṛṣṇa." But with the choice of the *añjalika* weapon (see note 160 here), it is also "as if the implicit theme of fratricide is resolved symbolically into a death which affirms that the final salutation is that of brothers who are inherently friends" (Hiltebeitel, 1982a, 108). See further Hiltebeitel (1988, 411 and n. 23); Biardeau and Péterfalvi (1986, 214): "la geste des deux mains jointes du suppliant…sans doute en manifestant son respect intérieur pour Karṇa"; and Biardeau (2002, 2:384): "un ultime salut respecteux et suppliant à la victim! Sans doute Arjuna a-t-il l'obscur pressentiment qu'il a tué un ennemi qui ne devrai pas être un."

[165] The sorceress is a *kṛtyā*, a type of female personification of black magic that the epic invokes and evokes at various points; see note 30 here. In the same vein, Atharva-Aṅgirasas probably suggests practitioners of Atharva Vedic black magic *abhicāra* rites. See Türstig (1985).

[166] See Monier-Williams ([1899] 1964, 420), on *jighāṃsur*: desirous of destroying or killing; revengeful.

[167] He is like his arrow (see previous note).

[168] At 8.1159* it adds that Arjuna struck off Karṇa's head, like Indra removing Vṛtra's, with the *mantra*-inspired Añjalika weapon, making Karṇa's trunk fall on the earth.

[169] Karṇa has for two days, days 16 and 17 of the eighteen-day war, been marshal (*senāpati*) of the Kaurava army.

[170] Karṇa's sun-like head falls in three phases, collapsing a year into a day by the mention of autumn.

25. The embodied soul of that one of lofty deeds abandoned the handsome body, ever raised in happiness, with exceedingly great difficulty, like a lord of great wealth the house to which he was attached.

Cut with arrows, the tall lifeless body of Karṇa, who was deprived of armor, fell with its wound streaming like a lightning-struck mountain peak flowing with red chalky water.

Then from Karṇa's overthrown body a blazing luminosity[171] soon entered the sky. All the men and warriors saw this wonder, O king, after Karṇa was slain.

The delighted Somakas, seeing him slain and lying down, bellowed with the troops. Exceedingly thrilled, they beat their musical instruments and waved their arms and garments. Others, endowed with strength, danced. Embracing one another, they shouted, roaring,

having seen Karṇa cut down from the chariot, slain by darts, like a fire scattered by a great wind when it is at rest in the morning at the termination of a sacrifice.[172]

30–34. Karṇa's body shone like the sun with its rays, its every limb filled with arrows and bathed in streams of blood. Having scorched the hostile army with burning rays of arrows, Karṇa was a sun led to the Asta Mountain by Arjuna as powerful time. When going to Asta Mountain, the sun thereupon departs, having taken away its luster; just so did the arrow go,[173] taking away Karṇa's life. In the late afternoon, O worthy friend, the *sūta*'s son's head, cut off in battle by the Añjalika, fell with the body. Higher and higher, rising straightly, that arrow quickly snatched away the head and body of Karṇa, that enemy of warriors.

35. Having seen the fallen hero Karṇa lying on the earth filled with arrows, his limbs smeared with blood, the Madra king went away with the chariot, its flagstaff cut.

When Karṇa was slain, the Kurus fled, overcome with fear and gravely wounded in battle, repeatedly glancing at Arjuna's great flagstaff shining with beauty.

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[171] *Tejo dīptam*; numerous texts say "his blazing *tejas* entered Sūrya [*sūryam… viveśa*]."

[172] A complex image, if Karṇa is like a fire dispersed after a *night* sacrifice. Shulman (1985, 386) argues for "a coherent semantics of sacrificial fate" in Karṇa's portrayal. Note the shift now to *ślokas*.

[173] Suggesting an "arrow of time."

That one whose acts equaled those of the god of a thousand eyes,[174] whose face was beautiful like a thousand-petaled lotus, like the thousand-rayed sun at the close of day, so his head fell to the earth.

68.1. Seeing the troops crushed with arrows in the struggle between Karṇa and Arjuna, Śalya, glancing at the approaching Duryodhana, beheld the Bhārata battlefield.

Duryodhana, having seen his army with its elephants, horses, and chariots beaten down and the *sūta*'s son slain, his eyes full of tears, repeatedly sighed, a picture of woe.

Then they stood surrounding Karṇa, desirous of seeing the hero fallen on the earth filled with arrows, his limbs smeared with blood, as if Sūrya had happened to drop.

Among the enemy and among your own were those who became thrilled, terrified, despondent, or forgetful; so also others gave way to grief, each according to their respective natures.

5. Seeing Karṇa slain by Dhanaṃjaya, his energy[175] destroyed, his armor, ornaments, garments, and weapons in disarray, the Kurus fled like a confused herd of cows whose bull is slain.

Having seen Karṇa lying on the earth harshly slain by Arjuna like an elephant by a lion, the Madra king, terrified, slid away quickly with the chariot.

And the Madra lord, his mind stupefied, having gone quickly to Duryodhana's side with the chariot whose banner was removed, addressing that one beset with woe, said this word,

"The foremost chariot warriors, horses, and elephants are shattered. Slain, your army is like the realm of Yama, with its men, horses, and elephants like mountain peaks after having attacked one another.

There has never been such a battle, Bhārata, as was the one now between Karṇa and Arjuna. The two Kṛṣṇas[176] together were surely swallowed by Karṇa, and all the others who are your enemies.

10. But what is the fate brought forth from its own sway that protects the Pāṇḍavas and kills us? Surely all the heroes who promoted your success and purpose are forcibly·slain by the enemy.

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[174] Indra.
[175] *Ojas*, not *tejas*, here.
[176] Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa.

Heroes mighty as the Lord of Waters, Kubera, Vaivasvata and Vāsava[177] with their manliness, heroism, and strength, and endowed with all manner of abundant great merits,

fit to be unslayable, Indras among men desirous of your purpose, were slain by the Pāṇḍaveyas. Don't grieve over it Bhārata. It is settled. Success takes its course. There is not always success."

Hearing this word of the Madra lord and reflecting on his own misconduct, Duryodhana, wretched at heart, at wit's end, sighed again and again, a picture of woe.[178]

To him who was silent in thought, miserable, and severely afflicted, Ārtāyani[179] said this wretched sad word: "Hero, behold this terrible battlefield arrayed with slain elephants, horses, and men;

15–16. with fallen elephants, huge as mountains, suddenly wounded, their vital spots pierced with arrows, agitated and lifeless, garlanded with gold, bathed with their armor, weapons, and reins in streams of blood, their standards, lances, hooks, and bells in disarray, like lordly mountains whose herbs, trees, deer, and rocks are scattered, riven with thunderbolts;

and arrayed with fallen horses pierced with arrows, others breathing hard and vomiting blood, with wretched moans, their eyes rolling, biting the earth and neighing pitifully;

arrayed also with pierced horse- and elephant-warriors—some with little life left, some with their life departed—and with crushed chariot warriors, elephants, horses, and men; the earth is hard to look at like the great Vaitaraṇi;[180]

with elephants whose limbs, trunks, and hind feet are cut, trembling, fallen on the earth; with famous elephant-, chariot-, and horse-warriors; and with foot-soldiers slain fighting their enemies face to face, their weapons, garments, ornaments, and armor shattered, as if the earth was covered with tranquil fires;

20. with the great armies seen fallen by thousands, afflicted by the attacks of arrows, their wits lost, panting again, it is as if the earth

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[177] Varuṇa, Kubera, Yama, and Indra, the gods of the four directions.

[178] Here App. 1, no. 43, follows—a long *adhyāya* in the Vulgate: How did the armies fare, crushed and scorched during, after, and while fleeing the fight between Karṇa and Arjuna? Twice Duryodhana rallies his troops like the Asura Bali against the gods, the second time saying that as there is no place to flee, they should fight like warriors.

[179] Śalya, he whose course is orderly, truthful!

[180] The foul, corpse-strewn underworld river of the dead.

came to have its fires extinguished; with its waters fallen from the sky, the stainless earth is like the night sky with its planets ablaze.

The arrows released from the arms of Karṇa and Arjuna, having riven the bodies of men; horses, and elephants, quickly taking away their breaths, entered the earth everywhere like great snakes with weapons[181] toward their dwelling.

With the elephants, horses, and men slain in battle, with chariot warriors killed by Dhanaṃjaya and Ādhiratha's arrows on the way, the earth became very hard to traverse.

With chariots shattered by weapons, bent and separated, their traces, yokes, axles, and wheels cut, their warriors and flagstaffs, choice weapons, horses, and inseparably connected charioteers crushed by choice shafts,

with iron-made devices that were released and knocked down, their joins struck, bent, and disconnected, their broken seats adorned with gold and jewels, the earth was strewn like a sky with autumn clouds.

25. With speedy, ornate, and well-equipped battle chariots drawn by fleet steeds, their lords slain, fleeing quickly with masses of men, elephants, chariots, and horses your forces are smashed on every side.

Golden tiaras fell, as did bludgeons, axes, sharp pikes,[182] clubs, sharp-edged spears, spotless unsheathed swords, maces bound with golden cloth,

bows ornamented with golden rings and arrows with beautiful golden feathers, and spotless unsheathed tempered lances, darts, and swords with golden luster,

umbrellas, fans, and conches and garlands beautiful with flowers and the finest gold, variegated elephant cloths, emblems, and cloth turbans, diadem-crowns and beautiful tiaras,

and cloths scattered and dispersed, and necklaces chiefly of rubies and pearls, tight upper-armbands, the finest bracelets, collars for the neck with strings of gold,

30. the best of gems, pearls, gold, and diamonds and auspicious jewels high and low, and bodies accustomed to unending happiness, their heads and faces like the moon—

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[181] What *astraiḥ*, "with weapons," is doing here is not clear.

[182] I revert to the Vulgate's *śitāś ca śūlā* here; the Critical Edition reads *kadaṅgarāyo*, for which there does not seem to be a sound explanation.

having abandoned their bodies, enjoyments, and retinues and even the happiness known to the mind, and acquiring great steadiness in their own *dharma*, they together went with glory to the celebrated worlds."

Having thus spoken, Śalya stopped. Duryodhana, his mind seized with grief, saying "Oh Karṇa! Oh Karṇa!" was distressed, senseless, his eyes filled with tears.

Then the lords of men, the son of Droṇa[183] first among them, having all comforted him, went on, glancing back repeatedly at the great banner of Arjuna ablaze with glory.

The earth sprinkled with red blood born from the bodies of men, horses, and elephants, from union with the gold, garlands, and red cloths, was like a radiant woman accessible to all.[184]

35. Perceiving her highly illustrious form covered with blood at that terrible hour, O King, the Kurus did not even stand. All pledged to the world of the gods,

they were very miserable about Karṇa's death, saying, "Oh Karṇa! Oh Karṇa!" Beholding the sun reddened, O King, they set forth quickly to their camps.

But Karṇa, his horses smeared with blood from the sharp gold-feathered arrows sped from Gāṇḍīva, his body covered with arrows, shone on earth even though he was slain like Sūrya himself with his wreath of rays.

Having touched with his hands[185] the blood-besprinkled body of Karṇa, the lord Vivasvat,[186] his form blood-red, compassionate toward his devotee, went to the other ocean desiring to bathe.

As if so reflecting, the universally celebrated hosts of gods and Ṛṣis went each to his home. And the folk,[187] having reflected, flowed away as they wished to heaven and the surface of the earth.

40. Having seen that wonder causing fear to all bearers of breath, that battle between the two foremost Kuru heroes Dhanaṃjaya and Ādhiratha, those amazed folk then left applauding.

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[183] Aśvatthāman.
[184] On the battlefield-earth as a seductive, beautiful, and ultimately triumphant woman and redeemed goddess, see Hiltebeitel (1980a, 106–109).
[185] Sūrya's hands are his rays.
[186] Sūrya.
[187] See note 84.

41–46. Though his armor was cut through with arrows, though the hero was slain in battle, Fortune[188] did not leave Rādheya even though his life was gone. Adorned with various ornaments, O King, his bracelets made of polished gold, the slain Vaikartana lay like a tree possessing sprouts. Resembling the finest gold, aflame like the Purifier,[189] having burnt the Pāṇḍavas and Pāñcālas, O King, with the energy of his weapons, that tiger among men together with his sons was quieted by Pārtha's energy. The one who also said "I give," and not "It is not so," when sought by seekers, a good man always with the good,[190] that Vṛṣa was slain in the chariot duel. The high-souled one whose entire wealth of self belonged to brahmins; he for whom there was nothing, even his own life, he would not give to brahmins; always dear to men,[191] a giver whose gift was dear—he has gone to heaven having taken away from your sons their armor, protection, and hope for victory.

When Karṇa was slain, the streams did not flow, and the sun went soiled to the Asta mountain; and a slantwise planet, Yama's son,[192] had the color of burning fire for its rising, O King.

Thereupon the sky split, the earth roared, and violent high-velocity winds blew; the regions blazed forth violently with smoke and the great noisy oceans trembled.

Multitudes of mountains shook with their forests, and hosts of beings shuddered, O worthy friend. The planet Bṛhaspati,[193] oppressing the constellation Rohiṇī, took on the same color as the sun or moon.

50. When Karṇa was slain, the regions did not disclose themselves; the sky was covered in darkness, the earth roamed about, meteors of blazing light fell, and night-stalkers[194] too were thrilled.

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[188] Lakṣmī.

[189] Pāvaka, Agni.

[190] *Sadbhiḥ sadā satpuruṣaḥ.* See section D, at note 43: Karṇa "persevere[d] in the conduct of noncruelty that befits a good man."

[191] The Vulgate and some other texts have instead *strīṇām*, "always dear to women."

[192] This planetary "son of Yama" eludes me. The Vulgate has instead *somasya putra*, "son of Soma," which Ganguli, *Karna Parva* ([1884–96] 1970, 7290) names as Mercury. Monier-Williams ([1899] 1964, 846), gives Saturn as a name for Yama himself in the *Harivaṃśa*.

[193] Jupiter.

[194] *Niśācara*s, most typical of whom are Rākṣasas. The term is not used for Ghaṭotkaca, but he is one, and it would be fitting for his kind to take vengeful delight in Karṇa's death.

When Arjuna with his razor-sharp arrow toppled Karṇa's head, its face radiant as the moon, folk in the atmosphere, heaven, and here repeatedly cried, "Alas!"

Having slain the foe Karṇa in battle, who was honored by gods, men, and Gandharvas, Arjuna Pārtha shone with utmost energy like the thousand-eyed one after slaying Vṛtra.[195]

Then with the chariot that roared like a bank of clouds, that glittered like the sun at midday in the autumn sky, whose emblemed banner had a terrible roar,[196] that shone like snow, the moon, a conch, or crystal, that was adorned with coral, diamond, pearls, and gold and was fast beyond measure,

the two best of Men,[197] the Pāṇḍava and the crusher of Keśī,[198] lofty like the sun or fire, fearless and quick in battle, shone like Viṣṇu and Vāsava mounted on the same vehicle.

55. With the sounds of their wheels, palms, and bowstring, having forcibly destroyed their enemies' lusters, having extinguished the Kurus with showers of arrows, the one with the monkey on his banner and the one with the best of birds[199] on his banner then took up with their hands their fine-sounding conches that were covered with webs of gold

and dazzling as snow, and, forcibly blowing them loudly, sank the hearts of their foes. The two best of men[200] with the two best of faces kissed the two best of conches and blew them jointly,

57. and from both, from Devadatta and the blare of Pañcajanya,[201] it filled the earth, atmosphere, and heaven, and even the waters.

Those two heroes, making the forests, mountains, streams, and regions resound with the sound of their conches, terrified your son's army and gladdened Yudhiṣṭhira.

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[195] The Critical Edition regards this line about Vṛtra as uncertain, but all texts cited refer here in some way to Indra's slaying of Vṛtra. On this and further allusions to Indra's conquest of the demons Vṛtra and Namuci, see note 211 here.

[196] The monkey Hanumān roars from Arjuna's banner.

[197] *Narottamau*. Nara being a name for Arjuna's ancient Ṛṣi-identity that links him with Kṛṣṇa's form Nārāyaṇa, and *nara* being equivalent to *puruṣa* as "man," the title "two best of men" evokes Kṛṣṇa's identity as Puruṣottama (see note 90 here) as well as Arjuna's identity with Kṛṣṇa that makes them "the two Kṛṣṇas on one chariot."

[198] The name recalls Kṛṣṇa's killing of the horse-demon Keśī when he was a child in Vṛndavana.

[199] Garuḍa appears on Kṛṣṇa's banner, Hanumān on Arjuna's (See note 197 here).

[200] *Nṛṇāṃ varau* now! The poets are clearly having fun in this verse. See note 198 here.

[201] The conches of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, respectively.

Then, having heard the conches' agitating blare, the Kurus departed with speed, having deserted the Madra lord and also the lord of the Bhāratas, Duryodhana, O Bhārata.

60. Hosts of beings together applauded Dhanaṃjaya of many splendors in the great battle, and Janārdana too, as if the two were risen suns.

Covered with Karṇa's arrows, the two foe-tamers Acyuta[202] and Arjuna both shone forth in battle like the sun or the rabbit-marked moon with its wreath of rays, risen spotless, having destroyed the darkness.

Removing those bunches of arrows, the two lords[203] of unrivaled prowess, flushed with happiness, came surrounded by friends to their camp like Vāsava and Acyuta invoked by the attendees of a sacrifice.

Then they were honored by Cāraṇas,[204] men, and Gandharvas with the gods, and even the great snakes, Yakṣas,[205] and the great Ṛṣis for their supreme strengthening of victory, having slain Karṇa in that peerless battle.[206]

69.1–5.[207] Saṃjaya said, After Karṇa had thus fallen and your army had fled, joyfully embracing Pārtha, Dāśārha[208] said this word, "Vṛtra was slain by the destroyer of Bala;[209] Karṇa by you, Dhanaṃjaya. People will tell the death of Vṛtra and Karṇa as a doublet.[210] Vṛtra was slain

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[202] The "Unfallen," a name of both Kṛṣṇa (see note 89 here) and Viṣṇu (as implied in what follows by the connection with Indra). Note the building allusions to the Vedic sacrifice that begin here.

[203] Īśvarau.

[204] Celestial singers.

[205] Unpredictable cousins of Rākṣasas, given alternately to menacing, protective, and fructifying behaviors.

[206] At 8.1197*, one triṣṭubh is added in closing: they were lauded like Indra and Viṣṇu after the overthrow of Bali. Then follows app. 1, no. 44: the Kauravas broke, fled, in despair. Duryodhana took Śalya's advice and withdrew the army. Various heroes and forces are described returning to the Kaurava camp. No Kaurava warrior wished to continue the fight. Duryodhana lets them rest for the night.

[207] This adhyāya has a variant text in its entirety (8.1224*), mostly in the Southern recension, and is thus wavy-lined, as the preferred text of the editor. The variant has nothing of Kṛṣṇa's mysterious words to Arjuna., is much thicker in Yudhiṣṭira's "bhakti" paean to Kṛṣṇa-"Govinda's" grace, and lacks the ironies of the Northern passage (ll. 23–33).

[208] Kṛṣṇa, "worthy of respect" (see Biardeau, 2002, 1:105 11. 23).

[209] Indra. See note 128 here.

[210] Kṛṣṇa's mysterious evocation of an identity between these combats, and thus between Karṇa and not only Vṛtra but Namuci (see nn. 72, 132, 169), provides a Vedic "deepening" of Karṇa's demonic rapport with the Asura Naraka by possession

in battle by the many-splendored possessor of the thunderbolt. Karṇa was slain by you with the bow and sharp arrows. Let the two of us, Kaunteya, report this prowess spread in the world and bearing your fame to the intelligent Dharmarāja. Having reported to Dharmarāja the death of Karṇa in battle that was so long intended, you will discharge your debt."[211]

6–11. When Pārtha said "Yes," the bull of the Yadus, deliberate[212] Keśava, turned around the chariot of that best of chariot warriors. And Govinda[213] said this word to Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Yudhamanyu, the two sons of Mādrī, Wolfbelly, and Yuyudhāna,[214] "Bless you! May you stand watchful facing the foe until the king is informed that Karṇa is slain by Arjuna." Given leave by those heroes, he went to the king's encampment. And having taken Pārtha, Govinda saw Yudhiṣṭhira, that tiger among kings, lying down on the finest of gold beds. The delighted pair then touched the king's feet. Beholding their joy and their superhuman blows, thinking that Rādheya was slain, Yudhiṣṭhira rose up.[215]

12–18. Then the sweet-speeched Vāsudeva, delighter of the Yadus, narrated the death of Karṇa to him just as it happened. Slightly smiling then, Kṛṣṇa Acyuta, palms folded, addressed King Yudhiṣṭhira whose foe was slain. "Luckily the wielder of the Gāṇḍīva bow and the Pāṇḍava Wolfbelly and you too and the two Pāṇḍava sons of Mādrī are well, O King, freed from this hair-raising battle that has been destructive of heroes. Quickly do the things that are yet to be done, king. Harsh Vaikartana, the *sūta*'s son of great might, is slain. Luckily you triumph, Indra among kings. Luckily you increase, Pāṇḍava. He who

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(see section C). The Vedic Indra conquers Vṛtra and Namuci thanks to his "friend" Viṣṇu and, in Namuci's case, by a violation of friendship. The epic seems to reemplot this thematic set into the web of true and false friendships surrounding Karṇa (see Hiltebeitel [1976] 1990, 255–266; 1982a, 93–107). With the exceptions of the initial reference to Namuci and 68.52d on Vṛtra, these Vedic allusions are found only in the Northern recension.

[211] At 8.1198* two *ślokas* are added on how Yudhiṣṭhira was turned back in battle by Karṇa.

[212] Avyagra: unconcerned, unconfused, steady, deliberate.

[213] Govinda is probably the epic's most affectionate and salvific name for Kṛṣṇa (Hiltebeitel, 2001a, 67, 251–253, 256, 259 n. 54, 276; Biardeau, 2002, 2:273 n. 4, 317: probably from *gopa-indra*, "king of cowboys"), as it is in the cult of Draupadī (Hiltebeitel, 1988, 236, 275–81).

[214] Two of Draupadī's brothers, the Pāṇḍava twins, Bhīma, and Kṛṣṇa's kinsman Sātyaki, respectively.

[215] *Samuttasthau*. One could say he "altogether rises."

announced Kṛṣṇā won by dice, the vilest of good men[216]—today the earth drinks that *sūta*'s son's blood. Kuru bull, that enemy of yours lies on the earth with his limbs torn by arrows. Look at him, tiger among men, broken by many arrows."

19–25. The thrilled Yudhiṣṭhira paid homage to Dāśārha; he said, "Luckily luckily," Indra among kings,[217] and he gladly said this: "It is not strange in you, great-armed son of Devakī,[218] that, with you as his charioteer, Pārtha would now do what is manly." And the law-supporting Pārtha, best of Kurus, having grasped his braceleted right arm, spoke to both Keśava and Arjuna, "Nārada has told that you are the two gods Nara and Nārāyaṇa, the two ancient best of men[219] joined in the establishment of *dharma*.[220] The wise great-armed lord Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana[221] has also told me this divine story repeatedly. By your power,[222] Kṛṣṇa, Dhanaṃjaya with Gāṇḍīva conquered the foes who faced him and never faced away. Our victory was firm. Defeat was not to be ours when you undertook Pārtha's charioteering in battle."

26–34. Having thus spoken, Mahārāja, that great chariot-warrior, a tiger among men, having mounted that gold-decked chariot yoked with ivory-white black-tailed horses, surrounded by troops, pleasantly assenting to the heroic Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, then came to see the battle-field of many tidings. Conversing with the two heroes Mādhava and Phālguna, he saw the bull among men Karṇa lying on the battlefield broken in pieces everywhere by arrows sped from Gāṇḍīva. Having seen Karṇa and his sons slain,[223] King Yudhiṣṭhira praised both Mādhava and the Pāṇḍava, those tigers among men, saying, "Today, Govinda, with my brothers I am king of the earth, protected on every side by you, our lord, hero, and sage. Having seen the death of the proud tiger among men Rādheya,[224] that wicked-souled son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra[225] will

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[216] Cited at the beginning of section D. See also note 191 here.

[217] Saṃjaya to Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

[218] On the resonances of this epithet, see note 54 here.

[219] *Puruṣauttamaḥ*; see notes 34 and 90 here.

[220] Echoing *Bhagavad Gītā* 4.8.

[221] Vyāsa as "the island-born Kṛṣṇa"; the author.

[222] *Prabhāva* probably implying mysterious divine power. Yudhiṣṭhira is consistent in praising Kṛṣṇa rather than Arjuna.

[223] Effectively eliminating Karṇa's sons as heirs whom Yudhiṣṭhira might see himself obliged to enthrone in his own stead.

[224] Again, the irony of the naming of Karṇa Rādheya, Yudhiṣṭhira having yet to know that he is a son of Kuntī.

[225] Duryodhana.

be hopeless about life and kingdom now that the great chariot-warrior Karṇa is slain. By your grace, bull among men, our goals are met. Delighter of the Yadus, you and the wielder of the Gāṇḍīva bow are victorious. Luckily you triumph, Govinda. Luckily Karṇa is fallen." So, O Indra among kings, the much-delighted Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira praised Janārdana and Arjuna.[226]

35–40. Then the great chariot-warriors, filled with joy, magnified the king surrounded by all his brothers, beginning with Bhīma. And the Pāṇḍavas Nakula, Sahadeva, and Wolfbelly, and Sātyaki the foremost chariot-warrior of the Vṛṣṇis, O Mahārāja, and Dhṛṣṭadyumna and Śikhaṇḍin, and the Pāṇḍus, Pāñcālas, and Sṛñjayas[227] honored Kaunteya at the *sūta*'s son's fall. Behaving like conquerors, devoted to war, those tested champions, having magnified King Yudhiṣṭhira, lauded the two foe-taming Kṛṣṇas with words joined with songs of praise. Thus filled with joy, the great chariot-warriors went to their own camp. Thus this destruction, a very great hair-raising occurrence, came about on account of your evil policy, O King. Why do you grieve excessively now?

41–43. Vaiśaṃpāyana said, "Having heard this unpleasantness, the much-pained Kauravya lord of earth Dhṛtarāṣṭra fell helpless on the earth, as did Gāndhārī, the true-vowed lady who saw *dharma*. Then Vidura and also Saṃjaya took hold of the lord of men, and the two also undertook to comfort the lord of the earth. So too the royal ladies raised Gāndhārī. The king, taking heart for the two of them, became silent, discerning."[228]

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[226] Various Northern texts, including the Vulgate, have Saṃjaya add: "Having seen Karṇa slain, together with his sons by the arrows of Pārtha, the son of the Kuru clan thought himself born as it were again [*punar jātamiva ātmānaṃ mene*]! (8.1212*). There is a 'Fisher King' quality to Yudhiṣṭhira's recovery. See the translation at note 216 here.

[227] Like the Somakas, a branch of the Pāñcālas.

[228] The Vulgate and other manuscripts have for this last line, "The king considered fate and necessity to be paramount" (8.1217*). A *phalaśruti* (a passage on "the fruits of hearing" the *Karṇaparvan*) follows in many Northern texts, and includes these rewards: "Whoever recites this great sacrifice of battle of Dhanaṃjaya and Karṇa obtains the fruit from hearing a desired sacrifice rightly performed" (1219* ll. 1–4)—adding that "Viṣṇu is the sacrifice [*makho hi viṣṇur*]" (1. 6); "And since it is God, the eternal lord Viṣṇu, who is glorified everywhere [in this *parvan*], the happy man [who recites it] acquires his desires, as the word of the great Muni [Vyāsa] is respected" (1222*).

BROTHERS, FRIENDS, AND CHARIOTEERS:
PARALLEL EPISODES IN THE IRISH AND INDIAN EPICS

For over thirty years, since the early publications of Stig Wikander (1947) and Georges Dumézil (1948) on the *Mahābhārata*, it has been widely recognized that India's 'Great Epic' is a repository of certain kinds of Indo-European tradition. But the significance of this insight has not been sufficiently explored, either in terms of its implications for understanding the nature of the epic vis-à-vis other Indian texts, or in terms of clarifying precisely what its Indo-European heritage is. With regard to the first point, this essay holds room for only the following remarks. It is a distinctive feature of the *Mahābhārata* that it regards itself as a Fifth Veda, self-consciously perpetuating the Vedic tradition and recasting the Vedic 'revelation' in heroic terms. The epic thus appears to have a unique place in classical Indian literature as a carrier and repository of India's early heritage of Ārya narrative lore, probably including much of the *akhyāna, itihāsa*, and *purāṇa* material so frequently alluded to, but rarely told, in the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads. As we have it in its present form, the epic draws all such material into a great synthesis, motivated chiefly by the concern to articulate themes of *bhakti* and *dharma*. But one may still identify some of the older strains that have been worked into this synthesis. Some of these are demonstrably Vedic (that is, related to themes found from the Vedas to the Upaniṣads). Others might also be described tentatively as 'non-Ārya' (see Hiltebeitel 1980b, 1980c). But there is a significant body of concepts, topoi, and narrative skeins that clarify themselves only through the hypothesis that the *Mahābhārata* somehow situates itself very strongly in a para-Vedic continuum that draws from the Indo-European heritage. The distinctiveness of the *Mahābhārata* among post-Upaniṣadic texts should be emphasized here, for such an assessment could not be made of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, for which efforts to find similar Indo-European continuities have been unconvincing (Dubuisson 1979; Gehrts 1975:182–183; Molé 1960), and certainly not of the Purāṇas.

Regarding the second point, if some fair sample of the various claims and suggestions made about it can be trusted, the *Mahābhārata*'s

Indo-European heritage would seem to be multifaceted. While the list is not exhaustive, five major features of the epic narrative have been traced to Indo-European sources. The first, and the widely accepted[1] starting point for further inquiry, was the recognition of mythic traits concerning tri-functional groups of Indo-European deities transposed onto the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī (Wikander 1947; Dumézil 1948; 1974: 53–124). Second, varying arguments have been presented that the central drama of the epic involves the transposition of an Indo-European eschatological myth into heroic terms (Wikander 1960a; 1960b; Dumézil 1973: 49–65; Hiltebeitel 1976: 299–356; O'Brien 1976). Third, the main narrative of the epic itself has been shown to have striking correspondences with other Indo-European *epic* (as distinct from *mythic*) traditions, most notably with the Norse Battle of Brávellir (Wikander 1960a; 1960b; see also Wikander 1950). Fourth, the epic includes independent tales *outside* its main narrative that seem to be the Indian variants (Yayāti, Vasu Uparicara, Mādhavī) of Indo-European prototypes; these mini-epics are concerned primarily with royalty, and more particularly with 'primal kings' (Dumézil 1973). And fifth, certain singular episodes *within* the larger main narrative seem to be the Indian variants of heroic gestes, here involving not primal kings but warriors and champions. The arrow-bed deaths of Bhīṣma and Ubbo Frescius (Wikander 1960a; 1960b) and the annihilations of Śiśupāla, Starkadr, and Heracles after their sins against the three functions (Dumézil 1971:17–132) are cases of this latter type. And it may be that the father-son combat between Arjuna and Babhruvāhana should be considered in comparisons of the Irish (Cúchulainn and Connla), Germanic, Iranian, and Russian variants of the same theme (Hatto 1973; Stuart 1977). This essay will examine one more case of this fifth sort, and will concern the parallels between two episodes which are about as renowned and popular as any in the two epic traditions in which they are found: the Irish story of Cúchulainn's combat with Fer Diad in the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, and the combat between Arjuna and Karṇa in the *Mahābhārata*.

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[1] The trifunctional interpretation of the Pāṇḍavas withstands its critiques, the most relentless being that of Gonda (1971) on the paternity of Yudhiṣṭhira by Dharma. Whether or not Dharma is a 'rejuvenated Mitra' as Wikander (in Dumézil 1948:49) and Dumézil (1948:60, 77) claimed, Yudhiṣṭhira and Dharma maintain in the epic important rapports with what may be called first function themes (sovereignty, truth, dharma, vows, riddles, and the brahmin position in the caste hierarchy).

It has been observed that in terms of textual features, each of these episodes has a singular character in its respective epic. Based on analysis of language and style, it has been claimed that the Fer Diad episode in its present form is not older than the eleventh century (Thurneysen 1921: 219), that it is doubtful whether it formed part of the first recension of the *Táin* (O'Rahilly 1970: xv, n. 2), and even that it was invented either in part or whole cloth out of elements used in earlier episodes and conjured up by the imagination. Thus Cúchulainn has another opponent in the *Táin* who is his foster brother (Fer Baeth), and another who has a 'horn-skin' (Loch) (Thurneysen 1921:220); and the rare fight from chariots could be 'a late invention of the compiler' (O'Rahilly 1970: xi, n. 5; cf. Kinsella 1970:275, n. to p. 168).

At first sight, the textual situation of the *Karṇaparvan* looks to be just the opposite. The *Mahābhārata* is composed primarily (about 90%) in the *śloka* metre, with most of its remainder in *triṣṭubh*s, 70% of which are hypermetric or 'irregular' in that they 'cannot be classified as classical metres' whose metrical patterns were set about 350 A.D. (M.C. Smith 1972:3–4). Mary Carroll Smith has argued that the *triṣṭubh*s form the 'core' of the *Mahābhārata*, and the irregular *triṣṭubh*s the 'nucleus' (*ibid.* 65). She points out that whereas most of the epic duels at the battle of Kurukṣetra make use of classical *triṣṭubh*s, the *Karṇaparvan* 'retains a distinguishable layer of irregular verses…. It is the last book of the *Mahābhārata* to give sustained evidence of once having had a narrative core of irregular *triṣṭubh* verses at its center…. In chapter 67, the death of Karṇa, it is necessary to separate at least three layers of metre before the irregular verses appear (*ibid.* 56). There is good reason to suspect that Smith is right that the irregular *triṣṭubh*s preserve archaic epic material, although there is no reason to think that *śloka* verses are necessarily more recent (see Horsch 1966:250–284, 360–365), or that certain passages in *śloka* may not also be more archaic than others. It is thus not convincing to speak of an 'irregular' *triṣṭubh* 'nucleus' or a *triṣṭubh* 'core.' But it is convincing to think of the layered texture of the *Karṇaparvan* as building upon some of the *Mahābhārata's* most archaic material. And if this is true, and if significant parallels can be shown between the *Comrac Fir Dia* and the *Karṇavadha*, it should reopen some of the questions about the former episodes' place in the *Táin*. It may well have been rewritten, and originally an independent tale within the Ulster cycle. But it may be seriously questioned whether it was a late invention composed from bits and pieces.

The parallels can best be set forth by first offering a brief statement of the main common elements, and then a more thorough analysis of them. The main convergence concerns the relative prominence in the two episodes of the war chariot. This would seem a promising setting for the conservation of archaic themes, for although the Celtic-Irish (Harbison 1971) and Indian (Hopkins 1972: 179–206; Singh 1965: 23–52) chariots underwent their own late modifications, there is evidence to suggest that the battle chariot was adopted 'by the Indo-Europeans on the northerly fringes of Sumer and Akkad soon after 2000 B.C., given added speed and lightness by the use of horses and the invention of the spiked wheel, and spread by them in their expansion to east and west' (Piggott 1950: 276; cf. Polomé 1978–79: 50). Indeed, Stuart Piggott insists that the early Vedic war chariot 'was essentially the same vehicles as that known from other areas of Indo-European colonization,' and remarks on the nearly identical features of chariots 'in the two peripheral areas of Britain and India' (Piggott 1950: 281). It is noteworthy that the impressions of an eight-spiked wheel indicate a Kurgan chariot burial from no later than 1500 B.C. at Sintashta on the South Trans-Ural Steppe, probably belonging to an Indo-Iranian ethnic group (Genning 1979: 9 and fig. 3).

The chariots themselves are of varying importance in the two epic accounts, but in each case the combatants come to battle in chariots, and in each case their relations with their charioteers play a strongly determinative role in the outcome. Moreover, the warriors' rapport with their charioteers is in each case part of a wider network of complicated social relationships centered on the themes of partial or symbolic brotherhood and 'friendship.' Let us now look at each of these matters more closely. Citations of the *Táin* will be made from Cecile O'Rahilly's editions and translations of the two main recensions: from the 'First Recension' (I), most of which can be found in the *Book of the Dun Cow* (ca 1100), but of which the *Yellow Book of Lecan* yields the oldest account (late fourteenth century) of the Fer Diad episode (O'Rahilly 1976: vii); and the more regularized, recent, and elaborated 'Second Recension' (II) of the *Book of Leinster* (O'Rahilly 1970). It should be noted that there is nothing basic to our discussion that is not found in the older recension, but that both will be considered on equal terms as retaining variants of themes deriving from a presumably fluid oral tradition. Citations from the *Mahābhārata* will be from the Poona Critical Edition. Here too everything basic can be found in *triṣṭubh*s, but the *śloka* material deserves equal attention.

1. Setting and Contestants. Each combat comes about after what appears to be considerable postponement and anticipation. Fer Diad has the reputation of being Connacht's foremost champion, and Medb (Connacht's queen) calls upon him to be the last of the opponents to take on the suicidal task of fighting Cúchulainn in single combat at the ford. Moreover, he alone is regarded as Cúchulainn's match: 'For similar and equal was their (power of) fighting and combat' (*Dáig ba cosmail ocus ba comadas a comlond a comrac*; II 2610–2611). The duel between Arjuna and Karṇa has been postponed since the first meeting of their youth. At a tournament designed to exhibit Arjuna's skills at weapons Karṇa appeared unexpectedly and displayed equally impressive feats, but Arjuna refused to fight him because of Karṇa's reputed mixed-caste origins (*Mbh* 1.126–27). And during the battle of Kurukṣetra, their confrontation is postponed for sixteen days, the final six of which preoccupy Arjuna against a suicide squad called the Saṃśaptakas, those 'sworn together' to fight him to their doom. Arjuna and Karṇa's parity in battle is also elaborately developed. On the morning of their duel, Karṇa tells king Duryodhana that their skills and weapons nearly balance each other out, but that Arjuna comes to battle with certain advantages which must be neutralized, most notably his two inexhaustible quivers, his horses of the speed of mind, his indestructible chariot, and his charioteer Kṛṣṇa whom Karṇa has no trouble recognizing as the 'creator of the universe' (*sraṣṭo jagatas*; 8.22.49). Karṇa says the balance can be restored, however, if the following conditions are met:

> But this one like a hero, Śalya, the ornament of assemblies—if he should do my chariot driving, victory will certainly be yours. Let Śalya, therefore, arduous with foes, be my charioteer. Let carts (*śakaṭāni*) bear my vulture-feathered arrows. And let the foremost chariots (*rathāśca mukhyā*), O king, yoked with the best horses, always follow behind me, O bull of the Bhāratas. Thus I will be superior to Pārtha [Arjuna] by these qualities (*guṇaiḥ*). Śalya is surely superior to Kṛṣṇa. Surely I am superior to Arjuna. As Dāśārha [Kṛṣṇa], slayer of heroic foes, knows the heart of horsemanship (*aśvahṛdayam*), so does the great chariot-warrior Śalya know about horses. (8.22.50–54)

In matters of arrows, horses and chariots, Karṇa thus seeks to make up for quality with quantity, but in matters of personal prowess he sees the four principals as equal, with the advantage even on his side.

Beyond such general similarities in matters of setting and parity, there are more specific coincidences regarding the primary combatants.

According to the *Táin*, 'neither of them had any advantage over the other save that Cú Chulainn possessed the feat of the *ga bulga.* However, to counterbalance this Fer Diad had a horn-skin (*conganchnessach*) when fighting with a warrior at the ford' (II 2613–2116). The *Táin* thus sets its ultimate weapon against what seems to be a natural born armor, or at least a means of natural self-defense that activates itself in the course of battle: 'for he has a horn-skin when he fights with an opponent, and neither weapons nor sharp points can pierce it' (I 2747–2748). Now it is one of the more intriguing parallels between the two episodes that Karṇa has been dispossessed prior to the battle of Kurukṣetra of a natural born suit of golden armor. Indeed, when Arjuna first saw him at the tournament, Karṇa's 'natural born armor' (*sahajaṃ kavacam*; 1.126.2) made his body 'hard as a lion's' (*siṃhasaṃhanano*; 5). Yet it is still part of the series of tradeoffs that concern the eventual duel with Arjuna, for it was Indra (Arjuna's father) who, to protect Arjuna, had disguised himself as a brahmin and begged the armor along with Karṇa's natural-born golden earrings from the proverbially generous Karṇa, and it was Sūrya (the Sun god, Karṇa's father) who had insisted that Karṇa at least demand in return a dart (*śakti*) capable of killing Arjuna (3.284–94). It would thus seem that the *Mahābhārata* also pits two foes who, at least from the start of their antagonism, have traits parallel to those of Fer Diad and Cúchulainn: a natural-born armor versus the ultimate weapon. For Arjuna, even prior to the tournament where he and Karṇa first encounter each other, has learned from his guru Droṇa to use the Pāśupata weapon, the epic's doomsday weapon ultimately belonging to Śiva Paśupati.

2. Ties of Friendship. One can identify in each of these two epic episodes an elaborate skein of relationships bound up with the underlying theme of 'friendship.' It is, however, in each case a skein that unfolds from a similar set of central ambiguities. At the heart of the matter is the fact that in each case the duel itself is between figures whose relationship to each other includes the implications not only of friendship but of brotherhood.

As Fergus tells Cúchulainn in the *Táin*, you will fight 'your own friend and companion and foster brother, the man who is your equal in feats of arms and prowess and great deeds' (II 2727–2728; cf. II 2620). Cúchulainn had become Fer Diad's foster brother (*comalta*) when the two underwent training in arms by the warrior women Scáthach, Úathach, and Aife; and during this time, as Fer Diad recalls,

Cúchulainn was Fer Diad's 'serving man' (*forbfer*) and used to prepare his spears and couch (II 2938–2940). One thus has an indication that Fer Diad is the senior of the two foster brothers. Their friendship, combined with this sense of kinship, is also a sworn fact, which each acknowledges freely in their dialogues. Thus, for instance, Cúchulainn laments: 'You were my loved comrade (*chochne cride*), my kin and kindred (*tú m'aiccme, tú m'fine*). Never found I one dearer. Sad will be your death' (II 3006–3009; I 3071–3074). And before fighting 'they renounced their friendship' (*n-athcharatraid ráraile*; II 2944–2945).

In the *Mahābhārata*, Karṇa is Arjuna's older brother, or half-brother. Their mother Kuntī bore Karṇa to Sūrya before her marriage, and thus out of shame abandoned him at birth, whence forth he was raised by mix-caste *sūtas* (*Mbh.* 1.104; 3.287–293). Arjuna was born to her, sired by Indra, after her marriage to king Pāṇḍu. This situation is unknown to Arjuna before their duel, but it is known to Karṇa who insists it be a secret shared between himself, his mother, and Kṛṣṇa. Yet as Kṛṣṇa reminds Karṇa just before the war, Karṇa is legally (*dharmatas*; 5.138.9) a Pāṇḍava and thus Arjuna's brother, and could, if he chose, claim recognition as king since he is the senior of all the Pāṇḍava brothers. Kṛṣṇa predicts further that the Pāṇḍavas would be willing to serve Karṇa in various ways, Arjuna by driving his chariot (5.7.34–35), a role which holds implications concerning the theme of friendship, as we shall see, and reminds one that Kṛṣṇa has at this point already agreed to serve as Arjuna's charioteer.

One can thus summarize so far by saying that in each episode the duel between friends (potential or actual) disguises, in one way or another, the problematic of fratricide, and more particularly the killing of a senior brother.

Moving out from this center, we now come to the relationships between the warriors and their charioteers. Speaking first in general terms, it must be supposed that the chariot warrior and his charioteer should have a finely tuned rapport with each other. In fact, their intimate relation on the chariot was destined to become a subject of metaphysical speculations. Thus *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.3.3. and 9: 'Know the Self as the lord of the chariot (*ātmānaṃ rathinaṃ viddhi*) and the body as, verily, the chariot, know the intellect as the charioteer (*buddhiṃ tu sārathiṃ viddhi*) and the mind as, verily, the reins.... He who has understanding for the driver of the chariot (*vijñānasārathir*) and controls the rein of his mind, he reaches the end of the journey,

the supreme abode of the all-pervading' (Radhakrishnan 1953: 623–624).[2] Together on the chariot, the warrior and charioteer put themselves into a situation of ultimate mutual trust, where the life of each is in the other's hands. The warrior must protect his charioteer, who was probably unarmed (Hopkins 1972: 196; Singh 1965: 33). In the roughly nine hundred and sixty-six combat scenes at the battle of Kurukṣetra, there is individual reference to the killing of one hundred and fifty-five *sūta*s, or a 16% ratio of charioteers killed per duel. Thus Sarva Daman Singh can speak of the 'slaughtered heap of his [the *sūta*'s] kind' (Singh 1965: 49). Yet the charioteer must also protect the warrior (see *Mbh.* 8.23.5–6 and 17) by skillfully guiding the horses.

It is thus not surprising that the rapport between driver and warrior should serve to bring into focus a variety of narrative reflections on the theme of friendship. Indeed, the relationship between them is precisely one which relies on friendship because it is based on an inherent inequality. The warrior, of course, has the higher rank. In India the main classificatory term for charioteer, along with more descriptive terms like *sārathi, yantṛ, niyantṛ*, and *saṃgrahitṛ*, is *sūta*, which holds the stigma of mixed-caste birth supposedly from the original union of a Kṣatriya father and a Brahmin mother (e.g. *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*; 10.11). In Ireland there are also indications that the skills are a family trait, as Laeg mac Riangabra—Cúchulainn's charioteer—shares his trade with two brothers (Cross and Slover 1969: 258; each drives for one of the three champions in 'Bricriu's Feast'). It is common for the warrior to call his charioteer (*arae*) *gilla*, 'lad,' which—along with other features of their interactions in the tales—implies inferiority. And one can infer some notion of crookedness, if not exactly social stigma, in the promptings of an early Christian metrical rule: 'If thou should take the path of repentance, advance step by step every day, practice not the way of the charioteer' (*ni dernae bésu arad*) (Strachan 1904: 200). One may thus be on the watch for ramifications of this theme of 'friendship' as mutual trust based on implied inequality,[3] which may be taken itself

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[2] Cf. Plato's *Phaedrus* 246 and *Mahābhārata* 3.202.21–28, where in each case the soul is itself the charioteer. There may also be Irish 'metaphysics' involved when Saint Patrick calls Cúchulainn and Laeg back from the dead to convert king Loegaire by allowing him to see their fantastic feats together on the chariot (Cross and Slover 1969:847–354; 'The Phantom Chariot of Cu Chulainn').

[3] *Mahābhārata* 1.122, concerning the broken friendship between Drupada and Droṇa, declares the opposite doctrine, that friendship is possible only between those

as a further adumbration of the conflict between older and younger brothers and would-be friends.

Turning to specifics, then, in the *Táin*, as elsewhere in the Ulster Cycle, there is an ideal 'friend' relation between Cúchulainn and Laeg. It is characterized by an easy and intuitive naturalness, and Cúchulainn frequently calls Laeg *popa*, usually translated 'friend' although literally meaning 'father'—a term usually addressed to an elder or superior but occasionally familiarly to an inferior (Marstrander and Quin 1913–1975: s.v.). The repeated use of this appelative thus suggests that in essential matters their friendship overturns distinctions of seniority or rank. Fer Diad's relations with his unnamed charioteer are, on the contrary, strained and bitter. He never calls him *popa* but only *gilla*. And after listening to his charioteer's repeated praise of Cúchulainn, Fer Diad rebukes him, saying 'This is no deed of friendship' (*daig ní gním ar codail*; I 2883; cf. II 2892).

In the *Mahābhārata* one finds the same pattern, but vastly more elaborated and 'deepened.' The *Karṇaparvan* refers repeatedly, and with an air of mystery, to Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa as 'the two Kṛṣṇas,' and when Karṇa speaks of 'having seen the two Kṛṣṇas together on one chariot' (*dṛṣṭvā kṛṣṇāvekarathe sametau*; 8.57.48; cf. 31.54), his words would seem to evoke such Upaniṣadic images as the one cited earlier of the *ātman* and the *buddhi* united in the chariot-body, or the two birds who as 'friends' (*sakhayaḥ*) occupy the same tree, one detached representing the *ātman*, the other active representing the transmigratory soul (*Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 4.6–7; *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 3.1.1.–2; see Sukthankar 1957: 112). Indeed, the latter image seems even more clearly evoked in the references to Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa as the two eternal and inseparable friends Nara and Nārāyaṇa (Sukthankar 1957: 100), figures who must represent the soul of 'man' (*nara*) and the god Viṣṇu in his cosmic form: 'stationed on one chariot like Brahmā and Śiva, these two heroes are invincible, foremost among creatures, the heroes Nara and Nārāyaṇa' (8.12.16). Throughout the battle, and particularly in the *Karṇaparvan*, Kṛṣṇa's charioteering and Arjuna's fighting are thus in near-perfect harmony. Most notably, Kṛṣṇa saves Arjuna's life by stepping down on the chariot so hard that it sinks into the earth enough that a deadly snake arrow hits and pulverizes Arjuna's diadem

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of like status. Here, however, the issue is the impossibility of friendship between king and Brahmin, neither of whom can willingly subordinate himself to the other.

rather than his head (8.66.10–19). Yet here one also finds some of the
most interesting inversions of the theme of unequal friendship. On
the one hand Kṛṣṇa subordinates himself to act as Arjuna's charioteer
(as Pārthasārathi), and though the epic never refers to Kṛṣṇa as a *sūta*
the implication is certainly there. Yet Kṛṣṇa is actually God, to whom
Arjuna must subordinate himself in the *Bhagavad Gītā* with apolo-
gies for having always called him 'friend' (*sakhi*; Gītā 11.41). One may
thus say that in essential matters their friendship overturns normal
matters of seniority and rank to affirm the eternal friendship of God
and man.

In contrast to this perfect attunement between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, the
relation between Karṇa and his charioteer Śalya are, like that between
Fer Diad and his charioteer, filled with tension. Śalya is insulted that
Duryodhana should request him to drive Karṇa's chariot, a situation
which presents the anomaly of a Kṣatriya (Śalya) serving as *sūta* for
a *sūta* (Karṇa) who is really a Kṣatriya (see 8.23.19–36). Rather than
the mutual self-subordination of the friends Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, the
two thus engage in several rounds of insults. And when Śalya praises
Arjuna, Karṇa's reply is similar to Fer Diad's rebuke to his charioteer:
'An enemy with the face of a friend (*mitramukhaḥ śatrur*), surely you
desire to frighten me' (8.27.28). Karṇa further calls Śalya an 'injurer
of friends' (*mitradrohī*; 29.21), 'an enemy having become a friend'
(*suhṛdbhutvā ripuḥ*; 27.68), and cites a proverb *gāthā*) about the people
of Madra, of whom Śalya is king: 'The Madraka is always an injurer of
friends…' (*mitradhruṅmadrako*; 27.73). Śalya's charioteering also suf-
fers in this atmosphere of distrust. When the two finally set forth with
Śalya at the reins, Karṇa's horses 'fell down on the ground' (*nipetus
taragā bhuvi*; 26.36). And one must assume that when Karṇa's chariot
wheel gets stuck in the earth leading to his death, it has something
to do with his driver. Whereas Kṛṣṇa saves Arjuna by pressing their
chariot down, Śalya is of no use to Karṇa during the latter's efforts to
lift his chariot up from its rut. Yet when Karṇa is slain, Śalya has no
trouble driving off the flagless *ratha* to tell Duryodhana of Karṇa's
defeat (67.35).

From these central relations of friendship between combatants and
charioteers, each episode elaborates further to a widened net of friend-
ships that takes in many of the essential motivations of the two epics.
In the *Táin*, Fer Diad is prompted to fight Cúchulainn by a number of
threats and cajolements, the last among the latter being Medb's offer
to him of her own 'intimate friendship' or 'friendly thighs' (*comaid*

doṃ śliasaidsea; I 2601; latter translation by Kinsella 1970:169. Yet it seems that Medb is lying to Fer Diad when she taunts him into fighting by telling him that Cúchulainn had boasted that he would kill him (I 2609–2610). Then Cúchulainn's 'friend' (*popa*) Fergus, who has sided with Connacht against his own native Ulster, comes to give his countryman Cúchulainn a 'friendly warning' (*co rrobad ocus co n-airchisecht*; I 2721–2723) that he will face a formidable foe in Fer Diad. And more particularly, he alerts Cúchulainn to the underlying issue by stringing together a number of terms that reflect different aspects of the theme at hand: Cúchulainn must fight his friend (*carae*), companion (*coicle*), and foster brother (*comalta*; II 2727). Indeed, it would seem that throughout the Fer Diad episode the terminology of friendship (*caratrad, cairddine, cairdes*) is persistently developed and illustrated in relation to such other themes as fosterage, kinship, and loyalty to province, king, or queen.

As I have argued elsewhere (Hiltebeitel 1976:254–266), the *Mahābhārata* offers a similar anatomy of the theme of friendship in the *Karṇaparvan.* By reputation, according to Yudhiṣṭhira, Karṇa is the 'enhancer of the joy of his friends, like the destroyer to his foes' (*suhṛdānandavardhanam antakābhamitrāṇām*; 8.46.9); and Kṛṣṇa describes him as 'destroyer of the fear of his friends' (*mitrāṇā-mabhayaṃkaraḥ* 51.61). And it is Karṇa who speaks authoritatively on the proverbial theme of 'seven-paced friendship' (29.21–24) when he denounces Śalya as an apparent false friend. Yet the *Mahābhārata* also provides a behind-the-scenes intrigue from which the audience knows that Karṇa's distrust (see 8.2 7.95) is well-founded. Śalya is a disloyal charioteer. In a scene which follows directly upon Kṛṣṇa's agreement to drive for Arjuna, Śalya makes an 'improper' (*akartavya*) pact with Yudhiṣṭhira to drive for Karṇa when the latter fights against Arjuna, and, while doing so, to destroy Karṇa's splendor or energy (*tejovadha*; 5.8.25–27).

Thus Karṇa, the model of friendship, is caught in a situation where his charioteer is a false friend loyal to Yudhiṣṭhira, to whom Śalya stands in the relation of maternal uncle. Moreover, Yudhiṣṭhira has prompted an improper breach of friendship in a situation where it is recognized to be essential: in the rapport between warrior and charioteer, exemplified in the indissoluble friendship of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, Karṇa and Śalya's opponents. Further, opposite Yudhiṣṭhira as a dharmic ('just') king who prompts a violation of friendship is Duryodhana, the adharmic ('unjust') king whose friendship with Karṇa,

frequently stressed in the *Karṇaparvan* (e.g. 6.18; 27.94), is never
violated by either party. It is also Duryodhana who seeks valiantly to
bring about a 'friendly' relation between Karṇa and Śalya prior to their
setting off for combat. Indeed, according to a passage which the Criti-
cal Edition rejects but which is widely found in both the Northern and
Southern recensions, Duryodhana appeals to them form 'the condi-
tion of friendship' (*sakhibhāvena*; 8.40,* *apud* 8.30.86). Add to this
that Kṛṣṇa speaks as a 'friend' (*suhṛd*; 8.49.1. and ff.) when he saves
Arjuna and Yudhiṣṭhira from a seemingly hopeless impasse: enraged
that Arjuna should delay in fighting Karṇa, Yudhiṣṭhira tells him to
give his bow Gāṇḍīva to someone else; but Arjuna had vowed to kill
anyone who spoke such an insult. Kṛṣṇa manages to defuse this situ-
ation by telling Arjuna to 'kill' Yudhiṣṭhira by addressing him in the
familiar (*tvam*), and then to 'kill' himself for this sin by praising his
own merit. This episode thus not only extends the issues of friendship
and the rapport between champion and king, but also the themes of
symbolic fratricide and—as will be discussed further—of praise and
reproach. Furthermore, as the *Táin* does with the Fer Diad episode,
the *Mahābhārata* uses the *Karṇaparvan* to diversify the vocabulary of
friendship. *Suhṛd* (6.18; 27.68; 28.2; 46.9; 49.1; 64.26 and 29; 67.19),
mitra (27.73 and 102; 29.21–23; 46.9; 64.27), and *sakhi* (27.94; 637
64.29) are used over and over again, and in telling contexts, sometimes
interchangeably and sometimes with differentiations implied, as with
the following words of Karṇa to Śalya: 'Because you are a *sakhi*, a
suhṛd, and also a *mitra* (*sakhibhāvena sauhardānmitrabhāvena caiva
hi*), for these three reasons, O Śalya, you now live' (8.386* *apud* 306,
found in all Southern and most Northern manuscripts). For what it
is worth, the commentator Nīlakaṇṭha relates *mitra* to Śalya's desire
for the success of Duryodhana, *suhṛd* to Karṇa's own indulgence of
Śalya, and, most interestingly, *sakhi* to Śalya's service as charioteer
(*sārathyenopakārakatvam*; comm. to 8.43.7 in Kinjawadekar 1931:
Karṇaparvan, p. 78).

Finally, as if in confirmation of the importance of the 'friendship'
theme in the *Karṇaparvan*, there is the connection made by the text
itself between the slaying of Karṇa by Arjuna and that of the demon
Vṛtra by Indra. As argued elsewhere (Hiltebeitel 1976: 216–265), the
connection is probably made on the basis of the mythic theme, ana-
lyzed by Dumézil in connection with the 'second function sin of the
warrior' (Dumézil 1970: 20, 72–81), of Indra's breaking of 'friendship'
(*sakhyam*) with Vṛtra at the encouragement of his 'intimate friend'
(*yújyaḥ sákhā; Ṛg Veda* 1.22.19) Viṣṇu.

3. Praise and Reproach. The duties of the charioteer are not limited to skills of horsemanship. As A. L. Basham summarizes for the Indian material, the *sūta* 'combined the functions of royal charioteer, herald, and bard, and was often the friend and confidant of the king' (Basham 1959: 90). The Irish *arae* was also charioteer, herald, friend, and confidant. Unlike the Indian figure, however, the *arae* does not, at least in his name, cover the role of 'bard' (see Horsch 1966: 423–424), which is of course an Old Irish word. Yet some of the 'bardic' functions and skills of the Indian *sūta* are also performed by the *arae.*

For one thing, it would seem that the charioteer has in both traditions a unique revelatory function. The warrior sees the true nature of what he encounters through what he hears from his charioteer. Thus Fer Diad's charioteer describes the awesome arrival of Cúchulainn (I 2943–2974). With Cúchulainn and Laeg the pattern is somewhat muted. Laeg will elaborately describe mysterious arrivals such as those of Lug mac Ethlend, Cúchulainn's divine father (I 2092–2104), or Fergus (I 2702–2723), but it is each time Cúchulainn who knows who it is from Laeg's description. There is, however, one passage which hints that the charioteer might be expected to have a remarkable skill in intuitively assessing the foe and the terrain of battle. Cúchulainn directs Laeg's attention to the tracks left by Medb's entire army in the snow, and says: 'Make an estimate of the host for us…that we may know their number.' When Laeg is confused, however, it is Cúchulainn who applies his 'gift of reckoning'[4] to inform Laeg: 'There are here in number eighteen divisions, but the eighteenth division, that is, the division of the Gailióin [Leinstermen] has been distributed among the whole host so that it is confusing to count them' (I 315–329).

One may be reminded here that Arjuna has his charioteer Kṛṣṇa drive him between the two armies of the Kauravas and Pāndavas before the battle of Kurukṣetra. There Arjuna 'surveys' (*nir-ikṣ-, paś-; Bhagavad Gītā* 1.2 2–26) the hosts and hears Kṛṣṇa deliver the *Bhagavad Gītā* amidst the eighteen army divisions assembled for the battle.[5] And in the *Karṇaparvan* Kṛṣṇa delivers a long extended simile

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[4] See now Hiltebeitel 2001a, 233–34 on the "counting 'magic' (*vidyā*)" or "heart of the dice" that Nala as charioteer gets from King Rtuparṇa in exchange for the "heart of horsemanship"(*Mahābhārata* 3.69.33–70.26).

[5] There may be a significant connection between Irish and Indian usages of the number eighteen. In both the *Táin* and *Mahābhārata*, eighteen divisions seems to connote an entire army. Medb's dispersal of the Gailióin and the alignment of the seven Pāṇḍava and eleven Kaurava divisions are both images of the destruction of that totality. The *Mahābhārata*'s seven-eleven opposition has a remarkable Irish parallel in the myth of

describing the battlefield to Arjuna, revealing in mystery-laden terms
that the terrible scene of carnage is nonetheless a scene of beauty like
the heavens strewn with stars (8.14.26–59; repeated in the Northern
recension preceding 8.41; see 8, App. I, No. 16, and cf. 7.123.30–41;
see also Hiltebeitel 1980a: 108). The *Mahābhārata* reserves a similar
all-seeing role for the *sūta* Saṃjaya, who describes the battle to the
blind Dhṛtarāṣtra.[6]

The most striking analogies, however, emerge from an examination
of the charioteer's role in arousing the martial ardor of the warrior by
sensing the appropriate moments for utterances of praise and reproach.
It is the *Táin* which gives the clearest expression of the theory behind
such a function. Says Cúchulainn to Laeg on the morning of the final
day of fighting with Fer Diad: 'Therefore if it is I who am defeated this
day you must incite me and revile me and speak evil of me so that my
ire and anger shall rise thereby (*ara nderna-su mo grísad ocus mo glá-
mad ocus olc do ráda rim gorop móite eir m'fir ocus m'fergg foromm*).
But if it be I who inflict defeat, you must exhort me and praise me and
speak well of me that thereby my courage rise higher' (*are nderna-su
mo monod ocus mo molod ocus maithius do rád frim gorop móti lim
no menma*; II 3271–3275). In its more condensed version, Recension I
limits the contrast to two of the verbs just used: *gressaid*, 'incites, urges,
stimulates, provokes (used in egging on a warrior)' (Marstrander and
Quin 1913–1975: s.v.) and *molaid*, 'praise' (I 3082–3084).

It is clear that in the most general terms the charioteer serves the
warrior by making judicious use of the arts of eulogy and satire that
have such a major place in Indo-European value systems with their
emphasis on shame, disgrace, honor, and fame (Ward 1973; Friedrich
1973; Redfield 1975). But in more particular terms, the similarities in
the ways that the Fer Diad and Karṇa episodes employ this theme
provide strong evidence that we are working with narrative traditions
that bear some significant relation to each other. Let us now look at
the uses of praise and rebuke by the two pairs of warrior and chari-
oteer 'friends' as they prepare for battle.

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the First Battle of Moytura, where there are seven Túatha Dé Danann divisions and
eleven Fir Bolg divisions (Fraser 1915: 27; cf. Stein 1936).

[6] Compare the revelatory role of Bruno as charioteer for the blind king Haraldus
Hyldetan in Saxo Grammaticus account of the Battle of Brávellir (Wikander 1960a:184,
189).

The *Táin* launches its development of this theme on the night before combat. Laeg tells Cúchulainn that Fer Diad will arrive next morning well adored for battle; thus Cúchulainn should go 'where you will get the same adoring,' to spend the night with his wife Emer (1 2808–28 12; II omits this exchange). By moving directly to the contrastingly unsolicitous dialogue between Fer Diad and his charioteer, the text hints that Laeg's advice was beneficial and the night with Emer relaxing.

Fer Diad, however, starts his night carousing with his dispirited friends, who fear his death, and then either sleeps fitfully, filled with 'anxiety' (*ceist*; II 2797 and 2833), or not at all, a prey to 'great anxieties' (*inṡníma móra*; I 2821 and 2822). Wrought with tension, he rises early and orders his charioteer to harness the horses, but the charioteer begins their dialogue on the discouraging note that it would be better for Fer Diad if he stayed where he was (II 2802–2803; I 2831–2832). After Fer Diad urges their departure so that he might kill Cúchulainn and is told it is likelier he will fall, he castigates his charioteer for his 'diffidence' (*náire*; I 2852; II 2822) and summons up his own bravery.

The two then set off amidst inauspicious signs and reach the ford. There (only in Recension I) Fer Diad asks twice if his charioteer can yet see Cúchulainn. To the second query the charioteer replies sarcastically, "Cú Chulainn is no small hidden trifle, whatever he might be' (2828). After further exchange, Fer Diad asks his charioteer to prepare the chariot so that he can catch up on his sleep before the fight. "Alas," said the charioteer, "such a sleep is the sleep of a doomed one faced by stag and hounds." "Why then, driver, are you not capable of keeping watch for me?" 'I am," said the driver, "and unless they come out of the clouds and air to attack you, none shall come from east or from west to fight with you without due warning" (I 2901–2908). Fer Diad is of course unable to sleep, or does so only fitfully, his anxiety increased by these satirical and rather telling metaphors for his situation. He is like 'a doomed one faced by stag and hounds,' Cúchulainn being by name the 'Hound of Culann.' And he is safe unless his opponents 'come out of the clouds," most likely an allusion to the Túatha Dé Danann, the gods who come down from 'clouds of mist' when they first appear in Ireland (Cross and Slover 1969: 28; 'Second Battle of Mag Tured'), and with whom Cúchulainn is associated (as noted above, he is the son of Lug; see also II 2844–2849; 3602–3604). The texts then turn briefly to Cúchulainn's preparations, Laeg complying in all matters and driving

Cúchulainn to the ford. Here Recension I has Fer Diad's charioteer awaken him from his restless slumber and describe Laeg and Cúchulainn's awesome arrival in extolling terms.

Both recensions now converge with interesting variants. In Recension I, Fer Diad says twice that his charioteer praises Cúchulainn too highly, the second time adding 'for he has not given you a reward for his praise' (I 2975–2980). In the *Book of Leinster* he says the constant praise of Cúchulainn 'is almost a cause of strife' (II 2884–2886). Both these complaints are in prose. Then in verse Fer Diad continues: 'It is time now for help. Be silent, do not praise him (*nach ṁbladaig*). It was no deed of friendship, for he is not doom over the brink' (II 2890–2893; I 2982–2985 with minor variations). The charioteer replies that Cúchulainn heads toward them rushing 'like the swift thunderbolt' (*thorund tricc*; I 2998; II 2905), and in Recension I adds that he praises him for his 'excellence' (*is ar maith romalam*; 2996). Fer Diad replies: 'So much have you praised him that it is almost cause of a quarrel (*súail nach fotha [conais] a romét ras molais*). Why have you chosen him since you came forth from your house?' (II 2906–2909; I 2999–3003 with minor variations). One sees how thoroughly the themes of praise and reproach are linked with the anatomy of friendship. At this point, Fer Diad and Cúchulainn meet and exchange their own boasts, reproaches, and evocation of their own friendship. And then they fight.

Recension I provides only a capsule version of the fighting, but retains the essentials. In the words already cited, Cúchulainn tells Laeg before the dual to praise him and rebuke him at the appropriate moments. In the *Book of Leinster* Cúchulainn makes this request on the fourth and decisive day of combat. It is most instructive to examine how Laeg fulfills this duty. In Recension I he leaps immediately to the insults: 'Your opponent goes over you as a tail goes over a cat. He belabours you as flax heads (?) are beaten in a pond. He chastises you as a fond woman chastises her son' (I 3085–3087). And the attenuated description of Fer Diad's death follows. In the *Book of Leinster*, which surely preserves the context in which these words were appropriate, Laeg speaks similarly at a point when Fer Diad has gained a momentary advantage, again mentioning the comparisons to a mother chastening her child and flax beaten in a pond, and adding: 'He has ground you as a mill grinds malt. He has pierced you as a tool pierces an oak. He has bound you as a twining plant binds trees. He has attacked you as a hawk attacks little birds, so that never again will you have a claim

or right or title to valour or feats of arms, you distorted little sprite'
(*siriti síabarthi bic*; II 3303–3310). Upon which Cúchulainn goes into
his 'distortions' (*riastrad*) and kills Fer Diad.

One must appreciate that both Cúchulainn and Fer Diad have been
addressed by their charioteers in terms of praise and rebuke that draw
upon such metaphoric comparisons. In both cases the most significant
comparisons are unflattering. But whereas Fer Diad is addressed before
the combat in images that unnerve him, Cúchulainn is addressed in
the very midst of fighting, as he had requested, in terms that incite
'my ire and anger.'

Turning to the *Karṇaparvan*, the ingredients are identical. The
Mahābhārata does, however, provide greater narrative depth in setting
a background for the episode. As already indicated, Śalya has made an
'improper' agreement with Yudhiṣṭhira to destroy Karṇa's *tejas*, his
'energy' or 'splendor.' The text never makes it precise how he does
this, but it would seem that his efforts are threefold: first, his rather
haphazard driving; second, his duplicity as a 'false friend'; and third,
as with Fer Diad's charioteer, his misuse of the charioteer's skills in the
arts of praise and rebuke.

When Duryodhana finally gets Śalya to agree to drive for Karṇa,
Śalya insists on one condition: 'But there will be a certain agree-
ment (*samaya*) between me and Vaikartana [Karṇa], that I may utter
words as I wish (or 'according to faith, confidence': *yathāśraddham*)
in his presence' (8.23.53). After further words from Duryodhana, he
reiterates, but with more precision and greater duplicity: 'May you
(Duryodhana) and Karṇa pardon wholly all that which I may say to
Karṇa out of desire for (his) welfare, whether agreeable or disagree-
able' (*hitakāmaṃ priyāpriyam*; 25.6). When Karṇa accepts, Śalya then
sets the terms in which their exchange will follow: 'self-censure and
self-adoration, censure of others and praise of others, are four kinds
of conduct improper for *āryas*' (*ātmanindātmapūjā ca paranindā
parastavaḥ/ anācaritamāryāṇāṃ vṛttametaccaturvidham*; 25.8). His
restrictions would seem to apply to *āryas* praising or rebuking them-
selves or others of their own status or kind, and not to *sūta*s for whom
censure and praise of others are clearly part of the job. What is notable
about Śalya is that he immediately violates not only his own tenet but
his role as a *sūta* by launching into self-praise, supposedly to bolster
Karṇa's confidence in him (25.8).

After various preparations, Karṇa tells Śalya to proceed so that
he can slay Arjuna and the other Pāṇḍavas (26.24). Thus begins the

tejovadha, at least in its praise-and-blame aspect. Śalya tells Karṇa he should not 'disregard' (*ava-man*) the Pāṇḍavas (26.27), and says repeatedly that he should cease his boasting (*katthana*). He reminds Karṇa of Arjuna's past deeds, including Karṇa's earlier defeat at his hands, and concludes: 'This good fight (*suyuddham*) is, moreover, now presented again for your destruction (*tava nidhanāya*). If you do not flee from fear of the foe, gone to battle now, O *sūta's* son, you are slain' (26.69). Undaunted by this very harsh speech (*bahuparuṣam*; 26.70 and repeatedly), however, Karṇa continues to boast, saying over and over that he will give untold wealth to whoever locates Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa for him so he can kill them. To this, Śalya replies with a smile that Karṇa will have no trouble finding his opponents (27.18). These exchanges, of course, duplicate those in which Fer Diad's charioteer tells him he would be better off not fighting, and that Cúchulainn is 'no small hidden trifle' that cannot be seen.

The insults then begin to fly, and in a form that holds further reminders of exchanges in the *Táin*. 'We surely have not heard of two lions felled in battle by a jackal' (27.27), taunts Śalya. And when Karṇa says that Śalya cannot frighten him, Śalya, 'wishing to anger Karṇa exceedingly' (*cukopayiṣuratyarthaṃ karṇam*; 30), launches a string of satirical, uncomplimentary comparisons (*upamā*) reminiscent of those spoken by the charioteers in the *Táin*. As Smith (1972: 60) has noticed, the passage seems to have developed from a *triṣṭubh* core. Thus Śalya begins with four 'satires' in *triṣṭubh*s: Karṇa is like a little boy in his mother's lap seeking to seize the moon; proceeding against Arjuna is like rubbing up against a *triśūla*, the weapon of Śiva; he is like a foolish little deer challenging a huge wrathful lion; and like a satiated jackal against a lion (26.33–36). The first comparison reminds us of one of the two spoken by Laeg in both recensions of the *Táin*: 'he chastises you as a fond woman chastises her son.' Śalya then continues with sixteen more such unflattering comparisons in *śloka*s (26.3.7–52). Karṇa then takes up the gauntlet and roundly denounces Śalya's homeland of Madra. And Śalya answers by returning to the satiric similes, this time recounting at length the marvelous and pointed 'simile of the crow' (*kākopamā*) who lives, like Karṇa, on others' leftovers (*ucchiṣṭa*) yet thinks so highly of himself that he seeks to out-fly a swan (*haṃsa*; 8.28). After this long and elaborate insult, Śalya then concludes abruptly: 'Those two are lions among men, you are a dog among men' (*nṛsiṃhau tau naraśvā tvam*; 28.66).

Once the confrontation in the *Karṇaparvan* begins, Śalya's perfor-
mance as charioteer is more ambiguous. Twice he speaks words of
encouragement (8.57.14–32) in describing Arjuna's approach; 62.945,
after Karṇa is horrified by the death of Duḥśāsana). But he also con-
tinues with occasional taunts (e.g. 34.14, comparing the approach of
Bhīma to the 'fire of time' about to destroy the three worlds); and he
returns to treachery when he disturbs Karṇa's aim of one of his choicest
arrows by saying: 'This arrow will not reach [Arjuna's] neck, O Karṇa.
Having aimed it, fix another arrow that can strike the head' (66.7). To
which the enraged Karṇa replies that he is not the type of 'crooked'
warrior to aim the same arrow twice (8). As to Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, there
is no such extended development of the theme of praise-and-reproach
through similes as there is in the speeches of Śalya. Kṛṣṇa uses them
only intermittently, and in stock phrases (43.25, telling Arjuna that
Karṇa destroys the Pāṇḍavas as an elephant crushes lotuses; 43.42, he
rushes toward Arjuna to his death like a moth into a lamp; 51.99, he
destroys the Pāṇḍava forces as a fire does insects, or (106) as a disease
ravages the body). But when Arjuna finally proceeds against Karṇa
for their final duel, Kṛṣṇa does praise Arjuna extensively to still his
anxiety, though warning him not to take Karṇa lightly (50.49–65 and
51). And the Northern Recension concludes his speech with words
that recall the similes used by Śalya to Karṇa: 'He whose tongue is a
sword, whose mouth is a bow, whose teeth are arrows, bold, proud,
a tiger among men—slay Karṇa, O Dhanaṃjaya. I know you by your
energy and power. Slay the hero Karṇa in battle like a lion an elephant'
(8.754,* lines 1–4, *apud* 50.65).

In contriving such similes, the poetic or 'bardic' role of the charioteer
is evident. *Upamā* is classified as one of the four original *alaṃkāra*s,
or poetic figures of speech, and as a rhetorical device it has from its
earliest descriptions a distinction of similes of praise (*praśaṃsa*) and
blame (*nindā*) (Gerow 1971: 140–145). Such contrivance of similes, of
course, also stands out as the most prominent of the bardic functions
we have seen performed by the *arae*, the Irish charioteer.

4. Deaths and Concluding Remarks. The number and variety of
specific convergences observed between these episodes from the Irish
and Indian epics requires, I think, serious consideration of the likeli-
hood of a significant relationship between them. Minimally, it might
be assumed that the two traditions developed their narratives inde-
pendently, based on their experiences with similar artifacts, social

relations, and values. But this underestimates the narrative consistencies of these two stories. As the episodes are presented, they are more than just two sets of common elements. They are stories which weave their common threads into recognizably similar wholes. It would thus seem that we are dealing with related tales. Since borrowing in either direction is most unlikely, it is not unreasonable to propose that the two traditions have each preserved and further developed on their own an archaic epic theme.

Indo-Irish parallels have, of course, been observed before, especially in connection with themes of kingship (Dillon 1963: 214–215, 1969, 1973; Dumézil 1971; Dubuisson 1978b, 1978c; Krappe 1942). Here, however, the two scenes center on the figures of the champion and the charioteer. Yet rapports with royal figures are not absent. It is intriguing that in both epics it is only after the champions Cúchulainn and Arjuna defeat these two last hopes of the opposition that the kings whom they represent—Conchobor and Yudhiṣṭhira—finally gear themselves up for their only serious participation in the respective battles. Thus Conchobor leads the Ulstermen, lifted from their pangs, into the final battle; and on the last day of battle Yudhiṣṭhira, recovered from the wounds that had bedridden him on the previous day of Karṇa's fall, sallies forth to claim his own battle-'share' or victim, none other than Śalya (see Hiltebeitel 1976: 266–286). Recalling that our two main episodes are preceded by the combats of Arjuna and Cúchulainn with a group or series of suicidal foes, one might propose that the two epics preserve the themes found in the Karṇa and Fer Diad episodes in similar epic contexts. This, of course, cuts against the grain of several scholarly views, such as those which see the epics as relatively recent fantasies, or as embellishments of historical traditions. But it is to be seriously doubted whether the promoters of either view could effectively argue for two such similar independent inventions, or historical prototypes in separate national traditions. More particularly, as regards *Mahābhārata* scholarship, one must be cautioned against views which assume that the epic is made intelligible as the product of just one cultural context, or as a transposition of the mythology known to one particular period. Dumézil is certainly right that when the earth swallows Karṇa's chariot wheel, the epic poets are evoking a Vedic theme (Dumézil 1974: 135–138); there is also some significance of the opposition of Karṇa and Arjuna as sons of the Sun god and the god of storms (*ibid.* 130–133). And Madeleine Biardeau (1978: 173–174) has added considerable depth to our understanding of Karṇa as repre-

senting the errant sun of the *pralaya* (the 'dissolution' of the worlds). But neither approach does more than scratch the surface of the themes that dominate the *Karṇaparvan*, which are best understood by assuming that the story is fundamentally an archaic piece of epic enriched through its long life by correlations with themes 'old' and 'new.'

Building upon this premise, one can propose certain hypotheses about the archaic features of the episodes in the two epics. The Indian epic clearly enriches its account with multileveled mythic associations (not only with Indra and Sūrya, but as already indicated with Indra, Viṣṇu, and Vṛtra, with Nara and Nārāyaṇa, and also with the myth of Śiva's destruction of Tripura where Brahmā serves as Śiva's charioteer [8.24]). It also gives depth to the story by drawing it into connection with other incidents and fatalities in the epic (not only Śalya's agreement to destroy Karṇa's *tejas*, but the curse by Karṇa's guru Bhārgava Rāma that Karṇa will forget his weapon at the time of his death [8.29.3–7], the curse of a brahmin, whose *homa* cow Karṇa shot, that Karṇa's chariot wheel would get stuck [29.27–29]; and others). The *Táin*, on the contrary, yields little in the way of mythic associations except for allusions, already cited, to the Túatha Dé Danann who back Cúchulainn. And it draws the Fer Diad episode into rapport with the rest of the *Táin* only minimally, leaving us in the dark on several crucial points such as the identity of Fer Diad's charioteer and the reason(s) for his 'unfriendly' behaviour. In dealing with different treatments such as these, one must steer a careful course. It is likely that the Hinduized Indian tradition has in most of these cases continually remythologized the episode and rewoven it into the larger epic; but it is also likely that the Christianized Irish tradition has demythologized the episode and detached it, in its present form as a stylistically 'late' piece, from the larger *Táin* or the Ulster Cycle. In any case, one mythological correlation seems archaic. Just as the Túatha Dé Danann appear around Cúchulainn along with shrieking goblins, sprites, fiends of the glen, and demons of the air to raise a cry about Cúchulainn 'so that the fear and terror and horror and fright that he inspired might be all the greater' (II 2845–2849), so the Devas choose the duel between Arjuna and Karṇa to declare their favoritism for Arjuna, appearing in the sky along with the Asuras and every imaginable class of spirits, goblins, and mythological beings, all also deciding for one hero or the other.

There is, however, one difference between the two episodes that cannot be explained in terms of either Indian amplifications or Irish

retractions. It concerns the deaths of Karṇa and Fer Diad. If the epi-
sodes are related, this is the one point where we must assume that at
least one tradition has *changed* the story. Here I can only propose the
most likely hypothesis. As noted earlier, both Fer Diad and Karṇa are
protected by some kind of natural self-defense or armor. As the *Táin*
puts it, it is this protection—in Fer Diad's case his 'horn skin'—that
counterbalances his opponent's possession of the most destructive of
all weapons, the *ga bolga*, and leaves the two warriors thus fundamen-
tally equal. Now it is only in the *Táin* that these two devices—armor
versus weapon—figure in the death scene of the combat. It is thus
natural to assume that the *Táin* has preserved the older form of the
story. In a passage that leaves some matters quite uncertain, Cúchu-
lainn hurls a spear that makes Fer Diad raise his shield 'over the breast
plate of the horn skin,' and then hurls the *ga bulga* so that it 'entered
Fer Diad's body through the anus and filled every joint and limb of
him with its barbs' (II 3348–3359; c.f. I 3091–3100).

It seems quite likely that such a crude demise, perhaps with over-
tones of homosexuality that might, in a Lévi-Straussian sense, be taken
as the result of an 'overvaluation' of friendship, have lost its way amidst
changing Indian tastes. In any event, one can propose a quite plausible
account of what the Indian poets *could* have done in altering such an
ending. As already indicated, thanks to Indra, Karṇa loses his natural
coat of mail just prior to the war. It thus cannot figure in his death.
Moreover, Arjuna's advantage is undercut, for not only does he have
the Pāśupata weapon, but so—at least according to the *Karṇaparvan*—
does Karṇa (8.43.21). Thus when it comes to the final scene where
Karṇa's chariot wheel gets stuck, Arjuna will use a different weapon.
He seems to get the Pāśupata ready to shoot, if that is what is meant
when he unites one of his arrows with the *raudra* weapon (66.59). But
if he discharges this arrow, it takes no toll.[7] It is instead a different
and rather unusual weapon called the *añjalika* that Arjuna selects for
the coup de grace. As he aims, he utters the following 'act of truth'
(*satyakriyā*) (see Dillon 1947, 1963:215–217; Brown 1972; Hiltebeitel
1976:207–213; 350): 'This great weapon is unequalled, a firm arrow,
body-piercing, breath-stealing, hardhearted. My austerity is gener-
ated, my gurus are satisfied, and what I desire from friends is also

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[7] It is said here that they do this for him in every battle, but it is significant that
this is where it is mentioned.

heard: by that truth let this arrow, very sharp, invincible, slay my foe Karṇa' (*ayaṃ mahāstro 'pratimo dhṛtaḥ śaraḥ/śarīrabhiccāsuharaśca durhṛdaḥ//tapo 'sti taptaṃ guravaśca toṣitā/mayā yadiṣṭaṃ* [var. *yadīṣṭaṃ*] *suhṛdāṃ tathā śrutam//anena satyena nihantvayaṃ śaraḥ/ sudaṃśitaḥ karṇa-mariṃ mamājitaḥ*; 67.19cd–20). One must appreciate that Arjuna's *satyakriyā* brings its final focus onto the theme of friendship. What he has desired of his friends has always been heard; this holds especially for his friendship with Kṛṣṇa.[8] But the return to this theme also holds a likely key to Arjuna's choice of the *añjalika* weapon to kill Karṇa. This weapon's name is derived from the *añjali*, the gesture of salutation with semi-closed hands raised to the bowed forehead. It is, of course, a gesture that denotes reverence, benediction, and friendship, as when Duryodhana forms the *añjali* to Śalya when he appeals to him, out of friendship, to drive for Karṇa (8.401,* found widely in both Northern and Southern Recensions), and most notably when Arjuna joins his hands in the *añjali* at Kṛṣṇa's bedside (5.7.7) in the scene where he secures Kṛṣṇa's friendship (*sakhyam*; 10) and his service as charioteer (see Hiltebeitel 1976: 102–109).

It would thus seem that the *Mahābhārata* has given this culminating scene its own twist, but one still oriented around the theme of friendship. It is as if the implicit theme of fratricide is resolved symbolically into a death which affirms that the final salutation is that of brothers who are inherently friends.

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[8] There is a frequent variant *yadīṣṭam* for *yadiṣṭam*, making Arjuna say that 'what is desired by [his] friends is heard [by him].' This is even more pointed in its reference to Kṛṣṇa.

THE TWO KṚṢṆAS ON ONE CHARIOT:
UPANIṢADIC IMAGERY AND EPIC MYTHOLOGY

Classical *bhakti* Hinduism, the nonsectarian Hinduism whose social theory, cosmology, and theology are first fully articulated in the two Hindu epics and the *Harivaṃśa*, developed in these mythological texts a theological language of images that has ever since retained its power in mainstream devotional Hinduism. This essay is an exploration of such imagery as it is worked out through the narrative of the *Mahābhārata*, the most fundamental of these texts, "le monument principal, et sans doute le plus ancien, de la *bhakti*."[1] The point of departure for this study is thus an assumption not widely shared but, nonetheless, compelling in its widening application, that the *Mahābhārata* in its classical form is a work of *bhakti* through and through. In other words, no matter what one hypothesizes by way of sources for the story in earlier mythology, heroic legend (I am still of the view that it presupposes an Indo-European and āryan heritage that distinguishes it from its companion texts)[2] or possible history, there are no passages or incidents which on their own permit the reconstruction of either pre-*bhakti* stages of mythologiza-tion[3] or a historical pre-"divinized" or premythological core. Indeed, it is more pointless to look for original human-historical figures and

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[1] Madeleine Biardeau, *L'Hindouisme: Anthropologie d'une civilisation* (Paris: Flammarion, 1981), p. 78, n. 1.

[2] See Alf Hiltebeitel, "Brothers, Friends, and Charioteers: Parallel Episodes in the Irish and Indian Epics," in *Homage to Georges Dumézil*, ed. Edgar Polomé, *Journal of Indo-European Studies* Monograph no. 3 (1982), pp. 85–87.

[3] I must thus revise my argument that the "sacrifice of battle" theme in the *Mahābhārata* was first contoured by the sacrificial ideology of the Brāhmaṇas, and then, only secondarily, by *bhakti*. This may be true, if (as I suspect) there are earlier forms of the story. But in the text as we have it, the epic's understanding of sacrifice is no longer simply that of the Brahmāṇas and is unintelligible without reference to its place in what Biardeau has called "the universe of *bhakti*." For further discussion, see esp. Madeleine Biardeau and Charles Malamoud, *Le Sacrifice dans l'Inde ancienne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976), passim and esp. p. 83, n. 1, criticizing my *The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1976) on this point, a criticism which in principle I accept. See also my review of Biardeau's works, "Toward a Coherent Study of Hinduism," *Religious Studies Review* 9, no. 3 (1983): 206–12.

elements than earlier forms of the story since in the latter case there is
at least something comparative to go on. Rather than being a patchwork
of myths, legends, and historical reminiscences overlaid with *bhakti*,
what the narrative builds up to and works around are a series of what
I would call "*bhakti* tableaux," scenes which present images that hold
themselves before the hearer's mind. Ultimately, they present ways of
seeing the divine through the stories that are akin to the contempora-
neous development of temple iconography, and it is no accident that
many of these epic *bhakti* tableaux continue to find their places on mass
market oleographs in India today. The most obvious such tableau in the
Mahābhārata is, of course, the scene of the Bhagavad Gītā, which will
enter into the discussion later.

This epic language of images is not, however, simply visual (or
visional). It is also highly intellectual.[4] In the hands of the brahman
composers of the *Mahābhārata*, the narrative served as a tool for a
bhakti rereading of *śruti*, of the Vedic Revelation.[5] In its totality, this
of course includes the "transpositions" from Ṛg Vedic mythology
that Wikander and Dumézil have exposed so brilliantly.[6] And it also
incorporates a transformed prolongation of the Brahmānic ideology
of sacrifice.[7] But this essay will concern itself primarily with the com-
ponent of *śruti* that has the most immediate historical bearing on the
epic: the Upaniṣads. For although up to now it has been the natural
tendency to interpret epic mythology in relation to other mytholo-
gies (Vedic, Indo-European, para-Vedic, Brahmāṇic, Purāṇic) or ritual
systems (Indo-European and Brāhmaṇic), it is becoming clear that the
epic's *bhakti* handling of the *śruti* corpus (and of "para-Vedic" bardic
material which it would also seem to incorporate) presupposes the
Upaniṣads.

The matter may thus be formulated as follows: the epic's theologi-
cal language of narrative images serves its authors as a tool to work

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[4] See Madeleine Biardeau, *Études de mythologie hindoue*, vol. 1, *Cosmogonies
purāṇiques* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême Orient, 1981), p. 27.
[5] See Biardeau and Malamoud, p. 141.
[6] Stig Wikander, "Pāṇḍava-sagen och Mahābhāratas mytiska forutsattningar,"
Religion och Bibel 6 (1947): 27–39; Georges Dumézil, *Jupiter Mars Quirinus*, vol. 4,
Explication de textes indiens et latins (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1948),
including a translation of Wikander's article, pp. 37–53, and *Mythe et épopée*, vol. 1,
L'Ideologie des trois fonctions dans les épopées des peuples indo-européens, 2d ed. (Paris:
Gallimard, 1974).
[7] See n. 3 above.

out in *bhakti* terms a number of theological and soteriological issues raised in the Upaniṣads and resolved in them for the most part differently than in the epic (which of course includes the Gītā). It is not the intention of this essay to inventory all of these issues. But the ones that will be central to the discussion can be summarized as follows. The first is theological. As is well known, the Upaniṣads have a tendency to demythologize the Vedic pantheon, to reduce all the gods to one (see *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.9): to the impersonal *brahman* or its personified form Prajāpati or Brahmā. But in the so-called theistic Upaniṣads, which introduce some fundamentals of *bhakti*, the ultimate gods are two, or more exactly they are either Viṣṇu (as in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*) or Śiva (in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*). These same Upaniṣads, however, also introduce the preclassical forms of Yoga and Sāṃkhya, and the *Śvetāśvatara* in particular develops its doctrine of the "three unborns": the Lord (Śiva), the soul (*ātman* or *puruṣa*), and the feminine *pradhāna* or *prakṛti* (Śvet. Up. 1.9–10, 4.5). This latter abstraction can probably be regarded (at least from the perspective of the epic poets) as an "impersonal" way of talking about the Goddess. The theological problem which the epic poets thus inherit from this late development of the *śruti*, which was probably closer to them and their views than the rest of the corpus both conceptually and historically,[8] is one they handle mythologically in terms of two triads. The first of these is the relation between the three gods who emerge in classical Hinduism as what we may call the *bhakti* triad: Viṣṇu, Śiva, and the Goddess. And the second is the triad which Hinduism labels the *trimūrti*: Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Brahmā. As we will see, even though the epic does not condense these triads into the formulae popularized in later *bhakti* Hinduism, it is deeply concerned with the integrity of these interrelated theological configurations and handles the interplay of the deities concerned in terms of theologically charged symbolisms: not only the well-known ones of incarnation and descent but also equally important principles of hierarchy, subordination, kinship, complementarity, and equality.

The second issue is essentially soteriological. As Biardeau has shown, the Upaniṣads as a corpus present classical Hinduism with two

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[8] See Biardeau, *L'Hindouisme*, p. 100 and n. 1, arguing for a connection between the Taittirīya school of the Black *Yajur Veda*, which produced the *Kaṭha* and *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*s and the *bhakti* rereading of *śruti* that gave shape to the *Mahābhārata* (see n. 5 above).

definitions of the absolute, each with its own correlative definition of the "soul" and the spiritual itinerary to deliverance: in the "Vedāntic," "gnostic," or "saṃnyāsic" Upaniṣads (principally the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and the *Chāndogya*) the *ātman-brahman* identity, and in the "yogic" Upaniṣads (especially the "theistic" Kaṭha and Śvetāśvatara) the relation between the supreme divinity (Puruṣa, heir of the Puruṣa of Ṛg Veda 10.90) and the individual soul or *puruṣa*. Whereas the *ātman-brahman* realization is opened primarily for twice-born males who adopt *saṃnyāsa*, the *puruṣa*-Puruṣa itinerary is—as an expression of the universalization of *bhakti*—open to all.[9] It is this double but never mutually exclusive soteriological vocabulary that is taken up by the epic poets. And their primary means of presenting it is in terms of the relations between epic characters and, in particular, the characters who represent the two theological triads mentioned above.

As regards the particular epic images that I will discuss, it should be noted that one of them, the chariot, is the basis of an allegory in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* itself, an allegory which concludes on the soteriological note that the chariot warrior who has the "intellect" (*buddhi*) for his charioteer and all else in tune will reach "the end of the journey, that supreme abode of the all pervading," which is further characterized as the ultimate attainment of the supreme Puruṣa identified as Viṣṇu (Kaṭh. Up. 1.3.9–11). The main focus of this essay, however, will be on the two figures who represent that attunement in the *Mahābhārata*: Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna on their "single chariot." But this topic cannot be developed without attending to the curious terms in which it is presented. On their single chariot, Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa are repeatedly referred to as "the two Kṛṣṇas." This requires me to take up afresh a larger issue concerning the multiple usages of the name Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*.

When I first discussed this matter in *The Ritual of Battle*,[10] I focused on the meaning of the name (*kṛṣṇa* = black or dark) as it bears on three of the epic's leading figures. It was noted that "black" and "darkness" resonate associations with the dark Kali Yuga, with the earth,

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[9] See Biardeau, *Études*, pp. 24–32, and *L'Hindouisme*, pp. 33–34; Biardeau and Malamoud, pp. 79–80.

[10] Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle*, pp. 60–76. Vishnu S. Sukthankar and S. K. Belvalkar, eds., *The Mahābhārata for the First Time Critically Edited*, 19 vols. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental: Research Institute, 1933–66); all citations in parentheses in the text not otherwise marked are to the *Mahābhārata*, in this edition.

with Śūdras; and with themes of contrast and mediation with other color-related figures (principally associated with white, yellow, red, and blue). The "three Kṛṣṇas" discussed were Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva ("son of Vasudeva," i.e., Kṛṣṇa the incarnation of Viṣṇu), Kṛṣṇā Draupadī ("daughter of Drupada," the heroine, incarnation of Śrī), and Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana ("the island-born Kṛṣṇa," the alleged author of the epic, grandfather of the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas, and also an incarnation of a "portion" of Viṣṇu). A comparison of this threesome with the triad of Rāmas—a term also meaning "black"—who are each regarded as incarnations of Viṣṇu (Rāma Dāśarathi, Bhārgava Rāma, and Balarāma), showed that both were in effect "Vaiṣṇava" triads. In the *Mahābhārata* threesome, however, instead of three males there are two dark incarnations of Viṣṇu and one of his wife (Śrī-Lakṣmī). Such a perspective yielded a number of insights. But as more recent studies have made clear, it is far from exhaustive and, particularly on the theological side, quite incomplete.

Draupadī is the incarnation of Śrī-Lakṣmī, but her dark aspect is linked with themes of impurity, inauspiciousness, and destruction evocative of darker forms of the Goddess.[11] Kṛṣṇa, too, like most *avatāras* of Viṣṇu, reveals "rudraic" dimensions.[12] But most important, the theme of the "three Kṛṣṇas" hinges on the rapport of these two not with Vyāsa (Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana) but with Arjuna, who has important affinities with Śiva.[13] For Arjuna is also a Kṛṣṇa. Unaware in my earlier discussion of his rapport with Śiva, however, I treated his name Kṛṣṇa too lightly: "A fourth Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna, receives this name only through his connection with Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva in instances where, recalling their mystical identity as Nara-Nārāyaṇa, the dual case is used to refer to them as 'the two Kṛṣṇas' (Kṛṣṇau)."[14] Such a formulation, though correct in this one correlation, is inadequate as regards others. This essay will thus focus on one aspect of Arjuna's identity as a "Kṛṣṇa" that bears directly on his affinity with Śiva. The obvious mistake that we are beginning to rectify is the tendency to look for one-to-one correlations

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[11] See Alf Hiltebeitel, "Draupadī's Hair," in *Puruṣārtha* (*Autour de la déesse hindoue*, ed. Madeleine Biardeau) 5 (1981): 179–211.

[12] For instance, in the eleventh chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā*. See esp. Madeleine Biardeau, "Études de mythologie hindoue (IV), II: *Bhakti* et a*vatāra*," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient* 63 (1976): 182–85 and *passim* (henceforth EMH IV).

[13] See Alf Hiltebeitel, "Śiva, the Goddess and the Disguises of the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī," *History of Religions* 20 (1980): 153–68, 174.

[14] Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle* (n. 3 above), p. 61.

in Hindu mythology. In the background of this discussion, however,
it should also be kept in mind that one group of three Kṛṣṇas—Kṛṣṇa,
Arjuna, and Draupadī—represents the *bhakti* triad of Viṣṇu, Śiva, and
the Goddess, and that another—Kṛṣṇa Arjuna, and Vyāsa—may more
remotely evoke the three gods of the *trimūrti.* For Vyāsa, as Bruce Sul-
livan has perceived,[15] has certain affinities with Brahmā, But my main
focus will be on Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa.

The Two Kṛṣṇas

It has long been observed that Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa's identity as the "two
Kṛṣṇas" is related to other paired, and sometimes dual, identities of the
two figures. They are thus incarnations of the divine "friends" Indra and
Viṣṇu[16] and reincarnations of the inseparable *ṛṣi*s Nara and Nārāyaṇa;[17]
they are referred to with such paired names as Guḍakeśa (Arjuna) and
Hṛṣīkeśa (Kṛṣṇa), Viṣṇu and Jiṣṇu, and even Kṛṣṇa (black) and Arjuna
(white); and they are referred to by other names in the dual, such as the
"two Acyutas" (1.218.39). One finds their complementarity also evoked
in the formulas long ago noted by Sylvain Lévi and correctly identified
by him as encapsulating a central epic message: "Where Kṛṣṇa is, there
is victory"[18]—"victory" (Jaya, Vijaya) being a name of Arjuna.

  A heavy stacking and texturing of overlapping, and to some extent
hierarchalized, themes and formulae is thus evident. In the case of
the rapport between Viṣṇu and Indra, many of the connections with
Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna have already been discussed elsewhere.[19] The Nara-
Nārāyaṇa identity, evoking the relation of the soul (*nara = puruṣa*)
and Viṣṇu in his form as the supreme Puruṣa or Nārāyaṇa, has been
treated decisively by Biardeau.[20] And the *yatas/tatas* formulae obvi-

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    [15] Bruce Sullivan (Ph.D. diss. University of Chicago, in progress). See now Sullivan
1990.
    [16] See Jan Gonda, *Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism* (1954; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsi-
dass, 1969): pp. 159–61.
    [17] See Madeleine Biardeau, "Études de mythelogie hindoue (V), II: *Bhakti* et *avatāra*,"
Bulletin de l'Eeole Française d'Extrême Orient 65 (1978): 89–93 (henceforth EMH V).
See also the earlier bibliography in Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle*, pp. 61, n. 6, 257,
n. 23.
    [18] Sylvain Lévi, "Tato Jayam Udirayet," trans. L. G. Khare, *Annals of the Bhandarkar
Oriental Research Institute* 1 (1918–19): 13–20.
    [19] See Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle, passim.*
    [20] See n. 17 above.

ously relate to epic themes concerning dharma and the inevitability of victory for the side led by Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. But these identities are not as immediately linked to the specifics of the epic narrative as is the double identity of the "two Kṛṣṇas."

Statistics provide an accurate orientation to the fundamental issues. Of the eighty-one references to Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa as "the two Kṛṣṇas" cited in Sörensen's *Index*, sixty-nine (or 85 percent) are found in the four war books.[21] The remaining twelve references, found only in the prewar books, are all equally connected with combat scenes and themes: the burning of the Khāṇḍava Forest, the killing of Jarāsaṃdha, and the anticipation of the war itself. As to references to the two Kṛṣṇas within the war books, thirty appear in the *Droṇaparvan* and twenty-eight in the *Karṇaparvan*, these fifty-eight thus constituting 72 percent of the total number of appearances. Considering that the *Karṇaparvan* is little more than half the length of the *Droṇaparvan*, it thus has the greatest concentration of references per verse in the epic. It should thus be no surprise if the theme of the two Kṛṣṇas has a special connection with Arjuna's combat against Karṇa. On the way to substantiating this, however, it will be helpful to look more closely at some of the more instructive of the early references.

As just noted, citations of the "two Kṛṣṇas" in the prewar books are concerned with combat no less than those in the war books. The theme is introduced with five references in the episode of the burning of the Khāṇḍava Forest, a grisly scene which finds the two heroes helping Agni (Fire) devour the forest and its creatures in a great conflagration. The most vivid of the five citations is the concluding one: "The blessed lord of the prickly rays [Agni] blazingly burned down the Khāṇḍava Forest with the aid of the two Kṛṣṇas, bringing terror to the world" (1.225.5). As Biardeau has demonstrated, this episode abounds in *pralaya* images. Moreover, the two heroes are introduced not only to some of their most destructive and indestructible weapons— including, as we shall note, Arjuna's chariot (1.216.3–15)—but to their very roles as agents of *pralaya*-like destruction.[22] It is also this episode

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[21] I will not cite these references except where they are quoted, as they are easily checked in S. Sörensen, *An Index to the Names in the Mahābhārata* (1904; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1963), p. 425.

[22] See Madeleine Biardeau, "Conferences de Mlle. Madeleine Biardeau," *Annuare de l'Ecole pratique des hautes études*, Section des sciences religieuses, 79 (1971–72): 140–41; Alf Hiltebeitel "The Burning of the Forest Myth," in *Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), pp. 208–24.

that introduces Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna dramatically as the incarnations of Nara and Nārāyaṇa[23] and establishes the pair henceforth—thanks to a boon from Indra that concludes the forest-burning narrative—as bound by "eternal friendship" (1.225.19). But most important for my present purposes, I should note that in this episode Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, however united in purpose and concerted in action, lend their assistance to Agni from separate chariots.

The Single Chariot

The only other cluster of references in the prewar books occurs in the *Udyogaparvan*. Between these two clusters, however, there are two occurrences that reinforce themes brought out at the Khāṇḍava Forest and anticipate themes to come. There is a double occurrence in the *Sabhāparvan*, where Kṛṣṇa acts with Arjuna and Bhīma to bring about the death of Jarāsaṃdha. There Yudhiṣṭhira reflects that "the two Kṛṣṇas yoked together to a single task are invincible in battle" (*ekakāryasamudyuktau kṛṣṇau yuddhe 'parājitau*, 2.18.24; cf. just earlier, 2.18.14). Thus even though it is Bhīma who will kill Jarāsaṃdha, victory is assured by the uniting together—indeed the "yoking" together—of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. And a lone reference in the *Āraṇyakaparvan* has Yudhiṣṭhira describe the "two Kṛṣṇas" as identical with Nara and Nārāyaṇa, enemy slayers, the two lotus-eyed ones of the three [*sic*] yugas (3.84.4).

The cluster of references in the *Udyogaparvan* occurs after an important change has occurred in the rapport between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa. The latter has agreed to serve as Arjuna's charioteer. It is this new situation that is anticipated at Khāṇḍava Forest where the two are united in everything but their chariots and, more particularly, in the language of Yudhiṣṭhira's musings about "the two Kṛṣṇas *yoked* together to a *single* task." For the *Udyogaparvan* references make it clear that it is the uniting of the two heroes on the one chariot that brings the theme into its eventual focus.

I would now agree with Biardeau that my argument for an older initiation scenario behind the *pralaya* themes is too vague to be of much use. The "initiation" scenario is certainly there, but it is the *pralaya* themes that shape the episode; see Biardeau, EMH V, p. 127, n. 1.

[23] See again Sörensen, pp. 504, 508–12, on Nara and Nārāyaṇa; cf. Biardeau, EMH V, p. 140.

First, Dhṛtarāṣṭra speaks to Saṃjaya, his own charioteer, before send-ing him as an ambassador to the Pāṇḍavas: "My heart shudders with fear, having heard that the two Kṛṣṇas are stationed in a single chariot" (*srutvā kṛṣṇavekarathe sthitau*, 5.22.30). Then, having heard Saṃjaya's report on his embassy, Bhīṣma warns Duryodhana (5.48.20–24) that Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa are Nara and Nārāyaṇa once again born into the world to give battle, "one being divided in two" (*sattvamekaṃ dvidhākṛtam*), "the two eternal great-souled Kṛṣṇas stationed in a sin-gle chariot" (*sanātanau mahātmānau kṛṣṇavekarathe sthitau*).[24] And third, Dhṛtarāṣṭra says to Duryodhana in further counsel: "To him whose charioteer is Hṛṣīkeśa, his equal in character and conduct, his victory is assured, O son, as is victory for Indra. The two Kṛṣṇas in one chariot [*kṛṣṇavekarathe*], the bow Gāṇḍiva strung—we have heard that these three splendors [*tejāṃsi*] are united together. We have no such bow, no such warrior, and no such charioteer, but the fools under Duryodhana's sway do not understand this" (5.51.10–12).

One will note how the poets correlate the theme of the "two Kṛṣṇas" with the other formulary pairs discussed earlier: not only Nara-Nārāyaṇa, but Indra-Viṣṇu and the *yatas-tatas* theme. But as Dhṛtarāṣṭra says, it is the convergence of all such "splendors" on the chariot that makes Duryodhana's prospects so hopeless. Furthermore, it is this specific connection with the *ekaratha* or "single chariot" theme that places the "two Kṛṣṇas" identity of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa at the center of narrative developments.

It might be said of the war books, where the references to the "two Kṛṣṇas" predominate, that the *ekaratha* theme is implied throughout. The poets never lose sight of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa's cooperation on the chariot when they describe their part in the war. But allusions to the two Kṛṣṇas in the first two war books (*Bhīṣma-* and *Droṇaparvan*s) do not refer explicitly to the *ekaratha* image. I will return to some promi-nent themes connected with the two Kṛṣṇas in the first two war books. But first let us examine the context in which the *ekaratha* references resurface. This brings us to the *Karṇaparvan*, whose concentration of "two Kṛṣṇas" references has already been noted.

Let us begin by recalling the words of Dhṛtarāṣṭra: "The two Kṛṣṇas in one chariot, the bow Gāṇḍīva strung.... We have no such bow, no such warrior, and no such charioteer, but the fools under

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[24] On this passage, see Biardeau, EMH V. p. 92.

Duryodhana's sway do not understand this." Quite clearly, the "fools" whom Dhṛtarāṣṭra has in mind are Duryodhana's principal cronies: Karṇa, Duḥśāsana, and Śakuni. It is these three who consistently back Duryodhana whenever the wiser and nobler members of his court counsel against his designs. Now the point where such ignorance becomes crucial is the chariot duel between Karṇa and Arjuna: the true culmination of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa's participation in the war and their only sustained single chariot versus single chariot combat.[25]

In his preparations for this duel, Karṇa reveals his "foolhardiness" in terms that recall Dhṛtarāṣṭra's warnings about the two Kṛṣṇas. On the morning of their duel, Karṇa tells Duryodhana that in skill and weapons he and Arjuna are near equals, but that Arjuna comes to battle with certain advantages that must be neutralized, most notably his two inexhaustible quivers, his horses of the speed of mind, his indestructible chariot, and his charioteer Kṛṣṇa whom Karṇa has no trouble in recognizing as the "creator of the universe" (*sraṣṭo jagatas*, 8.22.49). Karṇa says the balance can be restored, however, if the following conditions are met:

> But this one like a hero, Śalya, the ornament of assemblies—if he should do my chariot driving, victory will certainly by yours. Let Śalya, therefore, arduous with foes, be my charioteer. Let carts bear my vulture-feathered arrows. And let the foremost chariots, O king, yoked with the best horses, always follow behind me, O bull of the Bhāratas. Thus will I be superior to Pārtha [Arjuna] by these qualities. Śalya is surely superior to Kṛṣṇa. Surely I am superior to Arjuna. As Dāśarha [Kṛṣṇa], slayer of heroic foes, knows the heart of horsemanship so does the great chariot-warrior Śalya know about horses. [8.22.50–54]

In matters of arrows, horses, and chariots, Karṇa thus seeks foolishly to make up for quality with quantity. But most recklessly, he negates whatever claim he has to parity with or superiority over Arjuna by insisting on the superiority of his charioteer Śalya over Kṛṣṇa.

It is precisely when Karṇa obtains Śalya as his charioteer that the "two Kṛṣṇas" theme resurfaces most forcefully. And here one must bear in mind that the rapport between Karṇa and Śalya turns out to be precisely the opposite of that between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa. As I have discussed elsewhere, Śalya drives haphazardly and stings Karṇa

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with insults, all to "undermine his confidence" or "dim his splendor" (*tejovadha*) to fulfill a prewar pact with Yudhiṣṭhira, whereas throughout the duel Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna cooperate implicitly and intuitively at every turn.[26] It is in response to Śalya's insults that Karṇa begins his *parvan*'s sustained treatment of the "two Kṛṣṇas on one chariot" theme. He says he will give untold wealth to whoever locates the two Kṛṣṇas for him (8.27.12). Śalya replies with a string of unflattering comparisons (*upamā*)[27] between Karṇa and his opponents, including: "You think yourself a tiger until you see the two Kṛṣṇas, like the sun and moon, stationed in a single chariot" (*samāsthitāvekarathe*, 8.27.47). As the *Karṇaparvan* develops, it is some time before the duel occurs. Here one finds repeated references to the two Kṛṣṇas, but in other contexts and without specific reference to the *ekaratha*. But when the duel begins, it is with a strong reminder. First Śalya (8.57.25) and then Karṇa (57.35) agree that Karṇa will have to slay the two Kṛṣṇas alone, Karṇa insisting that he will do so single-handedly. But Karṇa finally acknowledges the awesomeness of his task: "He whose qualities the whole world cannot count in a thousand years, of that great-souled one with conch, discus, and sword in hand, of Viṣṇu, of Jiṣṇu, of the son of Vasudeva, fear and alarm are born in me, having seen the two Kṛṣṇas together in one chariot" (8.57.48).[28] One will note that Karṇa includes Jiṣṇu in this verse among a string of genitives that grammatically apply to Kṛṣṇa. But the contextual connection of the pair Viṣṇu-Jiṣṇu with the "two Kṛṣṇas" implies that Jiṣṇu is Arjuna. I shall return shortly to this seemingly multivalent name. But for the moment let us note that the verse just cited was resonant enough to attract further elaborations of the "two Kṛṣṇas" theme. The Critical Edition text has Karṇa continuing to boast that on this day Śalya will see either Karṇa or the two Kṛṣṇas fall (8.57.50). And between these verses one finds Karṇa adding in certain manuscripts the following "interpolation": "Of all the Vṛṣṇi heroes, Lakṣmī is established in Kṛṣṇa. Of all the sons of Pāṇḍu, victory [*jayaḥ*] is established in Pārtha. These two lions

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[26] See Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle* (n. 3 above), pp. 254–66, and "Brothers, Friends, and Charioteers," pp. 92–95.

[27] See Hiltebeitel, "Brothers, Friends, and Charioteers" pp. 103–4.

[28] *Varṣāyutairyasya guṇā na śakyā/vaktuṃ sametairapi sarvalokaiḥ//mahātmanaḥ śaṅkhacakrāsipāṇer/viṣṇorjiṣṇorvasudevātmajasya//bhayaṃ me vai jāyate sādhvasaṃ ca/dṛṣṭvā kṛṣṇāvekarathe sametau.*

among men stationed in the same chariot [*samāne syandane sthitau*] are attacking me, well-born, alone. Alas for me, O Śalya" (8.883*).

Recalling that the duel between Arjuna and Karṇa contrasts the miraculous charioteering of Kṛṣṇa with the seemingly untidy workmanship of Śalya,[29] it is now time to look more closely at the symbolism connected with this *ekaratha* theme.[30] It is here that we move from the narrative implications of the theme to the theological and soteriological.

As we have seen, the divisive relationship between Karṇa and Śalya on their chariot contrasts with the unitive rapport of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, "the two Kṛṣṇas." As Karṇa and Śalya agree, Karṇa must withstand the "two Kṛṣṇas" alone. Moreover, he must face these two inseparable friends with a charioteer who is, as Karṇa recognizes, an enemy determined to undermine his efforts. As Karṇa puts it most pointedly, Śalya is "an enemy with the face of a friend" (*mitramukhaḥ śatrur*, 8.27.28). Thus he asks: "An enemy having become a friend, why do you frighten me with the two Kṛṣṇas?" (27.73; cf. 27.72, 29.21).

These oppositions take on clear proportions when examined in connection with certain archaic and often-repeated themes connected with the imagery of the chariot. Probably adopted by the Indo-Europeans in northern Mesopotamia soon after 2000 B.C. to serve them in their movements east and west,[31] the battle chariot, already in the *Ṛg Veda* a subject of hymns of praise,[32] was destined to become in India as in Greece the subject of a unique allegory.[33] For the Buddhists, clearly inverting Hindu themes, the composite nature of the chariot and its disjunctive and assembled parts served as an argument for the teaching

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[29] Kṛṣṇa saves Arjuna's life by stepping down on their chariot so hard that it sinks into the earth enough that a deadly snake-arrow pulverizes Arjuna's diadem rather than his head (8.66. 10–19). On the contrary, Karṇa's death is caused when his chariot wheel gets stuck (thanks to Śalya, one must assume) in the earth. Also, when Śalya begins to drive, the horses fall (8.26.36).

[30] There is one other reference to the *ekaratha* associated with the Karṇavadha at the beginning of the *Śalyaparvan*, where Śalya flaunts his prowess over that of the "two Kṛṣṇas stationed on the chariot" (*kṛṣṇau rathasthau;* 9.6.2). But Śalya merely carries forward the symbolism of the previous duel; cf. Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle*, pp. 265–66. See also 8.12.15–16, not mentioning the "two Kṛṣṇas" outright but clearly implying them.

[31] Stuart Piggott, *Prehistoric India* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1950), p. 276.

[32] See Jeanine Miller, *The Vedas: Harmony, Meditation, Fulfillment* (Bombay: B. I. Publications, 1974), pp. 52–57, 59.

[33] Thus Plato in the *Phaedrus;* see *The Works of Plato*, trans. B. Jowett (New York: Dial Press, n.d.), pp. 404–6.

of *anātman*, "not self."[34] For the Hindus, as with Plato, the dynamic interaction of persons, horses, and parts "yoked," "reined," and "bound" together, served as an allegory for the soul or "self" and its relationship to the senses and the body. Thus *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.3.3–4, 9: "Know the Self as the lord of the chariot [*ātmānaṃ rathinaṃ viddhi*] and the body as, verily, the chariot, know the intellect as the charioteer [*buddhiṃ tu sārathiṃ viddhi*] and the mind [*manas*] as, verily, the reins. The senses, they say, are the horses.... He who has understanding for the driver of the chariot [*vijñānasārathir*] and controls the rein of his mind, he reaches the end of the journey, the supreme abode of the all-pervading."[35]

Clearly, the epic poets are aware of this Upaniṣadic passage or are at least conversant with variants of it, for such chariot imagery, and much the same vocabulary, are called on frequently in the *Mahābhārata*. One of the most instructive instances occurs in the *Strīparvan*. Amid the laments for the war dead, Vidura includes the following among a series of parables meant to illustrate for Dhṛtarāṣṭra the "understanding" (*buddhi*) by which the "forest of *saṃsāra*" (*saṃsāragahanam*) may be comprehended (11.4.1, 5.1).

> The body of creatures is a chariot; *sattva*, they call the charioteer; the senses they call horses; the mental organ of action [*karmabuddhi*] is the reins. Whoever follows after the rush of those running steeds, he turns about like a wheel in the cycle of saṃsāra. Whoever restrains them with understanding [*buddhi*], that restrainer/charioteer [*yantṛ*] does not return. This chariot, by which the unwise are bewildered, must be controlled....[36] Restraint, renunciation, and vigilance [*damastyāgo 'pramādaśca*], these three are the horses of brahman. Whoever is firm in this spiritual chariot [*mānase rathi*], and yoked [to those steeds] with the reins of morality, having renounced the fear of death, O king, he attains to the world of *brahman*. [11.7.13–15, 19cd-20]

Here *buddhi* as the restrainer-charioteer (*yantṛ*) is identifiable with *sattva*, "goodness," the *guṇa* which characterizes the *buddhi* or understanding at its most lucid. On this "mental" or "spiritual" chariot, the *buddhi*, by restraining the horses of the senses and transforming them

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[34] In the *Milindapañha*; see W. Theodore de Bary, ed., *Sources of Indian Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958). pp. 103–5.

[35] S. Radhakrishnan, ed. and trans., *The Principal Upaniṣads* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1953), pp. 623–24; cf. *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 2.9, *Maitrī Upaniṣad* 4.4, and *Kauṣītakī Upaniṣad* 3.8.

[36] See critical edition (n. 10 above) notes to this passage.

into yogic restraints identified as the "horses of *brahman*," enables the *ātman* to attain the world of *brahman*. Actually, the passage makes no mention of the *ātman* and suggests that the "self" is both restrainer/ charioteer and that which attains union with *brahman*. From that perspective, *buddhi* and *ātman* have a reciprocity that implies a unity, which may help explain why certain epic passages make the soul itself the charioteer.[37]

One finds no such ambiguity, however, in a passage from the *Āśvamedhika Parvan*: "Having mounted the chariot that is yoked to the great elements and restrained by the *buddhi*, the soul of beings [*bhūtātman*] drives about everywhere. Yoked to the assemblage of senses [as to steeds], with the *manas* indeed as the charioteer, ever restrained by the *buddhi*, is the great chariot made of *brahman* [*mahānbrahmamayo rathaḥ*]. Thus whatever wise one knows constantly the chariot made of brahman, that resolute person does not become bewildered in any worlds" (14.50.4–6; cf. also 1–3). Here the *ātman* is clearly differentiated from the charioteer, which is identified as the *manas*, though functioning conjointly with the *buddhi*. And when all is known and their rapport tuned, the *ātman* rides everywhere unbewildered in the "great chariot made of *brahman*," having renounced, as the other passage puts it, the fear of death. Perhaps curiously, these verses occur at the beginning of the last *adhyāya* of the *Anugītā*, in which Kṛṣṇa is helping Arjuna remember what he has forgotten from the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

We shall return to these passages, but for the moment they are sufficient to indicate that the epic poets were familiar with the Upaniṣadic chariot imagery. The various identifications of the charioteer as *sattva*, *manas, buddhi* and *vijñāna* are most likely no more than reflections of the composite nature of the Hindu psyche vis-à-vis the *ātman* rather than significant doctrinal divergences. This imagery, however, should not be relegated to the backwater of so-called didactic interpolations. As Vishnu S. Sukthankar insightfully remarked, this Upaniṣadic image of the soul as rider and the charioteer as *buddhi* "has been improved upon by the *Gītā,* where the individual's soul [Arjuna-Nara] is still the rider, but the role of the charioteer has been taken over by…Kṛṣṇa."[38]

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[37] As does Plato. See *Mahābhārata* 3.202.21–23, 5.34.57–62, and also the vaguer 12.231.11 and 12.280.1.

[38] Vishnu S. Sukthankar, *Meaning of the Mahābhārata* (Bombay: Asiatic Society of Bombay, 1957), p. 112.

It is quite certain that the epic poets have drawn this connection, and not only for their depiction of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā*, the basic premise of which is that the charioteer reveals to the self the nature of the self in which they are united. It also applies in what follows from the *Gītā*: the participation of the "two Kṛṣṇas" in the *Mahābhārata* war. For it is there, as we have seen, that they appear above all as "the two Kṛṣṇas in one chariot"—an image which evokes over and over the pair's invincibility,[39] the invincibility of the self which, once in tune with the *buddhi*, is "beyond the fear of death." Moreover, as one of the epic passages describing the self as charioteer adds: "One should seek the self by the self, with *manas, buddhi,* and senses restrained. For the self is the self's only friend, and the self is the self's only enemy" [*ātmaiva hyātmano bandhur ātmaiva ripurātmanaḥ*, 5.34.62]. This maxim (cf. 11.11*, line 3, which has *mitra* rather than *bandhu* for "friend") is beautifully extended in the *Gītā*:

> One should lift up the self by the self,
> And should not let the self down.
> For the self is the self's only friend,
> And the self is the self's only enemy.
>
> The self is a friend to that self
> By which self the very self is subdued;
> But to him that does not possess the self [*anātmanas*], in enmity
> Will abide his very self, like an enemy.[40]

These words of charioteer to rider confirm the contextual implications of the passage: the self's "friend" is like a charioteer, who may lift up or let down. Insofar as the rider and the sense-"subduing" charioteer

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[39] Most of the contexts in which the two Kṛṣṇas are cited evoke their association with the *ātman*, as the latter is represented in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Generally, they are over and over said to be unslayable (7.86.32; 122.40; 8.12.17; 28.62; 9.3.26). Resisting them is always a marvel, usually restricted to Śiva's protégé Aśvatthāman (6.69.11; 8.12.17; 40.116; 45.4, 17; 9.1·3.6), thus reinforcing the epic's repeated insistence on the complementarity of Viṣṇu and Śiva. Duryodhana also miraculously resists them once with the help of magic armor from Droṇa (7.76.40). Like Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (*Rām* 6.35–40, G. H. Bhatt and U. P. Shah, eds., *The Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa Critically Edited for the First Time*, 7 vols. [Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1960–75]), they repeatedly survive being mangled with arrows (6.55.61; 77.39; 7.18.19; 28.3; 76.25; 8.12.51; 40.116; 45.4; 9.18.57), thus—in both epics—evoking the indestructibility of the *ātman,* especially as "yoked" to the divine. They cannot be overcome with illusions (7.29.15); they dive unharmed into a fire weapon (7.171.12, 46); and to oppose them is like rivers rushing into the sea (7.63.3).

[40] Franklin Edgerton, trans., *The Bhagavad Gītā*, Harvard Oriental Series, vol. 38 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 61.

have an intuitive rapport, they may ride the chariot of brahman. This possibility calls us back to the contrast between Arjuna and Karṇa, for the latter's dilemma is to have a charioteer who is his foe. Thus his bravery and ultimate despair in challenging "alone" the "two Kṛṣṇas united in one chariot."

The Chariot of Brahman/ Brahmā and the Burning of Tripura

There is, however, an additional theme that is subtly worked into the fabric of the *Karṇaparvan*, and one with which the *ekaratha* theme is still further intertwined. As just recalled, the chariot in which the rider and charioteer are fully in tune is referred to in one passage (actually spoken by Brahmā) as "the chariot made of the great *brahman*," and in another passage one hears of *brahman*'s horses. This is an archaic imagery, for though it is not made explicit in the Upaniṣadic passages, it can be found in the *Ṛg Veda*. As Jeanine Miller remarks, the Vedic chariot imagery seems to serve as "a way of describing that which helps to find, perform, or frame the *brahman* . . . for the *ṛṣis* themselves fashion, even as chariots [*rathān iva*], those prayers [*brahmāṇi*] that yield fulfillment" (ṚV 5.73.10).[41] It can thus be no coincidence that in the carefully textured *Karṇaparvan*, the *parvan*'s background myth[42]—Śiva's destruction of the three cities of the demons (the Tripuradahana)— also involves, in a special sense, a "great chariot of *brahman*." For on this chariot, Brahmā—personification of the *brahman*—is Śiva's charioteer. Moreover, the construction of the chariot by the divine architect Viśvakarman is tantamount to a cosmogony. The chariot has the syllable *oṃ* at its van (*mukhe*); the sound *vaṣaṭ* is the whip;[43] it is protected by the sacred Hindu scriptures; and it is composed, along with the attendant

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[41] Miller (n. 32 above). pp. 52, 54–55, on yoking by the *brahman*, and the *brahman* as the horses of the chariot.

[42] On "background myths" in the *Mahābhārata*, in particular correlated with different *parvan*s, see Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle* (n. 3 above), pp. 120–40 (Vāmana myth and *Udyogaparvan*) and pp. 312–35 (myth of Dakṣa's sacrifice and *Sauptikaparvan*).

[43] In pūraṇic versions it is frequently the syllabic "oṃ" that is the whip: *Śiva Purāṇa Rudra Saṃhitā* 5.8.124 (citations from J. L. Shastri, ed., *The Śiva-Purāṇa*, pt. 2, Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology Series, vol. 2 [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970], pp. 802–58); Liṅga Purāṇa 1.72.20 (citations from J. L. Shastri, ed., *The Liṅga Purāṇa*, pt. 1. Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology Series, vol. 5 [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973], pp. 333–64; Matsya Purāṇa 133.36 (citations from Jamna Das Akhtar, ed. *The Matsya Purāṇam* [Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1972], pp. 1–32 [second series of page numbers]).

weaponry, of the psychological, elemental, spatio-temporal, and divine forces of the Hindu cosmos. Thus Fortitude, Memory, Steadfastness, and Humility become the yoke pins, the Goddess Earth forms the chari-oteer's seat, Mount Mandara is the axle, sun and moon form the two chief wheels, the planets, constellations, and stars become the cover-ing skins, the year forms the bow, Kālarātri (the Goddess as "Night of Time") becomes the bowstring, the arrow is made up of Viṣṇu, Soma, and Agni, and so on (8.24.68–84).[44] Śiva's destruction of the three cities thus brings two cosmological images into confrontation: the demonic three cities of heaven, atmosphere, and earth versus a chariot composed of the reintegrated forces of the Hindu universe. The chariot is thus more than a "cosmic" chariot. It is a vehicle of revelation. This is not surpris-ing, for all the Indian cosmologies should be understood as revelations, descriptions of the universe through which the validity of each particular religion's traditions and values is disclosed.[45] Here the chariot presents the combined action of the Creator(s) (Brahmā/Viśvakarma) and the Destroyer (Śiva) turned to a particular use of cosmogonic and pralayic imagery. The universe, as chariot, is recreated, while a counteruniverse, Tripura, is destroyed.[46] In this one chariot are thus concentrated the very powers of creation and destruction through which the Hindu uni-verse is maintained and through which, on another level, victory over

[44] This Northern Recension material occurs with slight variation in the Southern Recension, where the formation of the chariot is preceded by a prologue in which Śiva secures the title of Pāśupati before agreeing to the gods' request. Such a "Pāśupata" prologue also occurs in some of the purāṇas: e.g., *Liṅga Purāṇa* 1.72.34–42; *Śiva Purāṇa Rudra Saṃhita* 5.9.13–19. The Southern Recension and these purāṇas seem to embellish. The Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata* (n. 10 above), representing the Northern Recension, has Śiva obtain the title Mahādeva (8.24.63) rather than Pāśupati this episode.

[45] See Randy Kloetzli, *Buddhist Cosmology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), pas-sim, arguing in particular that the Indian cosmologies—and in particular Buddhist cosmologies—represent critiques of each other, and provide expressions of central distinguishing concepts of the different traditions.

[46] In fact, one may speculate that the association of the demons of Tripura with heretical/heterodox (Jain, Buddhist) traditions, made explicit in many post-epic ver-sions of the Tripuradahana, is evoked here as well; see Marie-Louise Reiniche, *Les dieux et les hommes: Études de cultes d'un village du Tirunelveli Inde du Sud* (Paris: Mouton, 1979), pp. 83–111, esp. 104–10; Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 180–87, 198–204. The "three cities" would thus represent not just a counteruniverse but an alternative cosmology. Thus, see Reiniche, p. 107: "A l'instant du pralaya, on a dans une même vision l'image double du monde: celle de celui qui est irrémédiablement anéanti, celle de celui qui represente la synthèse divine du char."

demonic (heterodox?) forces is achieved.[47] In short, the chariot driven by Brahmā is, again, a chariot of the *brahman*, a vehicle by which the Hindu experience of reality is revealed and confirmed or, as Jeanine Miller puts it, found, performed, and framed.

The epic poets would seem to have expended considerable energy to weave this background myth together with the other themes I have identified in the *Karṇaparvan*. First of all, toward the beginning of the *parvan*'s two days of fighting, well before Karṇa and Arjuna meet, a heavenly voice (heard by warriors from both sides) proclaims: "These two, Keśava and Arjuna, are heroes who always bear the splendor, power, radiance, and beauty of fire, wind, sun, and moon. Like unto the invincible Brahmā and Īśāna [Śiva], these two heroes stationed on one chariot are the foremost heroes among all beings, the pair Nara and Nārāyaṇa [*brahmeśānāvivājayyau vīrāvekarathe sthitau/ sarvabhūtavarau vīrau naranārāyaṇavubhauu*]" (8.12.15–16). The analogy with Brahmā and Śiva is thus drawn into the same texture with the other themes we have discussed, including the image of the *ekaratha*.[48] Most important, they are linked through their chariots. Karṇa reminds us that it is the same divine impenetrable chariot which Arjuna obtained from Agni at the Khāṇḍava Forest (*agnidattaśca vai divyo rathaḥ…acchedyaḥ*, 8.28.48). But more revealing is Bhīṣma's identification of the chariot at one point in the *Droṇaparvan*: "The two Kṛṣṇas having mounted that chariot which formerly bore Brahmā and Īśāna, and Indra and Varuṇa, are gone [to battle]. One should have no fear for them" (*brahmeśānendravaruṇānavahad yaḥ purā rathaḥ/ tamāsthaya gatau kṛṣṇau na tayorvidyate bhayam*, 7.102.43).[49] Thus,

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[47] The chariot is thus like the Hindu temple, a convergence appreciated with special distinctiveness, in the South Indian *ratha* (chariot) festival studied by Reiniche, where the Tripuradahana serves as a background myth (which includes the humiliation of the Jains) for the festival; see Reiniche, pp. 83–111.

[48] Here without specific reference to the two Kṛṣṇas, but with no doubt that they are implied.

[49] A Northern "interpolation" in the *Karṇaparvan* makes the same identification at the point where Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa set off for the duel with Karṇa (8.410*, after 8.31.36: it is the "primeval chariot" [*ādyaṃ ratham*] which successively bore Brahmā and Īśāna, Indra and Varuṇa"). Curiously, the Khāṇḍava Forest passage gives a different background, it having been the chariot of Soma (1.216.3). The fate of this chariot in the *Mahābhārata* is also noteworthy. After the death of Duryodhana, Kṛṣṇa orders Arjuna to leave his divine weapons on it and step down. As soon as he does, the chariot self-combusts and burns immediately to ashes. Kṛṣṇa explains that it was only because he was stationed on it in battle that it did not shatter sooner, "burned by the energy of *brahma*-weapons" (*dagdho brahmāstratejasā*, 9.61.18–19). Once Kṛṣṇa (or

no matter how outrageous it may seem if one seeks for literalistic or "historical" explanations, Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa ride the same *ekaratha* that Śiva and Brahmā rode of yore. Let us now look more closely at the Tripuradahana's place as a "background myth" in the *Karṇaparvan* and the narrative unfolding of its thematic significance.

First of all, and rather ironically, it is Duryodhana who introduces the background myth into the *parvan*. When Karṇa says he needs Śalya as his charioteer to obtain parity with Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, Duryodhana invites Śalya to protect Karṇa on his chariot as Brahmā protected Maheśvara (8.23.5). Śalya objects. He refuses to drive for one like Karṇa who is lowborn (by reputation a *sūta*) and inferior (*nyūna*); *sūta*s serve Kṣatriyas, not the reverse. Actually, of course, unknown to Śalya, Karṇa *is* a Kṣatriyas. This fact is known to Karṇa and suspected by Duryodhana (1.127.10–16; 8.24.159), but the latter must assuage Śalya's vanity. So he tells Śalya he is a better charioteer than Kṛṣṇa, and finally Śalya agrees to drive for Karṇa, but on the condition that he can say whatever he likes to him, whether it be agreeable or disagreeable. This fateful pact concluded, Duryodhana then launches into his account of Brahmā's service as charioteer for Śiva at the battle of Tripura.

Duryodhana's version of this myth is arguably the oldest we have, assuming purāṇic accounts to be later.[50] But the story in its basic outline differs little from epic to purāṇic sources: the Gods always need Śiva to defeat the three cities; Śiva requires the "cosmic" chariot, and Brahmā ends up the charioteer. Thus, although there are some specific features of the epic account which can be identified as sources for details of later purāṇic versions,[51] it is still unlikely that the epic poets conceived the myth themselves, that is, fabricated it to provide a

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Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna: the two Kṛṣṇas step down, all tasks complete, the chariot and other implements of war (and sacrifice) are thus deprived of their animating, unifying, and sustaining principle(s).

[50] One can identify pre-epic sources for aspects of the myth—particularly the theme of the three demonic cities conquered by the gods (see, e.g., *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.4.4.3–5)—but it is the *Mahābhārata* which provides the first integrated account and the one which first incorporates most of the major themes found in the purāṇic versions.

[51] Thus the theme of Viṣṇu emerging from the arrow to lift up the chariot when the wheel gets stuck makes sense only in the *Mahābhārata*, where Kṛṣṇa will soon rescue Arjuna by pressing down and then lifting up his chariot (see n. 17 above). An echo lingers in *Liṅga Purāṇa* 1.72.28–32, but with a different message: Viṣṇu cannot right the chariot, presumably because of the weight of Śiva within it.

mythic exemplar for the heroic story. Rather, one can assume that the myth was already well known when it was correlated with the epic. It is thus in details where the epic version *differs* from purāṇic accounts that we can identify the sutures made by the epic poets to draw the two stories together. Let us now look at some of these connectives, first those which occur in Duryodhana's account of the Tripuradahana myth itself, and then those which occur later in the *parvan* but refer back to the myth.

The first connective within the myth occurs when Brahmā tells the gods why he cannot defeat the demons himself and why they need Śiva: "Surely I am impartial [*tulyaḥ*] toward all creatures, no doubt on that. But the adharmic must be slain, so I say to you. You Ādityas, choose Sthānu, Īśāna, Jiṣṇu of unstained acts as your warrior. He will slay those asuras" (8.24.34–35). If we suppose that Duryodhana's account is directed at an audience attuned to epic nuances and familiar with the Tripuradahana myth in its general outlines, several of Brahmā's words are striking. Brahmā's impartiality between gods and demons is a stock theme in epic and purāṇic mythology. But in the context where he is about to serve as Śiva's charioteer, it evokes a number of themes. First of all, unlike Brahmā, Śalya is not impartial. He actually favors his rider Karṇa's foe. Second, one is brought back to the scene where Kṛṣṇa, out of his supposed "impartiality," agrees to serve as Arjuna's charioteer while his forces, the Nārāyaṇa Gōpas, will fight for Duryodhana (5.7.10–20). As I argued in *The Ritual of Battle*, Kṛṣṇa in that scene evokes the stock figure of the impartial Brahmā.[52] Here, however, Brahmā's impartiality as charioteer-to-be harks back in reverse to the figure of Kṛṣṇa. And we sense this all the more strongly because of a most astonishing detail. Śiva is called Jiṣṇu—here, and nowhere else.[53] Normally Jiṣṇu, "the Triumphant," is a name for Arjuna, evocative of his rapport with Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa and his further name Vijaya. The reference to Śiva's "unstained acts" also relates his description to Arjuna, as it is frequently one of Arjuna's epithets, evoking the manner in which Arjuna—like Śiva—performs acts of sacrificial killing that leave him "unstained."[54] Thus Duryodhana's account, ostensibly meant to hearten his allies, hints rather at the odds against them: Brahmā is less

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[52] Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle* (n. 3 above), pp. 103–4.
[53] Sörensen (n. 21 above), p. 364.
[54] Hiltebeitel, "Śiva the Goddess, and Disguises" (n. 13 above), p. 171.

like Śalya than like Kṛṣṇa. And Śiva is less like Karṇa than like Arjuna. But I must reserve fuller discussion of these points for later.

The epic account now continues to describe the courting of Śiva's aid and the construction of the chariot, much as one hears the tale in the Purāṇas. Then one comes to a second interior connective. Śiva mounts the chariot and says with a smile (one always has to watch these smiles) that he requires a charioteer superior to himself (*mattaḥ śreṣṭhataro*, 8.24.96). The gods then tell Brahmā they see no one suitable but him, for he alone is "superior to the gods" (*devatābhyo 'dhikaḥ*, 105). Such requirements are unknown in purāṇic versions of the tale, whose customary exaltation of Śiva would seem sufficient reason for their omission.[55] I will return to their significance in the *Mahābhārata* later, but it should be noted that the epic passage allows for no sectarian or "favoritistic" implications (as the purāṇic passages do) and that its theology is well integrated in the larger epic narrative. For here again, the rapport between Brahmā and Śiva evokes issues at the heart of the rapports between the two pairs of heroic combatants. On one side is the supposedly direct parallel, made by Duryodhana: Śalya can drive for an inferior just as Brahmā did for Śiva (24.126–128). But in each of these cases the warrior—Śiva and Karṇa—is actually the superior figure. On the other side, however, Kṛṣṇa is the truly superior charioteer who nonetheless willingly subordinates himself to Arjuna, duplicating a pattern acted out so frequently by their prototypes in the mythology: Viṣṇu as Upendra, the younger brother of Indra, subordinating himself to Indra.[56] But Duryodhana, concluding his appeal to Śalya, recognizes only one of these correlations, and that with considerable misguided exaggeration: "Just like lord Brahmā, creator of the worlds, the Grandfather, yoke the steeds of the high-souled son of Rādhā [Karṇa]. Surely you are distinctly superior [*viśeṣataḥ viśiṣṭaḥ*] to Kṛṣṇa, Karṇa, and Arjuna, O tiger among men. There is no doubt. Surely this one [Karṇa] is like Rudra in battle. And you, O sinless one, are equal to Brahmā [*brahmasamo*]. Therefore you are able to

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[55] *Liṅga Purāṇa* 1.72.19, 26–27 and *Śiva Purāṇa Rudra Saṃhitā* 5:8.24 provide no explanation for Brahmā's service. In *Matsya Purāṇa* 133.46–56, all Śiva asks for is a charioteer "worthy" of him—a difficult enough requirement that puzzles the gods, who can think only of Viṣṇu, until Brahmā volunteers for the role.

[56] The self-subordination of Viṣṇu to Indra is a theme common to many myths, including several *avatāra* accounts. On its function in the *Karṇaparvan* duel with Karṇa, see further Hiltebeitel, "Brothers, Friends, and Charioteers," (n. 2 above), pp. 93–94.

conquer my foes, who are even like the asuras" (8.24.125–27; see also 25.2), Clearly, the poets have fashioned these words with considerable irony; not only the incongruous comparisons, but the allusions to Śalya—whom Karṇa will soon berate for his sinfulness[57]—as "sinless" (*anagha*) and "equal to Brahmā/*brahman*" (*brahmasama*). But of course everyone is "equal to *brahman*."

The mythic model of Śiva and Brahmā on the chariot is thus narrated in immediate connection with Karṇa and Śalya, but actually with an eye to its reverse application. For before Duryodhana has begun, we have already heard the heavenly voice announce that it is Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa who are like Śiva and Brahmā. And their chariot is the very one formerly ridden by those two divinities. On the conclusion of Duryodhana's narrative, such connectives are extended. First, in an interesting Northern Recension passage which surely extends an implicit theme, Śalya rather impertinently tells Duryodhana that he already knows the story of the destruction of Tripura, "and so does Kṛṣṇa" (8, app. 1, no. 5, lines 10–11). And he continues: "Kṛṣṇa knows truly both past and future. Knowing this very matter [the eventuality of this duel], Kṛṣṇa has come to be a charioteer for Pārtha, O Bhārata, as Svayaṃbhū [Brahmā] did for Rudra [*utadarthaṃ viditvāpi sārathyamupajagmivān/svayaṃbhūriva rudrasya kṛṣṇaḥ pārthasya bhārata*]" (*ibid.*, lines 13–14). And just before the final encounter, when divine, demonic, and other beings gather in the heavens to pick either Arjuna or Karṇa as their favorites, it is Brahmā and Śiva themselves who intervene to determine the outcome. When Indra urges Brahmā to favor Arjuna, he gets the following response: "Thereupon Brahmā and Īśāna replied to the lord of the thirty [Indra], 'Let victory [*vijaya*] be certain for the high-souled Vijaya [Arjuna]'" (63.50); and they continue to identify Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa as the invincible pair Nara and Nārāyaṇa (54), and twice as the indomitable "two Kṛṣṇas" (53, 55). The passage thus crystallizes nearly all of the formulaic themes connected with Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa (including the allusion to Arjuna as Vijaya/Jaya: "Victory").

The fact that this is the only instance in the *Mahābhārata* where the gods directly intervene in the battle is testimony to the pivotal charac-

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[57] See Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle*, pp. 272–79, and "Brothers, Friends, and Charioteers," pp. 102–4.

ter of the Arjuna-Karṇa duel.[58] Moreover, the decisive favoritism of Brahmā and Śiva for Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna is an indication of the mutually supportive interests of the three gods who, in classical Hinduism, come to be regarded as the *trimūrti.* For Kṛṣṇa is, of course, the incarnation of Viṣṇu. Whatever the date may be for the first articulation of the *trimūrti* concept, this interaction is indicative of an already significant interplay.[59] As Indra says, Brahmā and Śiva's decision will be for the welfare of the universe (*jagaddhitam*, 63.58). And in a further development, when Arjuna finally resolves to kill Karṇa, he invokes the permission of Kṛṣṇa, Bhava (Śiva), and Brahmā (65.23). Such formulae certainly point in the direction of the *trimūrti.*

Questions and Conclusions

The Tripuradahana is thus significantly integrated as a "background myth" within the *Mahābhārata* and, particularly, within the *Karṇaparvan.* But the correlation just analyzed, and the juxtaposition of mythic and epic themes, raises some intriguing further issues. For one thing, one is struck by the coincidence of chariot-related themes in the war and in the *Bhagavad Gītā.* Are we to assume that the authors of the *Gītā* were aware that, when Arjuna has Kṛṣṇa halt between the two drawn up armies, the pair are stationed on the very chariot formerly ridden by Brahmā and Śiva? A definite answer is probably not possible. Kṛṣṇa speaks frequently in the *Gītā* in Vedic and Upaniṣadic images, but the chariot image is reserved only for the descriptive setting. But one must remember that the terminology of "yoking" and "reining" is present throughout the *Gītā* and that the setting itself is not insignificant. It has been recognized as a kind of double allegory. In the chariot of the body, the *jīva* (Arjuna) learns from God (Kṛṣṇa Paramātman) the nature of the self (*ātman*) amid the converging forces of daivic (Pāṇḍava) and asuric (Kaurava) realms.[60] Or, in the chariot of the body, Kṛṣṇa as *buddhi*

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[58] It should also not be passed off as a supposed "theological" interpolation. The Irish epic has a contextually significant parallel; see Hiltebeitel, "Brothers, Friends, and Charioteers," p. 106.

[59] See Jan Gonda, "The Hindu Trinity," *Anthropos* 63 (1968): 212–25, esp. 212, n. 2, citing the consensus that the formula itself is "comparatively late," apparently meaning post-epic. But cf. also *Mahābhārata* 9.52: it is the three *trimūrti* gods who sanction, at Kurukṣetra, sending straight to heaven warriors who die in battle and yogis who practice *tapas.*

[60] Sukthankar, pp. 92–98.

restrains the lower self (senses/horses, etc.) to enable Arjuna to realize the higher self.[61] Quite significantly this dual perspective involves the same reciprocity we have observed elsewhere in connection with the two Kṛṣṇas: the mutual self-subordination of their "eternal friendship."[62] Kṛṣṇa subordinates himself to Arjuna as *buddhi* to *ātman*; and Arjuna subordinates himself to Kṛṣṇa as *jīva* to Paramātman. Moreover, the chariot which bears the two Kṛṣṇas is not simply the body but also the universe, the vehicle through which the self knows the brahman, the All. But these correlations require further refinement and do not exhaust the theological or soteriological vocabulary. For as Kṛṣṇa identifies himself in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, he is, in the double theological language mentioned earlier, both Uttamapuruṣa (Supreme Puruṣa) and Paramātman (*Gītā* 15.16–17). Furthermore, we must not isolate the *Gītā*'s use of such terms from the rest of the epic. But we shall return to these matters shortly.

A second issue must also be acknowledged. What is one to make of the fact that the defeated chariot belongs to the son of Sūrya, the Sun God? Georges Dumézil has left it beyond doubt that a link has been fashioned between the chariots of the Ṛgvedic Sūrya and the epic Karṇa. In both cases, Sūrya and Karṇa are defeated—in the Vedic myth by Indra, in the epic by Indra's son Arjuna—when one of the wheels of their chariots becomes disabled.[63] This recurrent detail seems in both cases to have cosmological implications, but somewhat different ones. Dumézil suggests that the Vedic myth is concerned with the conflict between Indra's role as patron of storms and Sūrya's as god of the sun.[64] Given the Vedic recognition of the beneficent character of the monsoon, this explanation is certainly plausible. But in the epic, where Karṇa—as Biardeau has argued[65]—represents the errant sun of the *pralaya*, the disabling of the solar wheel has more sinister implications. Again, as in the battle of Tripura, it would seem that the chariots of Arjuna and Karṇa represent conflicting cosmological

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[61] *Ibid.*, p. 112.

[62] See n. 26 above.

[63] Georges Dumézil, "Karṇa et les Pāṇḍava," *Orientalia Suecana* 3 (1954): 60–66, and *Mythe et épopée*, vol. 1 (n. 6 above), pp. 125–44, esp. pp. 135–38. Dumézil adds to the argument for a connection by noting that the beneficiary of Indra's intervention in the Veda is Kutsa Ārjuneya, "son of Arjuna" (p. 137).

[64] Dumézil, *Mythe et épopée*, p. 136.

[65] See Biardeau, EMH V (n. 17 above), pp. 173–74; Alf Hiltebeitel, "Draupadī's Garments," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 22 (1980): 102–3.

images. In the Purāṇas, where whole chapters are frequently devoted
to the cosmic imagery of the solar chariot, it is frequently said that it
has but one wheel,[66] no doubt symbolizing the sun's "rotation" around
Mount Meru.[67] Moreover, although the sun is said to have a bimonthly
succession of different "charioteers," it is actually Dhruva, the fixed
polar star (a far cry from the fickle Śalya), who holds the solar chari-
ot's reins (*Matsya Pur.* 125.50–58; 126.7–12; *Liṅga Pur.* 1.55.7–15), the
"wind ropes" that connect all the "planets" to Dhruva (*Matsya Pur.*
127.12–14). For the solar chariot to remain on its course is thus a most
fundamental condition of the cosmic order, the *ṛta*.[68] Yet, as the *Mat-
sya Purāṇa* (126.43–44) indicates, there is a limit to this arrangement:
"The horses were yoked at the beginning of the kalpa and carry on the
sun till end of the great dissolution" (*mahāpralaya*). If Karṇa's con-
nection with Sūrya symbolizes the errant sun of the *pralaya*, it would
seem likely that the disabling of his chariot wheel in the epic might
already evoke "purāṇic" themes: the termination of the "rotation" of
the single wheel of the solar chariot at the time of the *pralaya*, the
time when the sun alters its course, multiplies itself sevenfold, and
desiccates the earth.

Both of these issues carry on into speculative areas that go beyond
the *Gītā* and epic texts. But a third correlative between the myth and
the epic is more easily substantiated and confirms further the connec-
tives drawn between Arjuna and Śiva. As we have seen, Arjuna fights
on the same chariot at Kurukṣetra that Śiva occupies at the battle of
Tripura. The *Karṇaparvan* does not forget to expand on this persistent
rapport. Along with their parallelism as warriors on the same chariot,
we have noted the allusion to Śiva as Jiṣṇu and Arjuna's request of
permission from Śiva, Kṛṣṇa, and Brahmā to kill Karṇa. One finds
interspersed among these references further reminders of Arjuna and
Śiva's rapport. On the first of Karṇa's two days of marshalship (the
sixteenth day of the war), Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa set out with an homage
to Śiva (8.21.13), and then Arjuna, having drawn his bow Gāṇḍīva,
"as if dancing in battle" (*raṇe nṛtyanivārjunaḥ*), begins to slaughter

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[66] *Matsya Purāṇa* 126.39, 41; *Liṅga Purāṇa* 1.55.3. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 2.8 differs here and
at other points in its description of the solar chariot. The solar chariot is, of course, an
archaic image, already important in the Veda.

[67] Recall also the theme that Karṇa must fight the two Kṛṣṇas alone.

[68] Such a notion is already clear in the Veda; see Miller (n. 32 above), pp. 54, 59:
the *rathaḥ ṛtasya* (*Ṛg* Veda 2.23.3).

the Kauravas (21.15). As argued elsewhere, Arjuna's battlefield dance is itself an evocation of the dancing Śiva.[69] The same *adhyāya* confirms this with a description of the battlefield at the close of the sixteenth day's fighting: "Yakṣas, Rākṣasas, Piśācas and beasts of prey came en masse to the terrible battlefield, which was like the dancing ground of Rudra" (*rudrasyānartaṇopamam*, 21.42). But the most definitive statement of Arjuna's likeness to Śiva comes the next day from Arjuna himself. It is a convoluted scene. Enraged that Arjuna should delay in fighting Karṇa, Yudhiṣṭhira tells him to give his bow to someone else. Arjuna had vowed to kill anyone who spoke such an insult and must thus kill Yudhiṣṭhira. Kṛṣṇa then tells Arjuna how to escape this seemingly hopeless impasse by telling Arjuna to address his elder brother in the familiar, thus "killing" him symbolically. This symbolic fratricide stands against the background of the real fratricide which, unbeknown to them, both Yudhiṣṭhira and Arjuna are plotting against their elder brother Karṇa.[70] But now that Arjuna has "slain" his brother Yudhiṣṭhira, he despondently prepares to kill himself. Here again Kṛṣṇa counsels: Arjuna should "kill" himself equally symbolically, with self-praise. Thus Arjuna begins: "there is no other bow-bearer like me, O king, except the God with the Pināka bow [Śiva]. Indeed, I am esteemed by that great-souled one. In a moment I can destroy the universe, with its mobile and immobile things."[71] Kṛṣṇa merely tells Arjuna to "kill" himself by praising his own qualities or merits (*guṇāni*). He certainly does not tell him to lie. He does not even tell him to exaggerate.

Out of the remarkable constellation of "double identities" by which the epic characterizes the true identity of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, it is, of course, Arjuna's "concealed" identification with Śiva that has the greatest theological significance. For just as the epic insists, in numerous ways, on the identity of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, so it insists on the reciprocity and ultimate ontological unity of Śiva and Viṣṇu.[72] As I have shown elsewhere, Arjuna's "concealed" identity with Śiva is most significantly "revealed" in the symbolism of the disguise he assumes during the year the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī must spend incognito in

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[69] Hiltebeitel, "Śiva, the Goddess, and Disguises" (n. 13 above), p. 155.
[70] Hiltebeitel, "Brothers, Friends, and Charioteers" (n. 2 above), p. 96.
[71] *Na mādṛśo 'nyo naradeva vidyate/dhanurdharo devamṛte pinākinam//ahaṃ hi tenānumato mahātmanā/kṣaṇena hanyāṃ sacarācaraṃ jagat* (8.49.93).
[72] See, to begin with, Biardeau, EMH IV (n. 12 above). pp. 111–15.

the kingdom of Matsya. Not only do the roles he assumes as dancer, musician, and eunuch identify him with Śiva. It is his name Bṛhannalā/ Bṛhannaḍā, reinforced by numerous puns and comic allusions, that holds the greatest implications. For if Bṛhannalā/Bṛhannaḍā conceals the etymology *bṛhad-nara* ("great man"), and if *nara* is an allusion to Arjuna's identity not only as Nara but also as the *puruṣa* or "soul," then Bṛhad-nara as the "Great Nara" would identify Arjuna as the "Great Puruṣa" or Mahāpuruṣa, or more exactly—given the feminine ending and the "eunuch" disguise—"the Great Puruṣa who is also a woman." In other words, though the title Mahāpuruṣa or its equivalents could apply either to Viṣṇu or Śiva, the "name and form" Arjuna assumes can only evoke Śiva as Ardhanārīśvara, "the Lord who is half woman."[73]

Given these associations, one must perforce ask why it is that Arjuna should be Nara everywhere else in the *Mahābhārata* and only reveal himself to be "the Great Nara" in the period of concealment. The answer emerges from the previous discussions. First of all, the period which the Pāṇḍavas spend in disguise provides the *dīkṣā*-like rebirth from the "womb" which prepares them for the "sacrifice of battle."[74] It is also attended by numerous images of the *pralaya*: the name of the city (Upaplavya, "before the deluge") and the country (Matsya, the "fish") where they reside.[75] But above all it is Arjuna's evocation of Śiva as Ardhanārīśvara that implies the *pralaya* and, specifically, the *prākṛta pralaya*, for it is on the dissolution of the universe into *prakṛti* that Śiva and the Goddess—or Puruṣa and Prakṛti—are reunited in their ultimate Ardhanārīśvara form. Arjuna abandons this ultimate identity of Śiva (or of Śiva and Śakti) at the end of his period of disguise, although it is probably evoked throughout by his name Savyasācin, he who "draws the bow with the left hand," that is, the one who shoots equally well with the left (female) or right (male) hand. But he retains his identity with Śiva as the destroyer, thus linking Arjuna's warrior activities at Kurukṣetra with the Śiva who destroys the universe at the periodic or "occasional" (*naimittika*) *pralayas* that occur thousands of times over between *prākṛtapralayas*. And indeed, as Vyāsa explains to Arjuna at one point in the battle, Śiva is present in all of Arjuna's

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[73] See Hiltebeitel, "Śiva, the Goddess, and Disguises," pp. 153–57.
[74] *Ibid.*, pp. 149, 159–61, with citations, especially of Biardeau, EMH IV, pp. 207–8, and EMH V (n. 17 above), pp. 149–57, 187–88.
[75] See Hiltebeitel, "Śiva, the Goddess, and Disguises," pp. 149–50, and nn. 12–14.

destructive acts.[76] Now if Arjuna's disguise as Bṛhannalā/Bṛhannaḍā identifies him not only with this ultimate form of Śiva but also with activities (especially the dance and his defense, even as a eunuch, of Virāṭa's kingdom) that prefigure his role in the war, it is not surprising that Kṛṣṇa should subordinate himself to Arjuna as his charioteer. For he is, in fact, subordinating himself to Arjuna in his destructive dimension as a form of Śiva. But again, one must not forget the double soteriological language. For not only do they mutually subordinate themselves to each other as alternate representations of *puruṣa* and Mahāpuruṣa. They also ride together as the two Kṛṣṇas on the one chariot of the "impartial" Brahmā, the Brahmā with whom Kṛṣṇa is compared, and the Brahmā who can be "superior to the gods," even Śiva or Viṣṇu, only because he is the personification of the brahman in which all hierarchies and distinctions merge and cease.

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[76] *Ibid.*, p. 159, referring to *Mahābhārata* 7.173.

BUDDHISM AND THE *MAHĀBHĀRATA*:
BOUNDARY DYNAMICS IN TEXTUAL PRACTICE

It has long been felt that in the formation of boundaries between the religious traditions of South Asia, the composers of the *Mahābhārata* would have played a considerable role in generating the dynamics of what was to become Hinduism. But since the *Mahābhārata* is quiet if not exactly silent on the non-Brahmanical traditions, and particularly about Buddhism, scholars have not found it easy to discern how it might have constructed such borders and, still more durably, how it might have generated a new textual praxis that could be used by later epic and purāṇic authors to patrol them—if indeed such borders existed. One strain of scholarship approached this question from the standpoint that the *Mahābhārata* would have grown from oral origins into a massive 'encyclopedia', one that could eventually claim, 'whatever is here may be found elsewhere; what is not here does not exist anywhere' (*Mahābhārata*, 1.56.33; 18.5.38).[1] From this vantage point, a text of such self-sufficiency and self-importance could, at the most, have absorbed some minor references to the heterodoxies only haphazardly as a reflex of its snowball descent through the centuries (Hopkins 1969: 363–402; 475). This view concurs with an assimilationist model of Hinduism's relation to other traditions. Another approach has been to suspect that the *Mahābhārata* has more to say about Buddhism than it makes immediately obvious, and that what it has to say would have to have been said at some significant time in history. This view requires a more dialogical or interactive model such as is favored in this essay. But it is important to emphasize that the question is posed not with regard to the relation between traditions themselves as 'wholes', but with regard to the position of texts, and mainly one text, in defining one aspect of the relation between these traditions.

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[1] For an argument that the term 'encyclopedia' has been misleadingly applied to the *Mahābhārata*, particularly with reference to this verse, which, rather than defining the exhaustiveness of the text, is pitched toward an 'ontological debate', see Hiltebeitel 2001a: 162–163.

The question of the relation between Buddhism and the *Mahābhārata* is an old one, going back most famously to the younger Adolf Holtzmann's 'inversion theory' of 1892–95, which views the original *Mahābhārata* as a Buddhist epic celebrating Duryodhana in the image of Aśoka, and in memory of a national resistance against the Greeks, only to be subject to later Brahmanical inversion marked by the rise of Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu, that turned the plot upside down (Hiltebeitel 1979a: 69). As we shall see, certain authors are still playing with some of the same game pieces. But they come to quite different conclusions and have, I think it fair to say, a better understanding of the text and the historical possibilities for contextualizing it. What is perhaps surprising is that the issue took on sudden new steam, with three authors—Madeleine Biardeau, James Fitzgerald, and Nicholas Sutton—taking up the topic between 1997 and 2002.[2] Fitzgerald also offered a preview of his argument in a footnote in his 1980 dissertation (Fitzgerald 1980: 151, n. 1 [see then Fitzgerald 2001: 64, n. 5]), the very year that I developed an argument of my own for a different Buddhist backdrop,[3] one that I would now like to rethink in relation to these more recent offerings.

Biardeau hypothesizes a strict correlation in time between the *Mahābhārata* and Aśoka. Indeed, for her the two 'successive' epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, with the *Mahābhārata* in the earlier of the two, make up a 'brahmanical manifesto' provoked by the '*imperium* of Aśoka', one that 'dissimulates its real end', which must be decrypted or decoded.[4] Moreover, while the *Mahābhārata* is composed under conditions of 'urgency' apparently during the Aśokan reign itself, the *Rāmāyaṇa* may, she thinks, have been created

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[2] One should also be alerted to work in progress by Greg Bailey, for the moment exemplified in his paper presented at the *Conference on Religions in the Indic Civilization* and kindly supplied by the author (Bailey 2003). I comment on this paper only lightly.

[3] See now chapter 19. The article was written in late 1979 and delivered in January 1980 at the 'Seminar on Ancient Mathurā', sponsored by the American Institute of Indian Studies at New Delhi and Mathurā, but was not published until 1988 (Hiltebeitel 1988: 93–102). See Biardeau's kind encouragement to revisit the topic in Biardeau 2002: vol. 1, 21 n. 7. Fitzgerald and I developed our early views on these matters entirely independently.

[4] While I am cautious of the notion of 'code', and would prefer to think of a more flexible semiosis of referencing or allusion (Hiltebeitel 2001a: 119 and *passim*), the test of a code is to see if it works. I can only say that in thinking through the figures and terms that Biardeau decodes in connection with Jarāsaṃdha, I have found several points, to be discussed below, where I believe it is possible to extend her insights.

under less urgent conditions after the Mauryan empire had 'crumbled' (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 776). Nicholas Sutton also proposes "a date for the final reworking of the epic narrative some time in the Mauryan era" (Sutton 1997: 335; 339). The period of Aśokan rule *is* probably too early for the epics to have been written, but others—myself and James Fitzgerald included—have proposed a later date, about a century later at the earliest: that is, for me, no earlier than the Śuṅgas and probably about 150 B.C.E. to the year Zero.[5] That would make writing far more feasible. I also argue, as does Fitzgerald, that when the *Mahābhārata* speaks of *nāstikas* or 'heretics', it has other non-Brahmanical counter-movements in mind beside Buddhism alone: i.e. the Jains, whom Biardeau treats as having little if any relevance (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 768 n. 23), the Materialists, and the Ājīvikas.[6] I do not think, however, that Aśoka is the only royal figure of the period to leave traces in the *Mahābhārata,* for I think it quite likely that in its problematization of fighting and royal Brahmans, especially Droṇa,[7] the *Mahābhārata* may be reflecting on the reign of the Brahman Puṣyamitra Śuṅga (ca. 185–149 B.C.E.), the overthrower of the Mauryas—a point with which Fitzgerald agrees.[8] Further, as Biardeau herself notes, the post-Mauryan era marks a rise in the significance of the northwest as a place opposed to the more orthodox center. There one finds the Yavanas, Śakas, and Yue-chi, with a great *stūpa* at Puruṣapura/Peshawar, and Taxila/Takṣaśīlā as a crossroads of mixed population following destructive wars, while commercial exchanges are open with the West and China (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 149)—all of which may have something to do with the way the northwest is represented in both epics as a place where kingdoms (Gandhara [Biardeau 2002: vol. 1, 531], Madra, Bālhīka, Kaikeya) have questionable *dharma.*

Nonetheless, Fitzgerald[9]—like Nicholas Sutton (Sutton 1997: 331–341)—would agree with Biardeau that Aśoka is the *most* high-impact

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[5] See Hiltebeitel 2001a: 18; Fitzgerald 2001: 78–83.

[6] Hiltebeitel 2001a: 163 and n. 115 (with various references, several drawn from Nicholas Sutton 2000), Fitzgerald (Fitzgerald 2001) and I are close on these matters. See also the Jābāli episode in *Rāmāyaṇa*, 2.100–102.1.

[7] But consider also Kṛpa, Aśvatthāman; and see Rāvaṇa.

[8] We both consider the epic's negative evaluation of Brahman rule as evidence for a post—or at the date mid-Śuṅga date. See Fitzgerald 2001: 84; Hiltebeitel 2001a: 16–17.

[9] As observed above—mentioning Fitzgerald 1980: 151, n. 1; Fitzgerald 2001: 64, n. 5—Fitzgerald traces his view back to his 1980 dissertation. There, the note on the subject follows this statement: "A proper king should be *aśoka* in his execution of *dharma*"

historical royal figure on the *Mahābhārata*, but the three of them dif-
fer over how and where to trace that impact. Biardeau traces Aśoka
primarily into the career of the Magadha king Jarāsaṃdha; Fitzger-
ald and Sutton trace him into the figure of Yudhiṣṭhira. Yet Fitzger-
ald and Sutton part company over whether Yudhiṣṭhira is a dark or
light counterpart to Aśoka. For Fitzgerald, Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira
is a grim and somber extension of his father Dharmarāja Yama, the
god of death, who must oversee a divine raiding party of the gods
that descends to earth to restore Brahmans to privileges denied them
by Aśoka—Brahmans, that is, who, Fitzgerald thinks, composed an
initial 'main *Mahābhārata*', a first written redaction, out of 'rage' at
their treatment under Aśoka—"a deep and bitter political rage at the
center of the *Mahābhārata*." For Sutton, on the contrary, Yudhiṣṭhira
is a rather ideal representation of Aśoka as a figure of non-cruelty and
forgiveness. Sutton argues that "[t]he *kṣatriya-dharma* taught in the
dharma-śāstras and the *Śāntiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* is rejected by
the Aśoka of both legend and edict, as it is by Yudhiṣṭhira in the epic"
(1997: 334)—a somewhat anachronistic point for Aśoka, while for
Yudhiṣṭhira it is in unexplained contradiction to his being not only the
main hearer of the *Śāntiparvan*, but his rather small show of resistance
to its *Realpolitik*.[10] Moreover, Sutton thinks that Brahmans would have
admired Aśoka because he patronized them along with Buddhists (Sut-
ton 1997: 340). Sutton and Fitzgerald also have diametrically opposed
views of the *Mahābhārata*'s take on Aśoka's conversion. For Sutton,

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(Fitzgerald 1980: 151). But Fitzgerald supplies no citation for such a description of the
king in the epic, and must rather admit in his note: "Actually, more typical language of
the text is *viśoka* or *vitaśoka*. I do not get the impression that the late or final redactors
of the *MBh* consciously attempted to draw a parallel between Yudhiṣṭhira here and the
legendary Buddhist king. [...] On the other hand, the parallels between the situations
of Yudhiṣṭhira and Aśoka, and the contrast at the *doctrinal* level (regardless of actual
behavior) between the non-violent and renunciatory ideology of Buddhism and the
deliberate Hindu sanctioning of violence for *dharmic* ends and the Hindu attempts to
synthesize the renunciatory perspectives of *mokṣa* with the material and social processes
of society (in the *āśramadharma* and the *karmayoga*) make it difficult not to see the
MBh making some reply to the Buddhist pretense of having an adequate definition of
the role of the emperor. The Hindu king must fight and be *aśoka* at the same time"
(Fitzgerald 1980: 151, n. 1). It is not clear whether Fitzgerald at this point was inclined
to think the epic's rebuttal of Aśoka would have been only in a late redaction, to which
he assigns most of the *Śāntiparvan* in his more recent work.
    [10] See further Sutton 1997: 336, stating, "Yudhiṣṭhira utterly rejects this part of his
education" rather overstating the case. Similarly, it is unconvincing to align Aśoka's
condemnation of religious festivals and rituals with Yudhiṣṭhira's hesitant run-up to
his post-war Aśvamedha (Sutton 1997: 357).

Aśoka converts to a peaceful rule by *dharma*, and he sees "the functional Yudhiṣṭhira" as "modeled" after "the historical Aśoka and other kings of a similar disposition" (1997: 334; 339). Fitzgerald, however, regards "the figure of Yudhiṣṭhira at the beginning of the *Śānti Parvan*, in his attempt to renounce the kingship and go to the forest", as "deliberately scripted by the authors of the epic to represent what they saw to be wrong with the Mauryan emperor Aśoka, to purge and refute whose rule was, I believe, the principal purpose for the creation of the first generation of our written Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*" (Fitzgerald 2001: 64–65). On these differences, we could say that Biardeau agrees with both on the pivotal character of Aśoka's conversion, but has greater agreement with Fitzgerald at least to the degree that the Aśoka reflected in the text would be the dark one.[11] But her Jarāsaṃdha is, as we shall observe further, a figure not of the Hindu god of death, Dharmarāja Yama, but the Buddhist one, Māra.

Meanwhile, my attempt[12] was also to consider Jarāsaṃdha as a figuration of Buddhism, but of Buddhist cosmological and soteriological ideas rather than of a specific personage, whether mythic or historical. I shall unpack this difference in the next section. Nonetheless, Biardeau and I would agree that whatever the correlations one makes, they require an interpretation tied to the *Mahābhārata*'s articulation of *bhakti* themes and idioms, which set the iconic and narrative conventions for multiple deities and other related figures, but in particular those connected with Kṛṣṇa, who leads the opposition to Jarāsaṃdha. As Biardeau demonstrates, while Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, and Viṣṇu as Puruṣottama acquire "distinctive attributes that one finds as well on coins, pillars, and in the epic text"—without it being possible to say which is prior—, "the representation of the Buddha and his partisans starting from the monumental aniconic stūpa reliquary" goes on along side that "of the essential personages of postvedic Brahmanism, whom the epic already endows with specific attributes that are acquired henceforth" (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 751). In particular:

> The Mathurā region, on the Yamunā and all around out to Avanti and Vidiśā and Sāñcī, is testimony to this. At Mathurā, to our surprise, it is Buddhism that appears dominant there. But has not Kṛṣṇa himself taken

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[11] See above all, and most recently, Biardeau 2002: vol. 1, 782 (the theme appears in numerous of Biardeau's earlier writings).

[12] See n. 3 above.

the precaution in the epic to explain why he and the 'clans' that surround it…have had to flee from Mathurā…because of Jarāsaṃdha? They now occupy the extremity of the Gujarat peninsula! But above all, let us keep from confounding epic time and historical time. The epic neither invents the future nor recalls the past, not to mention the present. Apparently history gives another explanation: the Buddhists have invaded Mathurā (more by conversions than by migrations), but despite all, there are devotees of Bhagavān Viṣṇu not far from there as we know, a little more to the south, not far besides from the illustrious Buddhist cult center at Sāñcī. Kṛṣṇa will have his revenge at Mathurā, and it is still there that one finds him today.[13] (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 751)

Fitzgerald takes a different view here. For him, *bhakti* is late to the epic and the Jarāsaṃdha episode would probably not be part of his earliest written 'main *Mahābhārata*'.[14] In excising *bhakti*, Fitzgerald's notion of Brahman rage is quite different from Biardeau's take on Brahman-Buddhist interactions, in which she proposes two forms of *bhakti*, Brahmanical and Buddhist, developing along side each other, in the latter case among Buddhists who are "for the most part of Indian origins and inserted in the society of castes", fully 'at home' (*chez eux*) there, with "no one desir[ing] their departure, despite this sort of Brahmanical manifesto […] that the imperium of Aśoka provokes" in the form of the two epic texts (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 776). Here, of course, I side with Biardeau, and can see nothing to recommend Fitzgerald's conception of a pre-*bhakti* 'main *Mahābhārata*' in which faith is a matter of afterthoughts. For me, the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* are both designed to sustain a subtle, patient, and emerging political theology that propounds a new *bhakti* framework in which royal patronage and Brahman prestige are provided with new places and meanings. Nonetheless, while I regard Biardeau's stress on Buddhism and Brahmanism's mutual at-homeness to be of vital importance, something more needs to be said about the oppositions between them that can be a self-conscious feature of their texts. The *Mahābhārata* in particular often reflects greater antipathy

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[13] Similarly, one finds representation of Rudra-Śiva, Mahiṣāsuramardinī, Skanda, Sūrya (fitted with Iranian boots), all "announcing the diversity of Hinduism" (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 752–753). See, for discussion of extra details, also Biardeau 2002: vol. 1, 131–133. Further Hiltebeitel 1988: 94–97.

[14] Fitzgerald doesn't mention it among those he thinks to be not 'main', but he does include the closely related Śiśupāla episode as exemplifying the non-originality of "all episodes that elaborate some theme of devotion to Viṣṇu, Śiva, or Kṛṣṇa" (Fitzgerald 2003).

toward Buddhism than Biardeau indicates. I shall recall this point in connection with some of the passages she cites.

From here on, then, I would like to turn to two points that Biardeau makes central to her interpretation of the relation between Buddhism and the *Mahābhārata*: her decoding of the Magadha king Jarāsaṃdha, which I shall compare with my own; and her treatment of Mārkaṇḍeya's prophetic account of the ills of the Kaliyuga.

Jarāsaṃdha Decoded

Toward the beginning of the *Mahābhārata's* second book, the *Sabhāparvan*, it is the troubleshooter-saint Nārada who inspires Yudhiṣṭhira with the idea of the dangerous Rājasūya sacrifice that will make him an 'emperor' (*samrāj*). Yudhiṣṭhira checks with Kṛṣṇa, who says they must first eliminate Jarāsaṃdha, Yudhiṣṭhira's only rival for paramountcy or empire (*samrājya*), who 'has imprisoned eighty-six kings in an "enclosure for men" (*puruṣavraja*) at Girivraja, the future Rājagṛha in Magadha [...] in preparation for a sacrifice of a hundred kings to Śiva, that is, implicitly, a sacrifice of the entire [*ārya*] *kṣatra*' excluding his own line and others to be mentioned, 'for, as Kṛṣṇa tells Yudhiṣṭhira, Jarāsaṃdha sows dissension among the one hundred and one lineages of the Solar and Lunar dynasties' (*Mahābhārata*, 2.13.4–8 [see Hiltebeitel 1988a: 97]). At Kṛṣṇa's advice, Yudhiṣṭhira sends Kṛṣṇa (for policy or guidance, *naya*), Arjuna (for victory), and Bhīma (for force) to Magadha, to which the three set off on Kṛṣṇa's chariot with its Garuḍa pennant, Kṛṣṇa at the reins prefiguring his role as Arjuna's charioteer (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 775).

Meanwhile, we learn of Jarāsaṃdha's birth. Caṇḍa Kauśika, a Vaiśvāmitra Ṛṣi, gave a mango to the Magadha king Bṛhadratha, who then gave halves of it to his two wives. The child was born in two halves, discarded near the palace, and then—soon giving him his name—he was 'put together by Jarā': a magnanimous Rākṣasī who 'jauntily' gave the 'put-together' child back to the king—since "she wished to recompense the king for the good treatment she received as a domestic divinity of the palace [...] Oh! Oh! [says Biardeau] Do we dare exclaim: what is this Rākṣasī doing in a royal palace?" (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 755–56). Indeed, Biardeau sees her as a precursor of Rāvaṇa and the Rākṣasas and Rākṣasīs of Laṅkā; but let us note that Duryodhana's ninety-nine brothers are at least Rākṣasas incarnate. Later, during the

Mahābhārata war, Kṛṣṇa tells how Jarā died in the fight over Mathurā between Jarāsaṃdha and Kṛṣṇa when she was slain by Balarāma's falling mace.[15]

According to Kṛṣṇa, Jarāsaṃdha's allies are Śiśupāla as *protecteur des sots* (that is, 'protector of fools'); Haṃsa (whose name 'Gander' evokes the supreme self or *ātman*) and Ḍimbhaka (*sot*, 'fool'). The last two die as part of a triple death: first a pretext-Haṃsa is killed in battle; then Ḍimbhaka drowns having thought it was the real Haṃsa, his inseparable friend; then the real Haṃsa drowns having learned of the drowning of Ḍimbhaka. It seems to Biardeau that, along with the initial pretext-death of the first Haṃsa in battle, this double drowning evokes the Upaniṣadic two birds as friends in the one tree,[16] the *ātman* and *jīva* (the embodied 'living soul')—leaving Śiśupāla as a 'protector of fools (*sots*)' who could not, however, protect *these* fools who represent a Buddhist misrepresentation of these two inseparable dimensions of the soul (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 756).

Further 'decoding' Jarāsaṃdha, Biardeau calls attention to the list of 'descents' of gods, demons, and others into the heroic generations, in which Jarāsaṃdha is the incarnation of an Asura named Vipracitti (*Mahābhārata*, 1.61.4)—Biardeau suggests "'sans intelligence' (?)" (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 756). Jarāsaṃdha also appears at *two svayaṃvara*s: that of Draupadī in Pañcāla,[17] and that of an unnamed princess of Kaliṅga, daughter of the Kaliṅga king Citraṅgada, who becomes the wife of Duryodhana—a story told only at the beginning of the post-war *Śāntiparvan*, where Nārada answers a question from Yudhiṣṭhira: why was my brother Karṇa so fated with adversities? When the Kaliṅga princess reviewed the kings who had come to win her hand, she passed over Duryodhana, and feeling the snub, Duryodhana abducted her on his chariot—counting on the help of Bhīṣma and Droṇa, but helped especially by Karṇa who routed the ensuing kings and escorted Duryodhana and his new bride home to Hāstinapura. Having admired Karṇa's warrior prowess, Jarāsaṃdha then demanded to fight him in single combat—a sporting challenge (where it took

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[15] *Mahābhārata*, 7.156.10–14. See Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 219–220; and further discussion below.

[16] *Śvetāśvataropaniṣad*, 4.4.6–7; *Muṇḍakopaniṣad*, 3.1.1–3.

[17] Biardeau is relying on the Vulgate here, citing *Mahābhārata*, 1.186.23 (= Critical Edition 1.1821*) and *Mahābhārata*, 1.187.26 (= Critical Edition 1.1828* lines 5–6), but in both cases with fairly wide manuscript support.

place is not said) rather than a duel to the death. The fight began on chariots and ended in wrestling, until Jarāsaṃdha had to call a halt, since the seam left from his two halves being 'put together by Jarā' at birth had begun to show signs of rupture. Recognizing "Karṇa as the victor, Jarāsaṃdha gave him the city of Mālinī, which is apparently in or near Aṅga—where Karṇa must already rule in subordination to Duryodhana. Says Biardeau:

> These two little chapters permit us to know that Duryodhana and Karṇa are in the camp of Jarāsaṃdha, and that Jarāsaṃdha is obliged to recognize the superiority of Karṇa. But it is difficult to go farther and draw conclusions from this as to their fidelity to Brahmanism, not least because they would have to be deceiving the warrior Brahmans or Kṣatriyas who fight on their side against the Pāṇḍavas. (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 757)

In the *Harivaṃśa*, Jarāsaṃdha does include Duryodhana and his brothers among his allies (Biardeau 1978: 226; Hiltebeitel 1988a: 97). Moreover, it is highly fascinating that in the Tamil Terukkūttu tradition of dramas on the *Mahābhārata*, this story from the *Śāntiparvan* is clearly known, despite the fact that the drama cycle and the classical Tamil *Makāpāratam* of Villiputtūr Āḻvār that it builds on both stop their narratives with the death of Duryodhana and the end of the war. Moreover, it is not Duryodhana who marries this princess—now named Poṉṉuruvi, the 'Golden Earth'—but Karṇa because Karṇa touched her during her abduction, and because Duryodhana, despite his great friendship for Karṇa, always sees him as a man of low caste (de Bruin 1999: 286–90; 314; de Bruin 1998: 238–47).[18]

Biardeau also calls attention to the other kings who came to this Kaliṅga *svayaṃvara* to vie for the princess. One is named Aśoka (*Mahābhārata*, 12.4.7c)—a surprise that Biardeau does not do more than note in passing without working it directly into her interpretation (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 527; 529–32; 757). But the list is interesting, and bears on her notion of alliances between Duryodhana and possibly pro-Buddhist camp. Here is the list of kings attending the Kaliṅga *svayaṃvara*—an odd lot that would likely consist quite precisely of kings *not* penned up in Jarāsaṃdha's corral at Magadha, the properly Ārya kings whom Jarāsaṃdha is keeping to sacrifice to Śiva:

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[18] On the name Poṉṉuruvi, following Madeleine Biardeau's suggestion, see Hiltebeitel 1988b: 399.

> Śiśupāla, Jarāsaṃdha, Bhīṣmaka, Vakra, Kapotaroman (Pigeon-Hair), Nīla, Rukmin, Dṛḍhavikrama, the Mahāraja Sṛgāla who was the overlord of the kingdom of women, Aśoka, Śatadhanvan, and the heroic Bhoja—these and many other kings from the south, and *mleccha preceptors and kings* from the east and north, O Bhārata. (*Mahābhārata*, 12.4.6–8)

One wonders at the company that Duryodhana and Jarāsaṃdha keep, which includes not only this Aśoka and Mlecchācaryas—implying some kind of 'barbarian preceptors' from the north and east (the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* uses the term *mlecchācarya* for Adam, Enoch, Noah, Moses, *Buddha*, Jesus, and Muhammad) (Hiltebeitel 1999: 277–78)—, but the 'great king Sṛgāla ('Jackal'), overlord of the kingdom of women', who may be the Sṛgāla Vāsudeva mentioned in the *Harivaṃśa* as one of the 'pseudo Vāsudevas', another of whom, Pauṇḍra (i.e. from Bengal) Vāsudeva, is explicitly mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* as siding with Jarāsaṃdha (Sörenson 1963: 718–19; Hopkins 1969: 217).[19] These 'pseudo-Vāsudevas' perversely claim the title that 'properly' belongs to Kṛṣṇa, for whom it denotes both his paternity and divinity (Hiltebeitel 1988a: 101, n. 49).

   As with this Aśoka, Biardeau only notes these names, and turns her attention to Bhīṣma as, again, one who abducts (or in this case helps to abduct) a bride for another Kuru king: that is, as he did at a *svayaṃvara* at Kāśi, prior to these other two *svayaṃvara*s, where he abducted three brides for the Kuru prince Vicitravīrya, his own half-brother. But, notes Biardeau, this current *svayaṃvara*

> takes place among the Kaliṅgas, that people whom Aśoka made famous by the (historical) bloody conquest, regarding it as the regret that he put to the test to the point of inscribing it on stone in several places of India, not including Kaliṅga, to be sure, and describing it as the point of departure for his conversion to Buddhism. (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 529)

That Duryodhana goes to Kaliṅga, confident in Karṇa's aid, to get his bride is for Biardeau a confirmation of an earlier suspicion that the name 'Kaliṅga', interpreted as 'that which goes toward Kali' (*kaliṃ-ga*), implies affinities between Kaliṅga and Duryodhana, who is the incarnation of the demon Kali and who would thus (for Biardeau) be the

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[19] See further Hiltebeitel 1999a: 150 (in the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa*'s retelling of the Hindi oral epic *Ālhā*, Sṛgāla, 'Jackal' is the demon incarnated by the demonic king Jambuka, who is himself the father of the major demon foe Kāliya, an incarnation of Jarāsaṃdha). See also Hiltebeitel 1999a: 164, n. 27: in the *Mahābhārata*, Vāsudeva of Puṇḍra is not only a false Vāsudeva but a false Puruṣottama.

king Kali of the Kali Yuga.[20] Indeed, Biardeau finds more to support the idea that the epic gives a singular attention to Kaliṅga, whose people, she suggests, would likely have been converted to Buddhism by Aśoka's conquest (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 54). For during the *Mahābhārata* war, Kaliṅga allies itself with the camp of Duryodhana, "whose Buddhist sympathies one can only guess" (Biardeau 2002: vol. 1, 298); and when Arjuna travels to the east on the first phase of the tour that will bring him three additional wives, the Brahmans accompanying him turn back at the entrance to Kaliṅga, determining not to accompany him there (*Mahābhārata*, 1.217.10)—on which Biardeau remarks, "so as not to tread on an impure terrain?".[21]

For Biardeau, then, the account of the *svayaṃvara* in Kaliṅga gives the poet the opportunity to place at the forefront an alliance between Duryodhana and Jarāsaṃdha that is possible thanks to Karṇa. Karṇa's centrality to this alliance is in evidence again after Kṛṣṇa has used 'stratagems' to engineer the death of Ghaṭotkaca, which finally makes the death of Karṇa possible as the last real hurdle to Duryodhana's defeat. It is at that very point—at *Mahābhārata*, 7.156—that Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna how stratagems have been used to eliminate other foes, and that had Duryodhana been able to ally himself in particular with Jarāsaṃdha, Śiśupāla, and Ekalavya, he would have been unconquerable. Moreover, it is in this context that Kṛṣṇa reveals how Jarā died as a result of Balarāma's falling mace, as cited above. Amid such connections, it is perhaps significant that Kṛṣṇa is repeatedly referred to as Madhusūdana in the episode of the 'temptation of Karṇa'[22]—as if Karṇa, as the errant figure of the pralayic sun, elicits this aspect of Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu as the god who safeguards the Vedic cosmogony

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[20] "Le Kaliyuga ou le roi Kali qu'est Duryodhana" (Biardeau 2002: vol. 1, 298). See also Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 54. The *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* and the Ismaili *ginān* literature would seem to provide supportive evidence that the name can be used in this sense. This *Purāṇa*, in retelling the Hindi folk epic *Ālhā*, completes its profile of the story-launching demonic king (whom Hindi versions call Karingha or Kariyā) by naming him Kāliya as lord of the Kali Yuga and making him an incarnation Jarāsaṃdha. Meanwhile, the *ginān*s simply call him Kaliṅga, raising the likelihood that 'Kāliya' in the *purāṇa* evokes the Kali Yuga by augmentation rather than by connection with the verb *gam*). In either case, as also in *Ālhā*, the Pāṇḍavas (reincarnated or resurrected) join the divine leader (the reincarnated *avatāra* or the Imām) to destroy this king who embodies the Kali Yuga. See Hiltebeitel 1999a: 150–152; 341–347. Further, on deployment of themes from the Jarāsaṃdha-Śiśupāla sequence, Hiltebeitel 1999a: 150–152; 162–164; 346, n. 27.
[21] Biardeau 2002: vol. 1, 298: "pour ne pas fouler une terre impurer?".
[22] See n. 12 above.

(Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 531–32). But it is still Jarāsaṃdha who remains central to this configuration of alliances. Biardeau's hypothesis is that for the *Mahābhārata* poet, Jarāsaṃdha is a figure of Māra, Death, the Buddhist form of the Tempter who arouses desires and thus leads to "old age (*jarā*) and death"—that is, to repeated births (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 530, n. 5). Jarāsaṃdha is thus an 'apocalyptic' figure of Māra, recalling the Upaniṣadic compound *jarā-mṛtyu* and the 'more Buddhist' *jāra-maraṇa* from which the Buddhist teachings of suffering, thirst, and impermanence, including the impermanence of the *ātman*, proceed (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 757). Thus when Jarāsaṃdha is outwrestled by Karṇa and pronounces the latter victorious, this '"Buddhist' king plays a determining role in Karṇa's celebrity and in the extension of his power, since he cedes a city to him"—by name Mālinī, which is also a name for Draupadī in disguise, suggesting what is really coveted by Karṇa but also forbidden to him (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 757). Says Biardeau:

> Karṇa now has a rank that is more and more 'royal', whatever may be his birth. And the alliance of the three robbers gives precision to the hypothesis that the alliance with the Buddhists has been reinforced even before the intervention of Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna, and Bhīma that is commanded from afar by Yudhiṣṭhira in preparation for his Rājasūya. But at the same time Jarāsaṃdha discovers his limits, his congenital fragility. It serves as a warning of how he will die in combat with Bhīma. (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 530–31)

My own reading of Jarāsaṃdha's relation to Buddhism began with the observation that probably before, or at least in addition to, these alliances between Jarāsaṃdha and the Kauravas, Jarāsaṃdha has, as part of his 'net of alliances', one with Kṛṣṇa's first nemesis Kaṃsa, whose anxieties that Kṛṣṇa has been born to kill him result in Kṛṣṇa's taking on his 'cowherd disguise' among the Gopās and Gopīs. Kaṃsa is allied with Jarāsaṃdha through his marriage to the latter's daughters Asti and Prāpti (*Mahābhārata*, 2.13.30; *Harivaṃśa*, 2.34.4–6). I proposed that just as the *Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa* probably associates Laṅkā, "among its *many* symbolic associations, […] with Buddhism", so too would it be "likely for Girivraja, with its *caitya* peak which Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna, and Bhīma destroy—disguised as Brahmans!—upon entering the city on their way to killing Jarāsaṃdha" (*Mahābhārata*, 2.19.2, 17, 41), to be associated with Buddhism:

> Girivraja and Rājagṛha are of course prominent in the early history of both Buddhism and Jainism, and a center of early Buddhist kings—most notably Bimbisāra and Ajātaśatru—whose throne supposedly descends from Jarāsaṃdha (see e.g. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 4.23). And the region of Magadha is later the base of the first great Buddhist emperor, Aśoka. But most curious are the names of Jarāsaṃdha's two daughters—Asti and Prāpti—whom he marries to Kaṃsa. It is these two women who prompt their father's revenge against Kṛṣṇa after the slaying of Kaṃsa. Unusual names for Indian girls, they both evoke prominent features of Sarvāstivādin Buddhism: Asti (*sarvam asti*, the phrase which gives the school its name) and Prāpti ('obtention', the Sarvāstivādin 'pseudo-soul'). No other explanation for their names seems likely. (Hiltebeitel 1988a: 98)

As I still would not do today, I did not single out Aśoka to the extent that others have come to do, but would rather place him in a long history of Brahman dissatisfactions not only with heterodoxies and heterodox rule, including not just the Buddhists but the Jains, but further with rule by Brahman kings. But of course Biardeau's tracing of Jarāsaṃdha's Kaliṅga connections would justify giving Aśoka a certain prominence.

From there, like Biardeau (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 751), I attempted to relate the opposition between Kṛṣṇa and Jarāsaṃdha to ground conditions, with Mathurā being "connected not only with [Kṛṣṇa's] need to operate in the epic from Dvārakā, but with the prominence *in* Mathurā during the period of the *Mahābhārata's* composition of both Jainism and Buddhism" (Hiltebeitel 1988a: 98). But my greatest emphasis was on Jarāsaṃdha not as a figure who could be decoded with reference to one figure, one 'signified', whether Aśoka or Māra as implying Aśoka, but as a figure in juxtaposition with Kṛṣṇa through whom—or rather, through both of whom—the *Mahābhārata* poets could bring into relief a contest between Brahmanical and Buddhist cosmological and soteriological *ideas*. Thus, although I take Jarāsaṃdha's "curious name [...] 'Put together by *jarā*'" much as Biardeau now does[23] (that is, as implying the Buddhist connection between old age and death), I also take it to further allude to

> [...] the Buddhist 'wheel', the *bhāvacakra* [which] is precisely 'put together by old age and death'. The twelve *nidāna*s are drawn into a circle that 'puts these two together' with 'ignorance': [...] *avidyā*. But more than this, the Buddhist *bhāvacakra* is precisely a closed circle, without periods

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[23] Biardeau had an earlier explanation—Biardeau 1978: 227—relating the *sandha* in his name to either 'pact' or 'twilight' (as in *sandhyā*). See Hiltebeitel 1988a: 98 and n. 54.

of crisis and renewal, yugas. That is, it is a circle that does not admit the intervention of the *avatāra* who 'comes into being from yuga to yuga' (*Bhagavad Gītā* 4–8). (Hiltebeitel 1988a: 98–99)

Here I refer back to a passage from the *Mahābhārata*'s *Udyogaparvan* where Saṃjaya tells Dhṛtarāṣṭra how Kṛṣṇa rules the 'Wheel of the Yugas' in relation to two grander wheels, the 'Wheel of Time' (probably implying *kalpa*s) and the 'Wheel of the Universe' probably implying space):

> As if sporting, the supreme being (*puruṣottama*) Janārdana keeps the earth, atmosphere, and heaven running. Having made the Pāṇḍavas his pretext, and as if beguiling the world (*lokaṃ sammohayann iva*), he wishes to burn your deluded sons [the Kauravas] who are disposed toward *adharma*. By his self's yoga, the Lord Keśava tirelessly keeps the Wheel of Time, the Wheel of the Universe, *and* the Wheel of the Yugas revolving (*kālacakraṃ jagaccakraṃ yugacakram* […] *parivartayate*). I tell you truly, the Lord alone is ruler of Time and Death (*kālasya ca hi mṛtyoś ca*), and of the mobile and the immobile. Yet ruling the whole universe, the great yogin Hari undertakes to perform acts like a powerless peasant (*kīnāśa iva durbalaḥ*). (*Mahābhārata*, 5.66.10–14)[24]

I thus conclude that Kṛṣṇa's opposition to Jarāsaṃdha and other "wheel-evoking foes[25] may represent a confrontation of cosmologies: the *bhakti* cosmology of Hinduism which admits ruptures of time—twilights—for the sake of the world's renewal, and images of Time without the possibility of such divine intervention, such as occur in Buddhism and Jainism" (Hiltebeitel 1988a: 99). On this type of contrast, I was then as I am now indebted to the inspired work of Randy Kloetzli on Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain cosmologies (Kloetzli 1983; 1985; 1987). The important differences concern the *avatāra* and the *yuga*, which thus points the way to Biardeau's discussion of references to Buddhism in Mārkaṇḍeya's account of the Kaliyuga. Be it emphasized, however, that the *avatāra* and the *yuga* are both concepts in formation in the epics: the one not yet used as a substantive;[26] the other used with great fluidity;[27] and neither yet codified and ordered in the way they are to be in the Purāṇas.

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[24] Slightly modified from the translation in Hiltebeitel 1988a: 95.

[25] Such as Kālanemi, see Hiltebeitel 1988a: 98.

[26] As has been long and widely recognized (though see now, however, Couture 2001, 314, for an exception at *Mahābhārata* 3.146.33 that does not concern divine incarnation). See Hiltebeitel 2001a: 109, n. 56—a note overlooked even though it is back-referenced in a note on a page (236 n. 36) cited to criticize one of my approaches to this topic as 'implausible' on the sole stated grounds that I 'show no recognition of the fact that the term [*avatāra*] is later than the epics' (Brockington 2002: 601).

[27] See Luis Gonzáles-Reimann 2002. Also Hiltebeitel 2001a: 152, n. 82 (I would stand by my point that Gonzáles-Reimann's atomization of *yuga* references is not successful,

The Degradation of Dharma in the Kali Yuga

Just after Mārkaṇḍeya has wound up his account of how he survived the *pralaya* or dissolution of the universe on the remaining single ocean and has revealed that Janārdana Kṛṣṇa, who is sitting there with the Pāṇḍavas listening, is none other than the primal god who not only sleeps on that ocean and wakes at creation but is the very god whom he, Mārkaṇḍeya, met as a baby on a branch of a banian tree on that vast ocean, and who swallowed him then and there to bring him back to this world (*Mahābhārata*, 3.186.77 ff), Yudhiṣṭhira asks Mārkaṇḍeya to tell him next about 'the future course of the world under imperial rule' (*sāṃrājye bhaviṣyāṃ jagato gatim* [3.188.3])—or 'under empire'—in the Kali age (*Mahābhārata* 3.188.5). I take some liberty in translating *sāṃrājye* by 'under imperial rule' here, but do so bearing three points in mind. First, there is nothing to support van Buitenen's making Yudhiṣṭhira ask "about the future course of the world under *his* sovereignty" (Van Buitenen 1975: 593)—that is, under Yudhiṣṭhira's *own* sovereignty or imperial rule. Second, that it is a question about future *saṃrājya* in the abstract allows one to consider it as a back-reference to, or reminder of, Jarāsaṃdha's own past rule itself. As I indicate in *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*, the epic "[…] construes the whole episode of Yudhiṣṭhira's assertion of paramountcy through the elimination of his rival, the *Magadha* king Jarāsaṃdha, and his performance of a Rājasūya sacrifice around the issue of empire". This sequence provides in a flurry most of the *Mahābhārata*'s usages of the terms *sāṃrāj*, 'emperor', and *sāṃrājya*, 'empire'—to which I note, "Within the Pune C[ritical] E[dition], there are, between 2.11 and 2.42 [that is, in the Jarāsaṃdha-Śiśupāla sequence], eight out of the fourteen such usages in the entire epic"[28] (Hiltebeitel 2001a: 8 and n. 37). Thus, as regards Jarāsaṃdha, "Once Yudhiṣṭhira learns from Nārada that he should consider the Rājasūya as a means to empire (*sāṃrājyam*; 2.11.61), Kṛṣṇa says that he has the qualities (*guṇas*) to be emperor (*saṃrāj*) and to make himself emperor of the Kṣatra (*kṣatre saṃrājam ātmānaṃ kartum arhasi*; 2.13.60), but must first defeat Jarāsaṃdha who has obtained empire by

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but add that his work is valuable in demonstrating that uses of the *yuga* concept are fluid in the epic, and that a consistent or even overriding view of their applications is not easy to arrive at); cf. Biardeau 2002: vol. 1, 1007–1008 (with a view different from mine on the prevailing *yuga* context of the *Mahābhārata* war).

  [28] My source for such epic word-counts was Tokunaga 1994.

birth (*sāṃrājyaṃ jarāsaṃdhaḥ prāpto bhavati yonitaḥ*, 2.13.8)"[29] (Hilte-beitel 2001a: 8). Third, I do not follow Biardeau's argument that the epics do not mean empire by the term *sāṃrājya* (Biardeau 2002: vol. 1, 299; 845; vol. 2, 711). Indeed, it would seem she would have to concede that they use the term to talk about it if she considers Jarāsaṃdha a cryptic figure for Aśoka (Hiltebeitel forthcoming, chapter 12).

In any case, Mārkaṇḍeya addresses this topic under the heading of what will happen 'at the end' or 'with the destruction of the *yuga*' (*yugānte, yugakṣaye*).[30] Among these things to come, here are some of the passages that Biardeau finds most interesting, along with some others that bear on our concerns in this essay. I take them in their textual order.

> The Brahmans shall find fault with the Veda and abandon their vows; seduced [deceived][31] by argumentation/logic,[32] they will neither offer worship nor sacrifice (*na vratāni cariṣyanti brāhmaṇā vedanindakāḥlna yakṣyanti na hoṣyanti hetuvādavilobhitāḥ*). (*Mahābhārata*, 3.188.26)

The Vulgate adds here the following line, which Biardeau emphasize as a double reference to the key phrase: 'Deceived by argumentation/logic, they will make effort in the lowlands' (*nimneṣvīhāṃ kariṣyanti hetuvādavimohitāḥ*) (*Mahābhārata*, 3.948*).[33] Biardeau glosses *hetuvād-avilobhitaḥ* as "[…] led into error by discussions that pretend to be logical".[34] And she continues:

> But let us not fall asleep over this appeal to logical discussion that draws the Brahmans into error: discussions with whom? On what subject? Let

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[29] I do not agree—as indicated in Hiltebeitel 2001a: 8, n. 36—with those who argue that the whole Rājasūya episode is late.

[30] Note that this suggests for Yudhiṣṭhira, who goes on speaking in the future tense, that the Kali Yuga is an age yet to come. In what follows, Mārkaṇḍeya distinguishes Kṛta etc. with imperfect or present tense verbs (*Mahābhārata*, 3.188.10 ff) from Kali Yuga traits described by future tense ones (*Mahābhārata*, 3.188.15 ff).

[31] Where the Critical Edition has *vilobhitāḥ* here, the Vulgate has *vimohitāḥ*.

[32] See Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 760; 778.

[33] Biardeau does not in this context draw attention to the mention of the 'lowlands' here but elsewhere she notes that the marshy delta areas of Kaliṅga-Orissa, classifi-able as 'lowlands' are off-bounds to the Brahmans accompanying Arjuna (Biardeau 2002: vol. 1, 298, 516, 528, 530). This interpolated passage is found in the manuscripts B3, Dn1, n2, D6, and seems to have made its own connection between seduction by *hetuvāda* and the 'low-lands', which are mentioned in the next verse as a place where people commit malpractices in plowing (*Mahābhārata*, 3.188.27).

[34] Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 760: "induits en erreur par des discussions prétenduement logiques".

us keep in mind these logical discussions that, this time, cannot situate themselves in the sacrificial arena during the pauses of the ritual process, but which can no longer be purely mythical inventions, for it is the first time that one hears them spoken of in a Brahmanical text. (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 760)

This notion of 'pauses in the ritual'—that is, the intervals in which debates could be held among Brahmans and Kṣatriyas and (though Biardeau doesn't mention it) stories could be told—is important in her contrast between Brahmanical and Buddhist theories of *karman*, the act: the Brahmanical act defined in relation to the rite and specifically to sacrifice; the Buddhist rite taken out of that context and explained in relation to impermanent aggregates of a moment, that is, *dharma*s (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 763, 768). Here we find Biardeau at her most pithy: "Faced with Brahmanical society [...], the Buddha had only several words to say about it: Brahmans are inferior to Kṣatriyas (the Buddha being himself a Kṣatriya) and their rites are perfectly useless" (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 768). In this vein and further along in Mārkaṇḍeya's prophesy,

> The entire world will be barbarized.[35] without rites and sacrifices, without joy, and also without festivals (*mlecchabhūtaṃ jagatsarvaṃ niṣkriyaṃ yaj-ñavarjitam/bhaviṣyati nirānandam anutsavam atho tathā*), (*Mahābhārata*, 3.188.29)

It is worth recalling Gregory Alles' attention to the 'repressive' centralization that marked imperial policies of the Mauryas, among whom Aśoka "explicitly forbade popular religious assemblies" (Alles 1994: 65; also Hiltebeitel 2001a: 16). Still further along these lines, and now most decisively, Biardeau brings up Mārkaṇḍeya's references to *eḍūka*s, the oldest term for Buddhist reliquaries and to begin with those for the bones of the Buddha after his cremation: a term found both in Sanskrit and Pāli (where it occurs 'eventually also under the form *eḷūka*') and the early form of what are to become *stūpa*s.[36]

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[35] Mārkaṇḍeya makes this a recurrent phrase; see *Mahābhārata*, 3.188.37a (variant) and 45a.

[36] Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 759–760. The *eḍūka* references are among the "various Buddhist terms and concepts" that E. W. Hopkins thought made it "impossible to suppose that during the triumph of Buddhism such a poem [as the *Mahābhārata*] could have been composed for the general public for which it was intended" (Hopkins 1969a: 399). See further Hopkins 1969a: 391 (with the *eḍūka* references); 475.

The world will be totally upside down: people will abandon the gods and will offer *pūjā* to [Buddhist] reliquaries; Śūdras will refuse to serve the twiceborn at the collapse of the *yuga* (*viparītaś ca loko 'yaṃ bhaviṣyatyadharottaraḥ/eḍūkān pūjayiṣyanti varjayiṣyanti devatāḥ/śūdrāḥ paricariṣyanti na dvijān yugasaṃkṣaye*). In the hermitages of the great Ṛṣis, in the settlements of Brahmans, at the gods' temples (*devasthāneṣu*), in the Caitya sanctuaries, and in the abodes of the Nāgas, the Earth will be marked by [Buddhist] reliquaries and not adorned by houses of the gods. At the expiration of the *yuga,* that will be the mark of the *yuga*'s end (*āśrameṣu maharṣīṇām brāhmaṇāvasatheṣu ca/devasthāneṣū caityeṣu nāgānām ālayeṣu ca//eḍūkacihnā pṛthivī na devagṛhabhūṣitā/ bhaviṣyati yuge kṣīṇe tad yugāntasya lakṣaṇam*). When men become ever-gruesome and lawless meat-eaters and liquor-drinkers, the *yuga* will collapse [...]. Then the earth will soon be overrun by barbarians while Brahmans, out of fear of the tax burden, will flee to the ten directions (*mahī mlecchasamākīrṇā bhaviṣyati tato 'cirāt/karabhārabhayād viprā bhajiṣyanti diśo daśa*). (*Mahābhārata*, 3.188.64–67, 70)

Note that such explicit reference to Brahmanical temples is rare in the Sanskrit epics.[37] Yet more horrors are to follow (including the appearance of six suns [*Mahābhārata*, 3.188.75]), until Mārkaṇḍeya tells how the Kṛta age begins anew (*Mahābhārata*, 3.188.87):

A Brahman by the name of Kalki Viṣṇuyaśas will arise, prodded by time (*kālapracoditaḥ*), of great prowess, wisdom, and might. He will be born in the village of Sambhala in an auspicious Brahman dwelling, and at his mere thought all vehicles, weapons, warriors, arms, and coats of mail will wait on him. He will be king, a Turner of the Wheel, triumphant by the law, and he will bring this turbulent world to tranquility (*sa dharmavijayī rājā cakravartī bhaviṣyati/sa cemaṃ saṃkulaṃ lokaṃprasādam upaneṣyati*). That rising Brahman, blazing, ending the destruction (*kṣayāntakṛd*)*,* noble minded, will be the destruction of all and the one who makes the *yuga* turn. Surrounded by Brahmans, that Brahman will extirpate the lowly Barbarian hosts (*mlecchagaṇān*) wherever they are.[38] After destroying the robbers he will ritually make over this earth to the twiceborn at a great celebration of the horse sacrifice (*tataś*

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[37] Although there is a Ṛṣi named Devasthāna in the *Mahābhārata*, this prophetic passage provides not only the sole instances of *eḍūka* in the epic, but those as well of *devasthāna* and *devagṛha* in the sense of 'temple' (to which the *Rāmāyaṇa* adds only one usage of *devasthāna* at 2.94.3)—as derived from Tokunaga 1994 (see n. 39 above). Since the *Mahābhārata* rarely turns prophetic, and is normally portraying an heroic past, this is what one could expect in this passage.

[38] An *adhyāya* break occurs here, resumed with 'Vaiśaṃpāyana said' as the next *adhyāya* begins.

corakṣayaṃ kṛtvā dvijebhyaḥ pṛthivīm imām/*vājimedhe mahāyajne vidhi-vat kalpayiṣyati*): He will reestablish the auspicious limits that Svayaṃbhu has ordained (*maryādāḥ svayaṃbhuvihitāḥ śubhāḥ*). And when he has grown old in works of holy fame, he will retire to the forest. People who live in the world will follow his morality (*śīlam*). And with the robbers (*cora*) destroyed by the Brahmans, safety will prevail. Establishing black antelope skins, spears, tridents, and emblematic arms in the conquered territories (*deśeṣu vijiteṣu*), that tiger-like Brahman Kalki, praised by the chief Brahmans and honoring their leaders, shall walk the earth forever bent upon slaughter of the Dasyus. The Dasyus will wail piteously, 'Ah father, Ah son!' as he leads them to destruction. *Adharma* will decline and *dharma* increase, Bhārata, and the people will observe the rites when the Kṛta age arrives (*bhaviṣyati kṛte prāpte kriyāvaṃś ca janas tathā*). *Ārāmas* (resting-places), *caityas* (sanctuaries), temple tanks, wells, and the many ceremonies (*kriyāś ca vividhā*) will reappear in the Kṛta yuga. Brahmans will be strict, Munis will do *tapas*, hermitages [that were for-merly filled] with heretics will be firm in truth; people will be subjects (*āśramāḥ sahapāṣaṇḍāḥ sthitāḥ satye janāḥ prajāḥ*) [...]. (*Mahābhārata*, 3.188.89–3.189.9)

Here we have a number of terms that provide further reminders of an interface with Buddhism compounded by mlecchification. Kalki, like Kṛṣṇa, is a 'wheel-turner', but moreover a militant Brahman Cakravartin King who conquers by the *dharma.* His rule allows 'conquered terri-tories' to be reconquered. He restores a 'morality' (*śīla*) of 'auspicious limits ordained by Brahmā' that would be nothing other than a morality ordained by the Veda.[39] In a world restored by Kalki, 'robbers will be destroyed by the Brahmans'.

I believe we must recognize in such a prophesy a greater antipathy, indeed, the projection of an ongoing antipathy, between the Brahmans who composed the *Mahābhārata* and their heterodox others, than Biardeau stresses. And I believe the feelings and strategies were prob-ably reciprocal, and that counterpart expressions are not difficult to find in Buddhist texts. Nonetheless, I agree with Biardeau that the texts of these two main traditions have an answering relationship to each other, with *bhakti* as one of their shared vocabularies—though certainly not the only one. More specifically, I would agree with her,

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[39] A Veda which certain thieving demons, probably crypto-Buddhist, would have liked to hurl into hell at the moment of cremation—according to the myth of Madhusūdana in the *Mahābhārata*'s *Nārāyaṇīya*, as we have noted in chapter 1 and discussed further in chapter 5.

as I do with my starting point from Jarāsaṃdha's daughters Asti and
Prāpti, that it is pertinent to think of the Sarvāstivādins as one locus
of Buddhist *bhakti* in formation that would have been familiar to the
epic poets, along with the trends that would have led to the inclu-
sion of the Mahāsaṃghikas as another early formation that included
Buddhist *bhakti*-prone sects[40] among the so-called eighteen Hīnāyāna
schools—counted (let me suggest) from a perspective familiar with
both totalistic and oppositional senses of this epic number.[41] I also
like Biardeau's formulation that *bhakti* is the epic-composing Brah-
mans' 'trump' (*atout*), in that their *bhakti* is a *bhakti* of acts centered
on relations between God and the king (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 763;
777).[42] And I further concur that contending ideas about compassion
(Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 762), the gift,[43] caste (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2,
773), and descent (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 776) are among the basic
areas in which to explore this interface, to which I would add formu-
lations about friendship,[44] and the very basic shibboleths of what is
a Bhagavat and what is a self—in the latter case, the very issue that
would seem to be at stake in the choice of names like Asti, Prāpti,
Haṃsa, and Ḍimbhaka. Indeed, if Biardeau is right about such twists,
as I believe she is, the *Mahābhārata*'s answers to Buddhism are much

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[40] See Étienne Lamotte 1988: 526–527 (the prominence of both in Mathurā, and
of the Mahāsaṃghikas in Magadha); 622–629 ('Sarvāstivādin and Mahāsāṃghika
Buddhology'); John Strong 1979: 221–237 (on *bhakti* in the Sarvāstivādin *avadāna*
literature). Of course Theravāda texts must be studied as well (Bailey 2003), but as
texts canonized in a more distant milieu.

[41] I go further than Biardeau here; see her more cautious treatment of some of these
factors (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 760–71). On the count of eighteen sects, see Lamotte
1988: 529, 533, 535, 547: a number 'fixed by convention' that is dated by Buddhist
sources to the period from the second to third century after the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*,
and related to the great schism at the time of Aśoka.

[42] Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 750–752. Along with exchanges in the scientific, medical,
astronomical, and artistic domains would be transformations in the religious domain,
with the *Mahābhārata* being the principal witness to such from the brahmanical side,
while "the throne of the Buddha no longer remains empty" (Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 750).
That is, these transformations can be read as countering positions on kingship.

[43] Biardeau 2002: vol. 2, 763–764. For instance, Mārkaṇḍeya prophesies that at the
end of the *yuga*, 'people will be delighted with gifts in name only [or perhaps 'tell-
tale gifts'?] even from the wicked' (*tat kathādānasaṃtuṣṭa duṣṭānām api mānavāḥ*;
Mahābhārata, 3.188.31cd).

[44] This is an old interest of mine, especially with reference to Karṇa; see Hiltebeitel,
[1976] 1990: 254–266; 1982a: 85–112; 1984: 1–26. See n. 27 above on the Upaniṣadic
image of the two birds as reflected, according to Biardeau, in Haṃsa and Ḍimbhaka.
As I hope to show in a future study, this whole cluster of themes—especially those of
caste, friendship, and the gift—comes together in Karṇa.

more diverse and diffuse than others have imagined.[45] I believe that the Buddhist and Brahmanical texts, while preferring not to make it obvious, make such twists prominent in the ways they refine positions over and against 'each other'. As Frits Staal put it during the discussion that followed the initial presentation of this paper,[46] whereas everyday worshipers would seem to have moved rather easily between Brahmanical and Buddhist discourses and objects of devotion, it was the *business of writers* to make precise and subtle distinctions.[47]

From my perspective, which would stress polysemy, it is also less determinative to make one-to-one political or religious readings—such as a construction of Yudhiṣṭhira on Aśoka, Yudhiṣṭhira on Dharmarāja Yama, or Jarāsaṃdha on Māra or Aśoka—than it is to see that political readings must be tied in further with the larger cosmological and soteriological idioms through which the texts sustain their narratives. From this perspective, all these one-to-one readings may have something persuasive about them without being as singly correct as their proposers propound. If Buddhism was in the air for the poets of the *Mahābhārata*, they could very well have referenced it in multiple ways, and—as they do with many other classes of beings, including, as we have noted, Rākṣasas—through figures allied with both sides of the epic's main rivalry.

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[45] See my discussion of Śaunaka's instruction to Yudhiṣṭhira, upon the latter's entering the forest, about an 'eightfold path' (*aṣṭāṅgenaiva mārgeṇa*): from number one, 'right binding of intention' (*samyak saṃkalpasaṃbandhāt*) through various Vedic and yogic 'right' (*samyak*) procedures and proficiencies (numbers two through seven) to the eighth, 'right stopping of thought' (*samyak cittanirodhāt*) (*Mahābhārata*, 3.2.71–75d). Given what Śaunaka calls Yudhiṣṭhira's 'eight-limbed awareness' (*aṣṭāṅgaṃ buddhim*) (*Mahābhārata*, 3.2.17), this path will allow him to conquer *saṃsāra*, into which one 'falls […] womb after womb and is moved round like a wheel by ignorance (*avidyā*), karma, and thirst (*tṛṣṇā*)' (67). I conclude: "Considering the echoes of Buddhist language here, it would seem that Śaunaka's instructions for the forest life combine a preemption and subversion of Buddhist teachings about forest enlightment and the eightfold path with a strongly Vedic interpretation (or anticipation?) of an eight-limbed yoga" (Hiltebeitel 2001a: 172).

[46] The initial draft of this paper was prepared for Professor Frits Staal's Buddhism Class at the University of Leiden, the Netherlands, and presented November 6, 2003. I thank Professor Staal for his kind invitation to bring my thoughts together for that occasion on the topic that remains the lead title of this paper.

[47] My italics, of course; and since apart from the quoted phrase this is a paraphrase, I allow myself to add the word 'subtle'.

KṚṢṆA AT MATHURĀ

This paper is written from the perspective of research carried out mainly on the *Mahābhārata*, and involves reflections based on that text, and on its relation to the *Harivaṃśa*. I will argue that the nature of these texts must be understood before they can be pillaged for historical information. I do not suggest that they lack such information, of course, but rather that it has been symbolically processed. One must thus clarify the symbolism of these texts before one can make out what historical information is symbolized. The main and subordinate stories in these works are myths.[1] I do not use the word 'myth,' however, in the sense that it is used by many of the authors who have written on these texts: that is, simply the opposite of history, or a fanciful embellishment thereupon.[2] Myths are obviously generated and developed in historical conditions. But rather than recording what is or what was, or for that matter what will be, they project images on to the past (or future), often of what is not, of what never was, and of what never could be: in particular a pre-Mauryan war for the sovereignty of all India.

The pertinent question, then, is: what are the conditions—historical, geographical, cultural—that would have crystallized the *Mahābhārata* and its companion texts into their present form? I doubt that it was achieved all at once, or even in a short time. The *Mahābhārata* story almost certainly has oral roots that go back to pre-Mauryan times. Aspects of the main narrative may even be survivals of Indo-European oral epic.[3] Its core geography would seem to be the early Vedic heartland

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[1] I avoid here the issue of distinctions between myth, legend, and epic. See Alf Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata*, Ithaca, 1976, pp. 28–59. 'Mythic' can serve for all three.

[2] See the essays in S. N. Gupta and K. S. Ramachandran, eds., *Mahābhārata: Myth and Reality. Differing Views*, Delhi, 1976.

[3] See Stig Wikander, 'Sur le fonds commun indo-iranien des épopées de la Perse et de l'Inde,' *La Nouvelle Clio*, Vol. I (1950), pp. 31–329; *idem*, 'Fran Bravalla till Kuruk-shetra,' *Arkhiv för Nordisk Filologi*, Vol. LXXV (1960), pp. 183–193; *idem*, 'Germanische und Indo-Iranische Eschatologie,' *Kairos*, Vol. II (1960), pp. 83–88; Alf Hiltebeitel, 'Brothers, Friends, and Charioteers: Parallel Episodes in the Irish and Indian Epics,' *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, in press (= Hiltebeitel 1982a).

of Kuru and Pañcāla. But the story must have continually extended itself geographically over a fairly long period of time, to incorporate widening geographical horizons. Various cities and lands were given roles in the story that can only be symbolic.[4] Mathurā would seem to be one of these. There seems to be no clear indication that Mathurā was even settled prior to the seventh century B.C.—a date short of most, if not all, given for the alleged *Mahābhārata* war. Mathurā's place in the epics and *Harivaṃśa* would thus be essentially symbolic. But the point to be emphasized is that this is not true of Mathurā alone, but of the treatment of geography and cosmology as a whole, as a fundamentally symbolic map, projected onto the past.[5]

Yet it is more than just our understanding of Mathurā that is at stake. I was given the title 'Concept of Kṛṣṇa at Mathurā,' and have sought to look at Kṛṣṇa and his city together, still relying primarily on the great early texts. I do not see how I could discuss the 'concept of Kṛṣṇa at Mathurā' by basing my remarks on the inscriptional fragments and archaeological bits and pieces that have usually been used to reconstruct the early Kṛṣṇa cult. The reliance on piecemeal data by such scholars as Jaiswal, Bhandarkar, Majumdar, Raychaudhuri and others has been made in almost total evasion of what I consider the most important document of the entire period: the *Mahābhārata*. It is pointless to discuss Pāṇini's Arjuna and Vāsudeva, the five Vṛṣṇis, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, and so forth, in isolation from the epic, or as if the epic was inadmissable evidence because it is treacherously undat-

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[4] For example, on Matsya and Virāṭadeśa, see Madeleine Biardeau, 'Études de mythologie hindoue [henceforth referred to as EMH] (IV), Part II. Bhakti et avatāra,' *Bulletin de l'école française d'Extrême Orient*, Vol. LXIII (1976), pp. 166 and 208, n. 1; *idem*, 'EMH (V), Part II. Bhakti et avatāra,' *Bulletin de l'école française d'Extrême Orient*, Vol. LXV (1978), p. 189; and Hiltebeitel, 'Śiva, the Goddess, and the Disguises of the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī,' *History of Religions*, Vol. XX (1980), pp. 149–150. On Ekacakrā as projecting the 'one wheel' of the sovereignty temporarily divided between the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas, see Biardeau, EMH (V), p. 100. The names Hāstinapura ('City of the Elephant') and Indraprastha ('Residence of Indra') reflect the same divided sovereignty. The image of unity would be that of Indra riding his elephant. Furthermore the Pāṇḍavas are connected with Indra, the Kauravas with *nāga*s (snakes, elephants).

[5] Compare Jacob Neusner, 'Map without Territory: Mishnah's System of Sacrifice and Sanctury,' *History of Religions*, Vol. XIX (1979), pp. 103–127, discussing the Mishnah as a symbolic map that serves to replace the lost temple. The analogy with Mathurā as Kṛṣṇa's 'lost city' (to be discussed below) is striking, especially considering the contemporaneity of the two traditions and the fundamentally similar response—even though one is ritualized and the other mythicized—to what is in fact the same historical continuum. This essay owes a debt to Neusner's stimulating article.

able, probably unhistorical, or dismissably fanciful. Rather, we must attempt to integrate the development of cults with the early texts, and not just with the appearance in the latter of certain names and isolated sectarian interpolations (like the *Nārāyaṇīya*). More than this, we must seek out the relation between the early evidence of cults and the central narratives of the early texts, and particularly the images yielded in the latter of such things as cities, gods, and heroes.

1. *Kṛṣṇa and Mathurā*

Mathurā is at the center of the Kṛṣṇa story, but Kṛṣṇa is not in Mathurā. Upon this paradox, in its various expressions and ramifications, more than a century of scholarship has constructed for us its image of multiple Kṛṣṇas. This is not the place to account for them all. I have tried to do this for most of them elsewhere.[6] Suffice it to say that the analytical atomists continue to do their work, and that, despite determined efforts to keep the list short, the reductions to two, three, or four Kṛṣṇas are never quite identical. There is inevitable overlap, and no two scholars apply the scalpel in exactly the same way. Now, the city of Mathurā is consistently found on several of the lines of dissection. Born in Mathurā as a Kṣatriya, Kṛṣṇa is taken away to Vraja to be raised as a cowherd, and returns to Mathurā as a cowherd to recover his identity as a Kṣatriya. Does Mathurā then belong to 'Kṛṣṇa the cowherd,' or to 'Kṛṣṇa the Kṣatriya,' or again to the 'pastoral demigod' or 'folk deity,' or to the 'divinized' kṣatriya hero? Since both the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa* tell of his conflicts with king Jarāsaṃdha of Magadha, does one connect Kṛṣṇa's resultant flight from Mathurā to Dvārakā with the 'earlier' epic Kṛṣṇa (who operates entirely from Dvārakā), or with the 'later popular' Kṛṣṇa of the *Harivaṃśa* and the Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas (texts in which Dvārakā stories proliferate)? And because the texts have him spend most of his youth in Vraja and most of his adulthood in Dvārakā, does this, along with the relative paucity of iconic representations of Kṛṣṇa in and around Mathurā during the period of the formation of these texts (i.e., prior to the Gupta period),[7] provide

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[6] See Hiltebeitel, 'Kṛṣṇa in the Mahābhārata: A Bibliographical Study,' *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. LXI (1979), pp. 65–107.

[7] This is a conventional dating for the *Mahābhārata*. Datings for the *Harivaṃśa* vary widely; see Daniel H. H. Ingalls, 'The Harivaṃśa as a Mahākāvya,' in *Melanges*

evidence that 'his association with Mathurā is but a fleeting one,' that 'it provides but an entrance and an exit,' and that a strong identification of Mathurā and its surroundings with Kṛṣṇa is but a recent sixteenth century phenomenon?[8]

The weight of this scholarly dismemberment should give us pause. But not much. The assumptions on which it has been carried off are too fragile. If I may be excused for echoing some positions of Madeleine Biardeau,[9] the matter may be stated as follows. The persistent hypothesis of Ābhīra or other 'folk' origins for a separate 'cowherd god' cycle is completely arbitrary and unconvincing. The *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṃśa* are not antithetical texts. Both can be assumed minimally to reflect oral (and perhaps also written) traditions which would have developed concurrently, at least for a while, in the pre-Gupta (including the Kuṣāṇa) period. Without presenting them in narrative form, the *Mahābhārata* is well aware of stories of Kṛṣṇa's childhood as a cowherd;[10] and the *Harivaṃśa* is constructed with the *Mahābhārata* story in full view.[11] The Critical Editions of these texts are of very little use in stratifying and dissecting Kṛṣṇa's biography.[12] Certainly neither text yields the slightest convincing grounds for reconstructing originally separate identities, a 'gradual divinization' of Kṛṣṇa, or for that matter 'traces' of his 'prior humanity'—the flight from Jarāsaṃdha

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d'Indianisme à *la mémoire de Louis Renou*, Paris 1968, pp. 381–394 (first to third century A.D.) and Charlotte Vaudeville, 'Aspects du mythe de Kṛṣṇa-Gopāla dans l'Inde ancienne,' in the same Renou Festschrift, p. 753 (eighth to tenth century). I would favor something close to the earlier dates, but the important point is the material from which the *Harivaṃśa* draws must be pre-Gupta. See now Couture 1996, 135–36, leaning toward "an earlier date than one usually assumed."

    [8] Charlotte Vaudeville, 'Braj, Lost and Found,' *Indo-Iranian Journal*, Vol. XVIII (1976), pp. 198, 199, and *passim*.

    [9] For the full discussion, see Biardeau, EMH (V), pp. 204–237.

    [10] See Sadashiva L. Katre, 'Kṛṣṇa, Gopas, Gopīs, and Rādhā,' in H. L. Hariyappa and M. M. Patkar, eds., *Professor P. K. Gode Commemoration Volume*, Poona, 1960, part 3, pp. 83–85; Bimanbehari Majumdar, *Kṛṣṇa in History and Legend*, Calcutta, 1969, pp. 49–57.

    [11] Biardeau, EMH (V), p. 217. The *Harivaṃśa* abounds in references to the forthcoming events of the *Mahābhārata*.

    [12] In making citations, the Critical Editions of the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* are used, but for the *Harivaṃśa* (which needs even more to be studied as a fluid tradition) I have used the edition of the Citrashala Press. I do not suggest that certain episodes concerning Kṛṣṇa may not be later than others: see Hiltebeitel, 'The Burning of the Forest Myth,' in Bardwell L. Smith, ed., *Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions*, Leiden, 1976, pp. 208–224; *idem*, 'Draupadī's Garments,' *Indo-Iranian Journal*; Vol. XXII (1980), pp. 98–101; but there is nothing to indicate that one can eliminate whole 'cycles.'

notwithstanding. 'Contradictions' between the human and the divine, the kṣatriya and the cowherd, are in the minds of scholars. They are certainly not derivable from the texts or the early iconography. Indeed, to put the matter briefly, what has been persistently resisted and obscured by the various strains of atomistic scholarship is that the stories are rooted in theology, cult, and myth, that their material is presented primarily in terms of symbols, and that the image of theological unity toward which these symbols point must be understood *before* any analysis of the materials into components can be seriously attempted.

I have never been convinced by these atomization of Kṛṣṇa, and, more generally, have never subscribed to the view that gods are made, as it were, with lego blocks. But until recently no convincing argument had been raised for the effective unity of the figure, including my own—suggested rather despairingly—that 'from the standpoint of comparative mythology, a [royal] childhood in the country is a commonplace.'[13] The situation now has changed, thanks to Biardeau. The solution is astonishingly simple, and requires accepting no more than two highly defensible arguments. First, the problem is not to find separate origins for 'contradictory' aspects of a composite Kṛṣṇa, but to understand why his essentially unitary biography is largely split in two; that is, why it is found in two texts, the earlier *Mahābhārata* and the later *Harivaṃśa,* And second, one must reconcile oneself to the fact that both texts are rooted in the same theology: Kṛṣṇa is an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa.[14] Drawing these two arguments together, Biardeau writes: 'Everything passes as if, having given scene to an *avatāra* in the epic to have him serve the model of the ideal king (Arjuna), one must then show him

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[13] Hiltebeitel, 'Kṛṣṇa in the Mahābhārata,' n. 194; I allow myself to introduce this bracketed 'royal,' because with it the comparative point can still be made. See also Jan de Vries, *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend*, London, 1963 (the pattern of 'the youth of the hero threatened'). Arguing for the unity of the Kṛṣṇa figure from different angles, see A. D. Pusalkar, *Studies in the Epics and Purāṇas*, Bombay, 1963, pp. 94–96 and 109–110; Vishnu S. Sukthankar, *On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata*, Bombay, 1957, *passim* (see especially pp. 5, 94–95).

[14] Atomists, of course, resist identifying Kṛṣṇa as an *avatāra* in the epic, and more particularly in the *Gītā.* There may be stages in the use of the term, and of its theological and mythological precision, but the myth in the *Mahābhārata* of the unburdening of the earth, Arjuna's references to Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* as Viṣṇu, plus the whole Nara-Nārāyaṇa theme in the epic are, in my mind, indissoluble facets of the *avatāra* theology. On the unburdening of the earth, see Hiltebeitel, 'Draupadī's Garments,' p. 103 and n. 30; on the place of the *Gītā* in me epic, see Hiltebeitel, *Ritual of Battle*, pp. 114–128, and n. 21. The *avataraṇa* theme clearly pervades the *Harivaṃśa.*

such as he is himself, *avatāra* in full status, acting by himself as *avatāra* instead of effacing himself before the epic king.'[15] This perspective of course abolishes the 'contradiction' between a human Kṛṣṇa and one 'gradually divinized.' But more than this, Biardeau is able to present a resolution to the 'contradiction' between the Kṣatriya and the cowherd. The latter identity does not derive from separate pastoral origins. It is simply the Kṣatriya Kṛṣṇa's bucolic disguise: 'Just as the epic has dressed the Pāṇḍavas in disguises that reveal their real character as much as they hide it, so the *Harivaṃśa* will invent for Kṛṣṇa and his brother a form of clandestinity which will symbolically unveil their true identity.'[16]

   The word 'invent' may be too strong, for as Biardeau further demonstrates, the epic Kṛṣṇa is not without important associations with cows and cowherds. First there is the epic's frequent use of the name Govinda, of which the 'cow' element is incontestable. Second, when Kṛṣṇa's sister Subhadrā removes the garments of a princess to appear before Draupadī as a servant-cowgirl (1.213.16), she subordinates herself to Draupadī as Kṛṣṇa does to Arjuna, and in doing so takes on the same *disguise* as Kṛṣṇa's. Third, Kṛṣṇa gives the Pāṇḍavas cows from Mathurā after Subhadrā's wedding with Arjuna (1.213.41–42). And fourth, while he helps the Pāṇḍavas in battle as a non-combatant, his troops—the so-called Nārāyaṇa Gopās—fight for the Kauravas. Biardeau is surely correct in seeing these 'warrior-cowherds' as a prolongation of Kṛṣṇa's own person, materializing his own omnipresence on the battlefield.[17] And most suggestive is her notice of the description of the Gopā-Nārāyaṇas as *gokule nitya-saṃvṛddhāḥ* (8.4.39), 'ever raised in Gokula,' no matter whether that term indicates an unspecified camp of cowherds, or, more specifically, the one

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[15] Biardeau, EMH (V), p. 218.
[16] Biardeau, EMH (V), p. 212; note also that Biardeau shows that both 'periods in disguise' are expressed in terms and themes of the *dīkṣā*, the 'consecration' preparatory to a sacrifice. On this latter, see Biardeau, EMH (V), pp. 187–200, and Hiltebeitel, 'Śiva, the Goddess, and Disguises,' pp. 149, 159, 168–174.
[17] Their main role is as part of the group of Saṃśaptakas who keep Arjuna from protecting his and Subhadrā's son Abhimanyu (i.e., Kṛṣṇa's own nephew). The implication that Kṛṣṇa thus manipulates the death of Abhimanyu is affirmed from another angle in south Indian versions of the story, in which Kṛṣṇa engineers Abhimanyu's death because the latter is a rākṣasa incarnate (oral information from Tindivanam, Tamilnadu, and from Martha Ashton concerning Karnataka).

of Kṛṣṇa's upbringing.[18] There are also other epic passages oriented in this same direction.

> As if sporting, Janārdana, soul of beings, keeps the earth, atmosphere, and heaven running. Having made the Pāṇḍavas his pretext, and as if beguiling the world, he wishes to burn your deluded sons (the Kauravas) who are disposed toward *adharma*. By his self's yoga, the Lord Keśava tirelessly keeps the Wheel of Time, the Wheel of the Universe, and the Wheel of the Yugas revolving (*kālacakraṃ jagaccakraṃ yugacakraṃ . . . parivartayate*). I tell you truly, the Lord alone is ruler of Time and Death, and of the mobile and the immobile. Yet ruling the whole universe, the great yogin Hari undertakes to perform acts like a powerless peasant (*kīnāśa iva durbalaḥ*; 5.66.10–14).

Kināśa, cultivator of the soil, peasant, evokes the agriculturalist more than the pastoralist, but the Indian tiller of the fields no doubt stands behind his bullock. Here too the 'disguise' theme is implicit, and the theology and cosmology, as we shall see, most informative. And one must wonder at the description of the attendance upon Kṛṣṇa as he wakes up, after the war, in one of the Pāṇḍavas' palaces at Hāstinapura:

> Then, sweet voiced practiced singers who knew the Vedic hymns and Purāṇas praised Vāsudeva, the All-Maker, Lord of Creatures. Hand clappers recited as singers sang. Conchs and various drums were sounded by thousands. And the exceedingly delightful sound of *viṇa*s, cymbals, and bamboo flutes (*veṇu*), spread like laughter, was heard throughout his abode. (12.53.3–5).

What have we here if not an evocation of *pūjā* (what is an abode where god is a guest if not a temple?), a seeming forerunner of the *kīrtan* or *bhajan*, and a possible allusion to an earlier-than-expected connection between Kṛṣṇa and the flute? Add to these points the well recognized allusions to Kṛṣṇa's youth and cowherd status which remain unshakably in the Critical Edition,[19] and one must agree that, even if a full account of Kṛṣṇa's pastoral childhood cannot be assumed, the epic already appeals to a cowherd complement of this type.

The *Harivaṃśa,* then, merely brings this to completion by telling the story of Kṛṣṇa's disguise, his *līlā* or *krīḍa*, in full. He is *gopaveṣa viṣṇu*, 'Viṣṇu in the guise of a cowherd' (HV 2.25.21); he and Balarāma are

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[18] This summarizes Biardeau's analysis in EMH (V), pp. 205–209. She also cites an unpublished dissertation by André Couture, 'Kṛṣṇa-Gopāla, Avatāra de Viṣṇu,' Paris, 1977.

[19] See above n. 10.

gopaveṣavibhūṣitau, 'adorned in the guise of cowherds' (HV 2.27.40). Having seen Kṛṣṇa hold up Mount Govardhana, the bewildered cowherds ask: 'To what end do you sport among us, wretchedly in the guise of a cowherd? Like one of the Lokapālas, why do you protect the cows?'[20] To which, as Biardeau perceives, there is an answer. As a kṣatriya he disguises an identity as a protector of cows.[21] As a cowherd he disguises an identity as a Kṣatriya. And when he lifts Mount Govardhana, he reveals the divine dimensions of both 'disguises,' Indra acknowledging: 'You have attained lordship of cows, thus people will extol you as Govinda' (*tvaṃ gavām indra gataḥ govinda iti lokās tvaṃ stoṣyanti*; HV 2.19.45). 'Lordship of cows' is not only a bucolic and royal title but a divine title. Indra indicates that it ranks Kṛṣṇa as paramount lord (Indra) above himself, and one cannot help but suspect that it represents for Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu an auspicious counterpart to Śiva's title of Paśupati.[22]

To put the matter briefly, then, there is no true contradiction between Kṛṣṇa the cowherd and Kṛṣṇa the Kṣatriya. And the elaboration of the cowherd narrative in the *Harivaṃśa* builds upon well established epic symbols, themes, and allusions concerning Kṛṣṇa's 'cowherd' dimension. This is not to deny that later *bhakti* traditions have favored and further elaborated the cowherd dimension.[23] It is merely to argue that the early texts provide no ground for supposing that their original source was a separate pastoral 'folk' tradition.

The resolution of this perennial problem has many implications for understanding Kṛṣṇa at Mathurā. Clearly the city is no mere 'entrance

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[20] *kimarthaṃ gopaveṣeṇa ramase 'smasu garhitaṃ lokapālopamaścaiva gāstvaṃ kiṃ parirakṣasi* (HV 2.20.7).

[21] Biardeau perceptively cites here the ancient Indian associations between the king and cows, and Arjuna's protection of cows in the *Virāṭaparvan*. It should be noted that Arjuna protects the cows also while in disguise, and that Bhīma (as *govikartṛ*; 4.2.7) and Sahadeva (as watcher of Virāṭa's herds) also take on disguises that involve rapports with cattle; see Hiltebeitel, 'Śiva, the Goddess, and Disguises,' pp. 168–173.

[22] On the inauspicious character of this title, see Hiltebeitel, 'The Indus Valley "Proto-Śiva", Reexamined through Reflections on the Goddess, the Buffalo, and the Symbolism *of vāhanas,*' *Anthropos,* Vol. LXXIII (1978), pp. 769–770, and *idem*, 'Śiva, the Goddess, and Disguises,' pp. 173–174. One may also note that Kṛṣṇa's killing of Kaṃsa is preceded by the killings of Ariṣṭa and Keśī. This bull-horse-man sequence is most likely an echo of the culminating three of the five *paśu* suitable for Vedic sacrifice. This may help explain why the Keśīvadha is singled out in the epic as one of the few episodes from Kṛṣṇa's childhood alluded to; see S. Sörensen, *An Index to the Names in the Mahābhārata,* Delhi, 1963, p. 423.

[23] See Biardeau, EMH(V), pp. 236–237 ('Et le Veṇugopāla?').

and exit point.' His association with it is more than 'fleeting.' And it belongs neither to Kṛṣṇa the Kṣatriya nor Kṛṣṇa the cowherd precisely because it belongs to both. Here we must turn to Mathurā's symbolic significance. In the *Mahābhārata*, Kṛṣṇa recalls the happiness of his people at Mathurā (2.13.45), his having to 'abandon Mathurā for fear of Jarāsaṃdha' (13.65), and his people's remembrance of the Middle Country (*smaranto madhyamaṃ deśam*; 13.59), incontestably an allusion to their experience at Mathurā. And in the *Harivaṃśa*, even more explicitly, it is asked by Janamejaya, the Kuru heir:

> To what end did the slayer of Madhu abandon Mathurā, that (zebu's) hump of the Middle Country, the safe abode of Lakṣmī, easily perceived as the horn of the earth, rich in money and grain, abounding in water, rich in Āryas, the choicest of residences?[24]

The symbolism here has certain obvious associations with Viṣṇu, suggesting that the absence is in a sense only apparent.[25] It is the sole abode of Śrī-Lakṣmī, Viṣṇu's wife. If the Middle Country is a cow or bull, Mathurā—where the 'Lord of Cows' was born and from which he retains cows to bring to the Pāṇḍavas even after moving to Dvārakā—is its hump. It is the 'horn' (*sṛṅga*) of the earth, evoking the many associations of Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu with the horn, including Kṛṣṇa's Śārṅga bow and the *ekaśṛṅga* with which Viṣṇu uplifts the earth as Varāha, the boar.[26] In fact, we may ask whether the term refers to Mathurā as the midpoint of the earth, or as the horn by which the earth will again—through the *Mahābhārata* war—be rescued from sinking into the ocean. And the combination of the name Madhusūdana with Mathurā points to a connection between the stories of Mathurā being founded in the forest of the asura Madhu (to be discussed further), Viṣṇu slaying another asura by that name after waking from his *yoganidrā,* his cosmic yoga-sleep,[27] and another of Kṛṣṇa's names, Mādhava.

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[24] *kimarthaṃ ca parityajya mathurāṃ madhusūdanaḥ/madhyadeśasya kakudaṃ dhāma lakṣmyāśca kevalam//śṛṅga pṛthivyāḥ svālakṣyaṃ prabhūtadhānadhanyavat/āryādhyajalabhūyiṣṭam adhiṣṭhānavarottamam* (HV 2.57.2–3).

[25] See above, n. 5.

[26] See Michel Defourny, 'Note sue le symbolisme de la corne dans le *Mahābhārata* et la mythologie brahmanique classique,' *Indo-Iranian Journal*, Vol. XVIII (1976), pp. 17–23.

[27] These myths are known to both the *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṃśa* and, with the exception of the lifting up of the earth (see above, n. 14), will be discussed further below.

One thus gets the impression that both texts evoke close connections between Kṛṣṇa and Mathurā, connections which have been ruptured, but not irremediably. This is, of course, less explicit in the *Mahābhārata* than the *Harivaṃśa*, but even in the former text, where Kṛṣṇa remains entirely in Dvārakā, it is evident that his actions reflect the fate of Mathurā and Madhyadeśa, the Middle Country.[28] As to the *Harivaṃśa*, one cannot miss the strong ceremonial, mythical, and theological overtones with which Kṛṣṇa's three entries of Mathurā are described. When he enters Mathurā to kill Kaṃsa, it is to participate in Kaṃsa's bow festival (HV 2.27–32). And when, prior to his final departure for Dvārakā, he returns to Mathurā twice after indecisive victories over Jarāsaṃdha, he is welcomed as a god, the first time along with Balarāma (HV 2.45), the second alone (HV 2.55.53–63), having just been given a divinely ordered *abhiṣeka* consecrating him this time as paramount among human kings (*rajendra*; HV 2.50–55). I would suggest that these 'returns' are cast in the royal imagery of temple festivals, and also as events of symbolic and theological dimensions. The city of Mathurā personified comes down (*ava-tṛ*) from Heaven to honor him (HV 2.55.85). And in the words of the citizens of Mathurā as they welcome Kṛṣṇa's *last* return, just prior to his settling at Dvārakā (which is at the moment being scouted out for him by Garuḍa): 'He is Nārāyaṇa, the abode of Śrī living in the milk ocean; leaving his serpent couch he has come to Mathurā city.'[29] In fact, I would suggest that this latter verse tells us something not only about Mathurā, but about Dvārakā. Are there not echoes in all the associations of Mathurā with the term *madhu* of the connection between the *madhu* as drink (mead, honey drink, Soma, etc.) and the theme of the bestowal of sovereignty, *śrī*? Such associations are well established in India, and have Indo-European roots.[30] If, as we have seen above, Mathurā is regarded as the 'safe abode of Śrī-Lakṣmī,' does this not help to explain the necessity of Kṛṣṇa's connection with it, for it is he who bestows sovereignty on

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[28] See J.A.B. van Buitenen, ed. and trans., *The Mahābhārata*, I: *The Book of the Beginning*, Chicago, 1973, Introduction, pp. 8–13, perceiving Kṛṣṇa's geopolitical motives as centered on his concern for Mathurā.

[29] *eṣa nārāyaṇaḥ śrīmān kṣīrārṇavaniketanaḥ/nāgaparyaṅkamutsṛjya prāpto 'yaṃ mathurāṃ purīm* (HV 2.55.60).

[30] See Madeleine Biardeau, 'Comptes Rendus des Conferences,' *École Pratique des Hautes Etudes*, 5th Section, Religious Sciences, Annuaire, Vol. LXXXIII (1975), pp. 109–110; Georges Dumézil, *The Destiny of a King*, Chicago 1973, pp. 70–129; Hiltebeitel, *Ritual of Battle*, pp. 143–191, 203–206, 222–228.

the Pāṇḍavas.[31] And as to Dvārakā, the 'City of Gates' redeemed from the ocean, is this not but an evocation of Viṣṇu on the cosmic waters, indeed, of Viṣṇu as he wakes from his cosmic sleep, grants boons, and slays Madhu and Kaiṭabha to earn the name Madhusūdana? Elsewhere I have argued for this connection already.[32] In the epic, when Kṛṣṇa wakes from his bedside at Dvārakā to begin the culmination of his earthly mission, the unburdening of the earth at Kurukṣetra, he grants boons to Arjuna (his service as charioteer) and Duryodhana (the Nārāyaṇa Gopās), and thus lays the groundwork for his 'omnipresence' during the great slaughter to come. We can thus perceive the mythical and theological necessity for Kṛṣṇa's *dual* residence at Mathurā and Dvārakā.

If the *Harivaṃśa* has introduced the entrances of Mathurā into Kṛṣṇa's biography in terms that evoke Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*, and if the *Mahābhārata*, as we have already seen, shows similar motives in various *narrative* passages, it must be noted that the epic is more restrained when it comes to highlighting Mathurā. It is Kṛṣṇa's absence that is most important there. Kṛṣṇa never *returns* to Mathurā from Dvārakā in the *Mahābhārata*, and though he tells of the killing of Kaṃsa, there is no description of his entry into the city (see 2.13.33).[33] But the *Mahābhārata* does have its symbolic context for Mathurā, and ultimately, as we shall see, it is probably again one that evokes themes of *bhakti.* Here we must look more closely at that second nodal point (after the childhood cycle) in the connection between Kṛṣṇa and Mathurā: his flight from Jarāsaṃdha. In this instance we are not dealing with the 'contradiction' between cowherd and Kṣatriya, but with the scene that is most often regarded as the surest sign of Kṛṣṇa's humanity prior to 'divinization.'[34] That line of inquiry, however, can only lead to bafflement. How to explain the divinization of a loser, a

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[31] This applies in a number of senses: his roles in the marriages of Draupadī and Subhadrā, at the Rājasūya, and in the war.

[32] Hiltebeitel, *Ritual of Battle*, pp. 102–107. Compare now the waking scene cited earlier in this essay.

[33] Biardeau, EMH (V), pp. 224–225, regards the entry to kill Kaṃsa in the *Harivaṃśa* as modelled on that of Girivraja in the *Mahābhārata*.

[34] See Christian Lassen, *Indische Altertumskunde*, Osnabrück 1968, Vol. I, Part 2, pp. 758 and 823; Adolf Holzmann, *Das Mahābhārata und seine Theile*, Kiel 1892–1895, Vol. II, pp. 48–49; Edward Washburn Hopkins, Epic Mythology, New York 1969, pp. 215–216; Walter Ruben, *Krishna: Konkordanz und Kommentar der Motive seines Heldenlebens*, Istanbul 1944, pp. 6, 137, 211–216; S. N. Tadpatrikar, 'The Kṛṣṇa Problem,' *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. X (1929), pp. 269–320;

Kṣatriya who flees from battle! *There* is a contradiction! The answer
must lie elsewhere.

2. *The Flight from Jarāsaṃdha*

Once again Biardeau has laid the groundwork:[35] It is the Jarāsaṃdha
episode that links the Kṛṣṇa of the *Mahābhārata* with the Kṛṣṇa of
the *Harivaṃśa*. First, the Jarāsaṃdha episode is greatly elaborated and
treated somewhat differently in the latter text, but with a clear view
to its being an essential part of the *Mahābhārata* story.[36] Secondly,
whereas the story of Kaṃsa culminates Kṛṣṇa's career as *avatāra* acting
independently,[37] the story of Jarāsaṃdha forms 'the mythic introduc-
tion to the entire problematic of the *Mahābhārata*,'[38] in which Kṛṣṇa
subordinates himself to the Pāṇḍavas.

The slaying of Jarāsaṃdha in the *Mahābhārata* is necessary, accord-
ing to Kṛṣṇa, if Yudhiṣṭhira is to perform the Rājasūya, the consecra-
tion to royal paramountcy (*sarṃrājya*). Jarāsaṃdha is Yudhiṣṭhira's
only rival for this suzerainty, and—according to the epic—he has
imprisoned eighty-six kings in an 'enclosure for men' (*puruṣavraja*;
2.13.64) at Girivraja, the future Rājagṛha, in Magadha. This is being
done in preparation for a sacrifice of a hundred kings to Śiva, that
is, implicitly, a sacrifice of the entire *kṣatra* except for his own line,
for, as Kṛṣṇa tells Yudhiṣṭhira, Jarāsaṃdha sows dissension among
the one hundred and one lineages of the Solar and Lunar dynasties
(2.13.4–8).[39] Now, whatever the significance these two lines may have,
it is evident that the epic regards their proper interaction and non-

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Sadashiva L. Katre, 'Kṛṣṇa and Jarāsaṃdha,' Indian Historical Quarterly, Vol. XIII
(1932), pp. 500–508, and *idem*, Vol. IX (1933), pp. 854–865.

[35] Biardeau, EMH (V), pp. 221–235.

[36] A heavenly voice keeps stopping Balarāma from killing Jarāsaṃdha (HV 2.36.29;
43. 72–73), saying his death is ordained to occur at another's (i.e. Bhīma's) hands.

[37] The *Harivaṃśa* keeps remarking on the paradoxical character of Kṛṣṇa's appear-
ances alone in contrast with his appearances with allies, and of his appearances
with and without a city. He and his foes both know that he is truly most dangerous
when he is alone, and when there is no king for him to subordinate himself to (HV
2.49.20–22; 50.15–17; 51.40). This theme is also played out in his theophany before
Duryodhana in the Kaurava court (in the *Mahābhārata*); see Hiltebeitel, *Ritual of
Battle*, pp. 120–128.

[38] Biardeau, EMH (V), p. 235.

[39] See Biardeau, EMH (V), pp. 225–226.

contention as essential for proper rule and the sustenance of *dharma*.[40] Yet Jarāsaṃdha threatens the abolition of this order, and, more than this, he comes from outside Madhyadeśa, the very Middle Country which Kr̥ṣṇa and his people 'remember' from Dvārakā and of which Mathurā, according to the *Harivaṃśa*, is the zebu's 'hump.' We must thus remind ourselves of certain features of the symbolic geography of the *Mahābhārata.*

Although the term Madhyadeśa has considerable flexibility in the Indian tradition as a whole, the *Mahābhārata* and Purāṇas give a basically consistent picture.[41] It is the terrain from which the *dharma* is upheld: says Karṇa, 'Those who are situated away from the Himavat and apart from the Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Sarasvatī, and also Kurukṣetra…are impure (*aśucīn*) and beyond the pale of *dharma*' (*dharmabāhyān*; 8.30.10–11).[42] But those around the Gaṅgā-Yamunā Doab represent the opposite: 'Among the Matsyas and those of the Kuru-Pāñcāla countries, among the Naimiṣas, the Cedis, and others who are distinguished, the good (*santaḥ*) uphold the ancient dharma' (8.30.62–63). As I argued elsewhere, the *Mahābhārata* war represents a reassertion of the center over against the periphery. It is the Pāṇḍavas who come to ally themselves with the above named forces of Madhyadeśa, whereas the Kauravas ally themselves primarily with the kings from the outlying regions.[43]

Now, these oppositions are prefigured and reversed in the *samrājya* of Jarāsaṃdha. In the *Mahābhārata*, Jarāsaṃdha's allies in his attacks on Mathurā are—with the exception of Śiśupāla of Cedi, whom Kr̥ṣṇa will kill and replace with a Pāṇḍava ally—all from outside Madhyadeśa. And those whom he puts to flight toward the west include not only Kr̥ṣṇa's people from around Mathurā, but the Pāñcālas and the Matsyas, two of the Pāṇḍavas' most important allies in the upcoming war. Jarāsaṃdha's *samrājya* is thus one which puts the forces of the center, the mainstay of dharma, to flight—all, that is, except the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas. In the *Harivaṃśa*, in fact, Jarāsaṃdha includes Duryodhana and his brothers among his allies (HV 2.34.20).[44] And there, when he

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[40] Biardeau, EMH (V), p. 234.
[41] See D. C. Sircar, *Cosmography and Geography in Early Indian Literature*, Calcutta 1967, pp. 71–73.
[42] Karṇa refers to Bāhlīkas of the Punjab, but his geography is typical of the epic.
[43] See Hiltebeitel, *Ritual of Battle*, pp. 273–279.
[44] On this and the above, see Biardeau, EMH (V), p. 226.

besieges Kṛṣṇa at Mathurā and Mount Gomanta, all the great kings of the *Mahābhārata* are at his disposal, future allies of the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas (who are the only ones noticeably absent) alike. Here the kings' imprisonment seems to be no more than their service to Jarāsaṃdha; there is no mention of the impending sacrifice to Śiva, or of a majority of the *kṣatra* being retained at Girivraja.

We are now in a position to look more closely at the place of Mathurā in this scheme. Mathurā is, of course, at the heart of Madhyadeśa. Both the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa* emphasize this strongly. Yet it is caught up in a most suggestive net of alliances. Through Kaṃsa's marriage to Jarāsaṃdha's daughters Asti and Prāpti (2.13.30; HV 2.34.4–6), Mathurā is allied with Girivraja, the future Rājagṛha, in Magadha. More anciently, according to the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* (HV 1.54.21–56; 2.37.28–29; 38.39–42; *Rām* 7.52–63), the city of Mathurā was founded by Śatrughna, brother of Rāma Dāśarathi, after he slew Lavaṇa who had, till then, protected the site known as the Madhu forest after it was bestowed on him by Madhu, his father. Though Madhu is in both texts a Dānava, his son Lavaṇa is in the *Rāmāyaṇa* both Dānava and Rākṣasa: his mother (Madhu's wife) is the Rākṣasī Kumbhanīsī, and Rāvaṇa is his 'maternal aunt's brother' (see *Rām* 6.7.7 and 7.60.14), that is, a brother of Kumbhanīsī as well. In any case, Lavaṇa is a rather close relative, a distant ally, and clearly an 'understudy of Rāvaṇa.'[45] This is a curious triangulation, and at the risk of bypassing the perennial debate on the whereabouts of Laṅkā, I would venture that in the *Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa* at least, Laṅkā refers to Śri-Laṅkā/Ceylon, and, moreover, that among its *many* symbolic connections, the poet associates it with Buddhism.[46] I would further argue that by the time of the composition of the *Mahābhārata*, the same would be likely for Girivraja-Rājagṛha, with its *caitya* peak which Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna, and Bhīma destroy—disguised as brahmans!—upon entering the city on their way to killing Jarāsaṃdha (2.19.2, 17 and 41). Girivraja and Rājagṛha are of course prominent in the early history of both Buddhism and Jainism, and a center of early Buddhist kings—most notably Bimbisāra and Ajātaśatru—whose throne

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[45] Hopkins, *Epic Mythology*, p. 43.
[46] To argue this would be out of place here. Let me just note that Rāvaṇa is opposed most directly not to Rāma, but to the traditional Vedic Ṛṣis, for whom Rāma is but an agent. It may be that Rāvaṇa's conversion to Buddhism in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (*ca.* 300 A.D.) merely makes official an already implicit theme.

supposedly descends from Jarāsaṃdha (see e.g. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 4.23). And the region of Magadha is later the base of the first great Buddhist emperor, Aśoka. But most curious are the names of Jarāsaṃdha's two daughters—Asti and Prāpti—whom he marries to Kaṃsa. It is these two women who prompt their father's revenge against Kṛṣṇa for the slaying of Kaṃsa. Unusual names for Indian girls, they both evoke prominent features of Sarvāstivādin Buddhism: Asti (*sarvam asti,* the phrase which gives the school its name) and Prāpti ('obtention,' the Sarvāstivādin 'pseudo-soul'). No other explanation for their names seems likely.

From here it is but a short step to completing this triangulation, and suggesting that Kṛṣṇa's absence from Mathurā is *symbolically* connected not only with his need to operate in the epic from Dvārakā, but with the prominence *in* Mathurā during a period of the *Mahābhārata*'s composition of both Jainism and Buddhism,[47] and again, more particularly, of its associations with Buddhism during the Kuṣāṇa period under the other great Buddhist emperor Kaniṣka.[48] Indeed, once again reinforcing the symbolic character of these stories, we see the *Harivaṃśa* quadrangulating the network of pseudo-historical forces pitched against the Aryandom of Mathurā. In that text Jarāsaṃdha's last hope of defeating Kṛṣṇa is Kālayavana, the 'Black Greek' or 'Greek of Time.' Like a number of Jarāsaṃdha's allies,[49] Kālayavana is a pseudo-Kṛṣṇa, the son of an Apsaras disguised as a Gopī and named Gopalī (*gopalī tvapsarās tatra gopastrīveṣadhariṇī*; HV 2.57.14)! As he assumes power, he takes leadership over such 'barbarian' (*mleccha*) kings as the Śakas, Tukhāras, Daradas, Pahlavas, and others. 'Encircled by those *dasyu*s, who were like locusts, with their varied terrible weapons and garments, he turned toward Mathurā.'[50] There can be little doubt that these new forces of opposition are imported into the story for their symbolic associations. There is no way to connect the Greeks

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[47] See Ruben, *Krishna*, p. 288; Vaudeville, 'Braj,' pp. 288, 204.

[48] Though ruling from Peshawar, Kaniṣka is said to have placed his son Vāsiṣka at Mathurā as his viceroy; J. Allan, T. Wolseley Haig, H. H. Dodwell, *The Cambridge Shorter History of India*, New York, 1934, p.79.

[49] This, I think, is the main point to be realized about such caricatures as Sṛgāla Vāsudeva, Puṇḍra Vāsudeva, Śiśupāla, and others. They are not historical challengers to Kṛṣṇa. in the first two cases for the 'title' of Vāsudeva. Rather, they are symbolic perversions, symbols of divinity unworthy of respect, of pseudo-divinity.

[50] *sa taiḥ parivṛto rājā dasyubhiḥ śalabhairiva nānāveṣāyudhairbhīmair mathurā-mabhyavartata* (HV 2.57.21).

and their northwestern 'allies' with the actual 'epic time,' the 'heroic age,' of the *Mahābhārata* or *Harivaṃśa*.[51] These sources collapse history into myth, but do so with a clear sense of a consistent symbolic geography which identifies Mathurā with the Middle Country, and its enemies, who threaten this Center from without and within, with forces that must certainly involve evocations of the great religious and historical forces—projected onto the distant heroic past—that were perceived as having eroded the stability of the dharma in this Middle Country.

With this in mind, I may hopefully be excused some speculations on the figure of Jarāsaṃdha. As we have seen, the *Harivaṃśa* provides him with a new ally, Kālayavana, the 'Black Greek' or the 'Greek of Time.' Either name evokes opposition to Kṛṣṇa, who is of course 'black' and frequently identified with Time. As we have seen, 'like a peasant' Kṛṣṇa 'tirelessly keeps revolving the Wheel of Time, the Wheel of the Universe, and the Wheel of the Yugas.' The connotation 'Greek of Time' is all the more suggestive, because Kaṃsa, another ally of Jarāsaṃdha, is said to be an incarnation of the asura Kālanemi (1.55.9 critical apparatus; HV 1.54.64–65), a former victim of Viṣṇu who terrified the gods when he appeared 'like Time' (*kālasannibham*; HV 1.46.58), stepped forth with three strides reminding them of Nārāyaṇa (*idem*, 59), and was finally dismembered by Viṣṇu with his *cakra*.[52] As Biardeau points out, Kālanemi is synonymous with Kālacakra, 'Wheel of Time.'[53] Now Jarāsaṃdha also has a curious name and story. The name is composed of *jarā* 'old age, Time, decline,' and *sandha,* which Biardeau takes in the sense of either 'pact' or 'twilight' (as in *sandhyā*).[54] The straightforward etymology, however, which the *Mahābhārata* uses by introducing a personification of *jarā*—the Rākṣasī Jarā, who unites Jarāsaṃdha's two halves when he is born split—is 'put together by jarā,' that is, 'put together by old age, Time, or decline.' Now the Buddhist 'wheel,' the *saṃsāramaṇḍala* or *bhāvacakra*, is precisely 'put together by old age and death.' The twelve *nidānas* are drawn into a circle that 'puts these two together' with 'ignorance': *jarā-maraṇam*, 'old age and death,' with *avidyā*. But

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[51] On the notion of an 'heroic age,' see Hiltebeitel, *Ritual of Battle*, pp. 48–59.
[52] The full account occurs at HV 1.46.48–48.51.
[53] Biardeau, EMH (V), p. 222.
[54] Biardeau, EMH (V), p. 227. Biardeau's interpretation differs from the one suggested here.

more than this, the Buddhist *bhāvacakra* is precisely a closed circle, without periods of crisis and renewal, *yuga*s. That is, it is a circle that does not admit the intervention of the *avatāra* who 'comes into being from yuga to yuga' (*Bhagavad Gītā* 4.8) and 'tirelessly keeps revolving the Wheel of Time, the Wheel of the Universe, *and* the Wheel of the Yugas.' Kṛṣṇa's confrontations with these wheel-evoking foes may thus represent a confrontation of cosmologies: the bhakti cosmology of Hinduism which admits ruptures of time—twilights—for the sake of the world's renewal, and images of Time without the possibility of such divine intervention, such as occur in Buddhism and Jainism.

Such remarks are admittedly highly speculative. To close with something more concrete, it is of the greatest interest that recent scholarship has found that the earliest iconic representations of Kṛṣṇa at Mathurā, probably from the Kuṣāṇa period, show him jointly with his brother Balarāma and sister Ekānaṃśā. I do not, however, think that this triad provides grounds for identifying an early kṣatriya Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa exempt from associations with a separate cowherd Gopāla Kṛṣṇa. Actually, one can propose that there is a consistent triadic theological paradigm that gives shape to a variety of combinations and relations in the early Kṛṣṇaite tradition. We are not yet at a point where we can decipher the significance, or determine an historical order, of the various triads that persistently crop up in connection with Kṛṣṇa: Balarāma, Kṛṣṇa, and Ekānaṃśā at Mathurā and Gayā; Balarāma, Kṛṣṇa, and Subhadrā at Puri[55] and, in the *Mahābhārata* story at Dvārakā; and Kṛṣṇa-Arjuna (counterpart to Balarāma as Kṛṣṇa's inseparable companion), Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva, and Kṛṣṇa-Draupadī (to whom Subhadrā subordinates herself) in the *Mahābhārata*. In this latter combination, we are dealing with three of the *Mahābhārata*'s four Kṛṣṇas, a designation by which the epic points to some of its deepest theological mysteries.[56] These triads would seem to involve a prismatic

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[55] See Doris Srinivasan, 'Early Kṛṣṇa Icons: The Case at Mathurā,' *Kalādarśana: American Studies in the Art of India*, ed. Joanna Williams Delhi etc. 1981; pp. 127–136. P. L. Gupta, 'Ekānaṃśā and Her Images,' *Bihar Research Society Journal*, Vol. LIV (1968), pp. 229–244; N. P. Joshi, 'Ekānaṃśā in Early Kuṣāṇa Art,' *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, N.S. (1967/68), pp. 34–36; idem, *Iconography of Balarāma*, New Delhi 1979, pp. 26, 30, 51, 75, 83; see also Anncharlott Eschmann, Hermann Kulke, and Gaya Charan Tripathi, eds., *The Cult of Jagannāth and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, New Delhi 1978, pp. 15, 70, 101, 121–123, 151, 153, 159, 169–98.

[56] See Hiltebeitel, *Ritual of Battle*, pp. 60–76; idem, 'Draupadī's Hair,' *Puruṣārtha*, Vol. V (1981), discussing Draupadī in relation to the Goddess.

set of complementary images through which Kṛṣṇa is involved in different yet related contexts, just as today in India divinities are known through local names and shifting mythical associations. But there is no way to detach either a cowherd nor a Kṣatriya component from the whole, or for that matter to identify stages in a process of 'divinization.' The iconic images and literary roles reflect the likelihood of a well diffused cult and mythology well before the pre-Gupta period, in which the variety of combinations suggests the recognition that no one grouping, or for that matter anyone locale or text, was meant to exhaust the theological whole. Moreover, it is important to stress that it is never a question of an independent deity, but of one always found in theologically significant combinations, particularly these recurrent sets of triads.[57] In this connection, it is perhaps noteworthy that at Madurai, the 'Mathurā of the South' (Dakṣiṇa-Mathurā) where Kṛṣṇa was also popular at a roughly contemporary early period,[58] a fundamental triad is still the basis of the city's most prominent festival: the marriage, during the Cittirai festival, that brings together Śiva with the sister of Alagar-Viṣṇu, Mīnākṣi.[59] The significance of these and other triads, and the question of a relationship between them and the textual traditions of the epics and *Harivaṃśa*, is a matter that will reward further investigation.

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[57] One finds other important associations besides triads (indeed dyads, tetrads, and pentads) in both early and later Kṛṣṇa literature and iconography, but the triads seem to have a central place in relation to the emergence of bhakti and temple worship.

[58] As Māyōṉ, the 'Black'; see Biardeau, EMH (V), p. 235, n. 1.

[59] See Dennis Hudson, 'Śiva, Mīnākṣī, Viṣṇu—Reflections on a Popular Myth in Madurai,' *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. XIV (1977), pp. 107–118.

EMPIRE, INVASION, AND INDIA'S NATIONAL EPICS

India's Sanskrit classical epics occupy a strange place in the comparative study of Indian myth, literature, and history. Comparisons have been made, and often at their expense. In terms of the metaphoric mapping strategy outlined by Fitz Poole (1986), the Sanskrit epics have usually been the 'target domain,' while either Greek epics, Indo-European epics,[1] oral epics, or historical plausibility have provided the 'source domain.' When invoking

> a comparison by delimiting the focus of analysis to the comprehension of one entity in terms of another, [one] often [considers] the more inchoate and problematic in terms of the better understood.... The target phenomenon or domain to be understood is new, abstract, uncharted, problematic, and less familiar than the source phenomenon or domain in terms of which it is described. Aspects of the known domain are analogically mapped onto aspects of the target domain (Poole 1986: 420–21).

Nowhere has such mapping been more tempting and indeed necessary than in the seemingly more-abstract-than-usually-realized Sanskrit epics. But the resulting maps have proved ineffective and misleading. The target is mined for whatever looks like the pure criterion of the source, and the rest of the landscape is reduced to encumbrances and rubble (interpolations, digressions, contaminations, growths). False maps are made, in such a way that any search for clarification is discouraged.

Although there is more to learn about the scholarly myths that have sustained this project, it may be that we have reached a point where 'comparative epic' has met its limits. Part of the problem has been one of genre. I will not suggest that we reject the term 'epic' for the Sanskrit works, though it is well known that Indian texts and languages have no corresponding term. It is clear that in comparing the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* with other literatures, one must look not only at

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[1] On Indo-European comparisons, see among recent attempts Hiltebeitel 1975, 1990; Katz 1989. As I now see it, the error lies in looking at common themes as evidence for older strata of the epics themselves and of their original character rather than as evidence of what the epic poets have done with older themes.

epics, encyclopedias, and other religious texts but also at philosophi-
cal and religious works of fiction (and ultimately the novel). However
with the publication of David Quint's book on Western epics, *Epic and
Empire* (1993), scholars of India's epics should find themselves gifted
with new comparative challenges: to ask how and why Indian epics
deploy tropes of empire and resistance to them; to reexamine those
crumbs previous comparative efforts have dropped from the epics'
supposed originals; and, even to consider the anxiety of influence, for
after all it was the same Alexander who invaded India in 327–325 B.C.E.
who 'carried on his campaigns a copy of the *Iliad*, which he kept under
his pillow, together with a dagger,' and later placed it 'in a precious
casket that had been captured from the Persian king Darius' (Quint
1993: 4).

In the West, Quint (1993: 7, 55) argues, Alexander was the first
to imagine epic as imperial, and Virgil the first to make this impe-
rial vision into a 'national epic,' celebrating the founding of Rome.
In India, shortly after Alexander's invasion with its highly brutal
massacres,[2] the Magadhan metropolitan state gathered renewed impe-
rial force under the Mauryas. This 'transition in Magadha,' as Romila
Thapar observes,

> remains without an epic to eulogize it. This may be due to the inclina-
> tion of the rulers of Magadha towards the heterodox sects, where, in the
> chronicles of early Buddhism, the epic as it were, of the rulers of Magadha
> is to be found in the *Dīpavaṃśa* and the *Mahāvaṃśa*…requiring a dif-
> ferent form from the epic (1984: 141).

On the contrary, the 'transition to a monarchical state in Kosala is
reflected not only in the form in which the lineage is recorded in the
Purāṇas but also in the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself' (Thapar 1984: 141). Thapar
wants to retain some historicity to the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s main story and
thus sees this second transition as one in which the poet recalls and
embellishes real events in Kosalan history. But here she follows the
risky practice of extracting history from what seems plausible in epic.
Thapar (1978b, 1979) rightly raises the question of empire and epic
with regard to the Mauryas and Buddhists, where it has a negative out-
come. She does not however see its implications for the 'Hindu epics,'[3]

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[2] Including one of a 'city of Brahmans' (Bosworth 1996: 95).
[3] The term is often—and from a modern perspective, rightly—used to describe the
Sanskrit epics; the term 'Hindu,' however, being anachronistic.

in which what interests her are 'reflections' of history. But if we resist reading history into the epics' main narratives, it would seem that they are the creations of Brāhmaṇa poets who developed their own variants on the epic genre, who centered their stories on kingdoms eclipsed by the time of the Magadhan imperial states, stories that celebrated these kingdoms by transposing them into a 'double past' that is simply unavailable to the modern historian.

As we shall see, a number of scholars have assumed a relationship between the Sanskrit epics and Indian experiences of empires—both those invading from without (Greeks, Persians, Kuṣāṇas) and those rising from within (Magadhan states, Śātavāhanas). But, as far as I know, no one has effectively suggested a link between these experiences and the Brāhmaṇical poets' adoption of an epic 'form.' I believe this link raises serious historical questions about Indian literature and religion, though it could of course encourage the creation of new myths of influence or indigenous invention. In any case, Quint's study should motivate further comparative reconsideration of the connections between empires, invasions, and the production of the Indian epics. This essay is an attempt in that direction.

It is in fact not a new issue, but one that has, until fairly recently (see Alles 1989, 1994; Fitzgerald 1991; Hiltebeitel 1989; Pande 1990),[4] dropped out of sight, indeed since 1947. This year is significant for both the independence of India from British imperialism and a resurgence of Western scholarly interest in the Indian epics, first as expressions of Indo-European mythology.[5] My purpose then is twofold. On the one hand, much of what has been said about the link between empires, invasions, and the Sanskrit epics is spurious. Most of what is spurious results from transforming the relation between history and genre into modern mythologies of empire that have more to do with the Āryans, Mughals, and British than with the Nandas, Mauryas, and Śuṅgas. As we shall see, scholarly discussion of empire and invasion in relation to the Sanskrit epics gets colored by such related constructs as eras, ages, national epic, nationalism, patriotism, and the so-called

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[4] For an earlier view not discussed below, see Hiltebeitel (1979a: 69) on the younger Adolf Holtzmann's 'inversion theory' in which the *Mahābhārata* begins as a Buddhist epic celebrating Duryodhana in the image of Aśoka and in memory of national resistance against the Greeks and is then subject to Brāhmaṇical inversions.

[5] For the beginnings of this project, see Dumézil 1948; for some of my own attempts to contribute to it, see Hiltebeitel 1975, 1990.

'Āryan invasion.' Further, all these issues, which tie in with current debates about Orientalism and colonial 'constructions' of Hinduism, force us to consider how 'Hinduism in the making' must be recognized not only 'objectively' in the texts, practices, and monuments attributed to its tradition but also reflexively in the contending strains of scholarship that 'construct the object.' I would say that it is rather shallow to argue, or insinuate, that the epic poets did not construct a Hinduism *avant la Iettre*, before the Mughals and British re-'invented' their own. Likewise, to think that one can position oneself as post-Orientalist simply by saying the word to name a scholarly era now past is equally superficial (see Pollock 1994; cf. Biardeau 1989; Hiltebeitel 1995). According to Nick Allen, 'Nowadays it becomes more and more apparent that *the* charter for Hinduism is the *Mahābhārata*' (1991 327; emphasis in original). I would make just two provisos: that one should really say 'the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*,' and that these epics' place in the construction of Hinduism needs to be rethought around many issues, including empire and invasion.

On the other hand, there can be no doubt that past scholars were right to see that Indian epics do offer their own reflections on experiences of empire and invasion. The *Mahābhārata* in particular construes the episode of Yudhiṣṭhira's rise to power, through the elimination of his rival, the Magadha king Jarāsaṃdha, and the performance of a Rājasūya sacrifice, around the issue of empire (see Hiltebeitel 1989). Indeed, this sequence provides most of the *Mahābhārata*'s usages of the terms '*saṃrāj*' (emperor) and '*saṃrājya*' (empire).[6] From the beginning of the episode, after Yudhiṣṭhira learns he should consider the Rājasūya as a means to empire (*Mahābhārata* 2.11.61), Kṛṣṇa says Yudhiṣṭhira has the qualities to be emperor, to make himself emperor of the *kṣatra* (2.13.60). First, though, he must defeat Jarāsaṃdha, who has obtained empire by birth (*Mahābhārata* 2.13.8). Let us note that Jarāsaṃdha's empire is ascribed; Yudhiṣṭhira's must be achieved. Then, once Yudhiṣṭhira wins the Mahābhārata war and considers renouncing his hard-won kingdom, Kṛṣṇa urges him to hear the *Ṣoḍaśarajakīya* (the 'Story of the sixteen kings' of old; *Mahābhārata* 12.129). Indeed,

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[6] Within the Poona Critical Edition, there are between 2.11 and 2.42, eight out of the fourteen such usages in the entire epic. *Saṃrāj* is probably used ironically when Yudhiṣṭhira and Draupadī call Virāṭa 'emperor' (*Mahābhārata* 4.6.7, 19.25). Sullivan (1990: 31, 48, 60, 75) makes the point that both the Rājasūya and Aśvamedha are imperial sacrifices and that Vyāsa acts as priest at both.

Yudhiṣṭhira might remember from an earlier telling of the story told by Vyāsa, at the death of Abhimanyu, that Pṛthu was 'consecrated by the great Ṛṣis in an imperial Rājasūya' to be the first emperor. He milked the earth for trees, mountains, gods, Asuras, men, snakes, the seven Ṛṣis, the Apsaras, and the Fathers after he was lauded by them with the words, 'You are our emperor. You are a Kṣatriya, our king, protector, and father' (*Mahābhārata* 7, Appendix 1, no. 8, 11. 764, 779–84). The corresponding term '*cakravartin*' (turner of the wheel) is used not for Yudhiṣṭhira but for 'heroic Kṣatriyas who were emperors in the Tretā Yuga' (*Mahābhārata* 6.11.10) and some of the sixteen kings in contexts that suggest overlap with the title Saṃrāj. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* (5.29.2), Rāma inherits the empire of his father Daśaratha, who was a *cakravartin*. Of course, these epic usages have a prehistory, which we cannot examine here (but see Witzel 1987; cf. Gonda 1969: 123–28; Sircar 1969: 48–56; Strong 1983: 150, 154, 158, 163–64); they also envision empire in distinctive ways, which we will consider.

Issues of empire and invasion thus run through the epics themselves and through earlier generations of scholars who seriously misconstrued them. I will single out two particularly durable misconstruals: of 'ages' or 'periods' around the epics, and of the significance of Kṣatriyas and Rājpūts.

Periodizing the Epics

The variety of conceptions developed around periodizations of the epics arises from the need to conceptualize the relationship between historical and literary orders of interpretation. This relationship comes into play when scholars address the historiographical and textual problems involved in defining periods for the epics' 'development.' Most typically they are placed into an eight- or nine-hundred year post-Upaniṣadic period, up to and including the Guptas. The epics are treated as both emblems and byproducts of this period of synthesis: emblems in that they are taken to define the period as a departure from the prior 'Vedic'[7] period, and byproducts in that they are assumed— and here one speaks especially of the *Mahābhārata*—to have accreted into being. They are represented as gathering heavier and heavier

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[7] Consider, for instance, Macdonell's *Vedic Mythology* (1974) with Hopkins' *Epic Mythology* (1969b) as guidelines to one element of such periodization.

cultural, theological, and sectarian freight to become 'encyclopedias' *of* the period. Further, it is generally assumed that these periods of textual development recall earlier times within the Vedic period that involved the transmission of the epics as songs, stories, and/or historical recollections.

I believe these periodizations to be questionable and have argued elsewhere (Hiltebeitel 1993, 1995)[8] that much of what they have to offer derives from scholarly conventions unable to address the issues involved.[9] To indicate the standpoint from which I discuss others' views, and to obviate repeated statements of agreement and disagreement, let me say the following. I consider the epics to have been *written* by Brāhmaṇas over a much shorter period than is usually advanced— in the *Mahābhārata*'s case, by a group; in the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s, mostly by a single author. Arguments for prior *oral* epic behind these written texts have been fashionably opportunistic and theoretically naive, as have those for a prior Kṣatriya tradition 'appropriated' by the Brāhmaṇas (see Hiltebeitel 1993: 12, n.d.; cf. Alles 1989: 221–22, 231n22, 1994: 123; Fitzgerald 1991: 150–56). Rather than being byproducts of a historical period of synthesis, the epics serve their authors to ground intertextual projects *of* that period in a historical periodization of their own.[10] As indicated, I regard the incessantly repeated encyclopedia notion to be inadequately supported by the historiography it presumes. As an analogy, it has its uses and also its limits (see Patton 1996: 455–61), but it has been falsely applied to the text's production.

Regarding scholarly periodizations, it will be useful to differentiate three types: the 'heroic age,' the 'encyclopedic period,' and the 'epic period.' Heroic age is used, for example, by N. K. Sidhanta to envision an age that 'depends both on Mars and the Muses. Mars may still be there; but [when] the Muses are absent,' the heroic age is over (1930: 224, cf. 218, citing Chadwick 1912: 440 ff.). The Indian heroic age thus

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[8] Compare Alles (1989: 222–24, 231, 241n45) on the non-necessity of positing strata and the '19th century European bias against the intellectual capabilities of an ancient poet' (223n8). But Alles holds to the idea that Indian epics begin with 'defining narratives' (1994: 26–28) that leave Vālmīki's original *Rāmāyaṇa* without its first and last books and the *Mahābhārata* 'overburdened with episodic material' (1989: 223, 1994: 36).

[9] Derived from biblical and Homeric 'higher criticism' and colonialist and Christian 'comparative religions' historiography and apologetics.

[10] The epics put in place the solar, lunar, and Magadhan dynastic chronologies along side the theory of *yuga*s, which, taking them together, the Purāṇas carry forward as history.

continues so long as bards sing songs to the heroes' descendants and ends, according to Sidhanta (1930: 37, 70–90, 218), about the eleventh or tenth century B.C.E. At this point 'authentic' epic yields to the development of literary epic, with its artificialities of embellishment, narrative digression, and didactic overgrowth. Sidhanta sees a 'heroic nucleus' only in the *Mahābhārata*, not in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which 'seems the product of an age of polish and culture, quite distinct from the "barbarism" of the Heroic Age' of the *Mahābhārata* (1930: 89).[11] Nonetheless, he sees the Kauravas as sufficiently 'civilized' to enable a comparison between them and the Romans. Taking the Pāṇḍavas as coming from a 'tribe with an inferior culture'[12] who 'tried to make their conduct approximate to the standards of the [Kaurava] society in which they found themselves,' Sidhanta sees the conflict between the two as one

> typical of the heroic poems of other lands as well, [which] may be traced to a contact between a semi-civilized people and one of a higher culture, leading through a period of training of the former to one of domination of the latter by the former (1930: 221).

The Pāṇḍavas are thus like the 'semi-civilized Teutons' brought by war and trade 'into close touch with the Romans and the civilization of the Empire' (Sidhanta 1930: 221). One may note how Sidhanta strains to make the analogy. He never says that the Pāṇḍava tribe invaded the Kauravas (as others did before him, including C.V. Vaidya) or that the Kauravas had an empire. His real analogy would seem to be with the British and with his attempt to match the epics as best he can with the heroic-age model of H.M. Chadwick.

Encyclopedic period will serve to bracket the time of textual formation. Although I know of no actual usage of the term, I use it to characterize scholarship that promotes the idea that the *Mahābhārata* is an encyclopedia. Representative here is Edward Washburn Hopkins, who 'imagines' the beginnings of an 'original Bhāratī Kathā' in a 'circling narration' that 'may lie as far back as 700 B.C. or 1700 B.C., for ought we know' (1969a: 386). Still, he considers himself on solid ground when he puts his 'facts together' to propose a five-stage development of the *Mahābhārata* from 400 B.C.E. to 400 C.E.+. During this time the 'Pandu

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[11] For comparable attempts to treat the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a source for information about an 'age,' see Dharma 1941; Vyas 1967.

[12] For instance, their polyandry and breaches of the rules of combat.

heroes' are consolidated into a story that probably begins without them as 'Bhārata (Kuru) lays' and Kṛṣṇa rises from a hero to a 'demigod' to an 'all-god' (Hopkins 1969a: 397–98). V.S. Sukthankar, summing up his foundational work as chief editor of the *Mahābhārata*'s Poona Critical Edition, comments, 'I will say candidly that for all intents and purposes this pretentious table is as good as useless' (1957: 9). But such assessments (cf. Hiltebeitel 1979a: 75–83) remain ignored by the run of textbook writers on Hinduism and Indian civilization, who continue to reproduce the received wisdom. The consensus further folds *Rāmāyaṇa* composition into a shorter window within an early phase of this same period, presumes that both epics begin as 'secular' works of the martial class appropriated by Brāhmaṇas, sees both as gradually deifying or divinizing a central hero (Rāma, Kṛṣṇa), and views both (the *Rāmāyaṇa*, only less so) as encyclopedically accretative (see, for instance, decade by decade, Basham 1963: 407–15; Hopkins 1971: 87–95; Brockington 1981: 54–69; Flood 1996: 104–8).

Hopkins, however, makes some interesting statements about invasions and empires during the period in which he sees the 'Pandu epic' being 'cast in its present shape' (1969a: 399n1). Numerous references to Greeks indicate that 'the Pandu epic as we have it, or even without its masses of didactic material, was composed or compiled after the Greek invasion' (Hopkins 1969a: 398). 'Contemptuous' allusions to Buddhist monuments and references to Buddhist terms and concepts (Hopkins 1969a: 391, 475) make it

> impossible to suppose that during the triumph of Buddhism such a poem could have been composed for the general public for which it was intended;... while a Buddhist emperor was alive no such Brahmanic emperor as that of the epic could have existed, no such attacks on Buddhism as are in the epic could have been made (399).

Hopkins (1969a: 399, 399n1) sees more favorable conditions for the 'casting' of this 'anti-Buddhist epic' emerging in the second century, after the overthrow of the Maurya dynasty by Puṣyamitra Śuṅga. In calling the *Mahābhārata* anti-Buddhist, however, Hopkins implies that it makes a head-on confrontation with just one religion. Rather, both epics use the term '*nāstika*' (those who teach what *is not*) to cover all heresies—Buddhist, Jaina, and Materialist—presumably to deny significance to anyone rival and to generalize opposing movements into this deontologized category.

Hopkins' window for the casting of the *Mahābhārata* is thus open between Puṣyamitra and 200 C.E., but 'handbook writers may safely

assign it in general to the second century B.C.' (1969a: 398). As others have observed—most notably Gregory Alles (1989, 1994), who assigns *Rāmāyaṇa* composition to the Śuṅga period for many similar reasons—Puṣyamitra was a Brāhmaṇa who reasserted sway through the Brāhmaṇical imperial symbolism of sponsoring two Aśvamedha sacrifices. According to Binod Sinha (1977: 94–98), Puṣyamitra sponsored the first of these Aśvamedhas to celebrate the departure of the Yavanas (Ionians or Greeks) from his territory. He undertook the second, 'more glorious' one during a second Yavana invasion under Menander (of Buddhist fame). Yet, if we may speak of Śuṅga imperialism (as does Sinha 1977), Śuṅga regionalism (Alles 1989: 235, 1994: 68) and decenteredness (1994: 70) differed markedly from the 'repressive' centralization of Maurya imperial policies. As we will see with Vaidya, as Brāhmaṇical imperial sacrifices, the Aśvamedha and Rājasūya are always cast in a regionalist mold, particularly in the epics. Yet although there is much to recommend the Śuṅga period as possible for the epics' composition, Alles (1994: 116–24, especially 119) remains stuck with Hopkins' problem of explaining how in the Indian context it becomes 'inevitable' that Rāma is divinized. And neither Hopkins nor Alles wrestles with what the epic poets would have made of their Śuṅga royal patrons being Brāhmaṇas, not Kṣatriyas—that is, unsuitable as kings. This argument could be made, given all that is in both epics concerning the bad kingships of Brāhmaṇas. But it would require answering why Śuṅga Brāhmaṇa kings would have indulged it.

Finally, epic period is used by Vaidya to cover the whole gamut from the epics' presumed beginnings in history to their completion.[13] Vaidya is of special interest because of his work with both the Sanskrit epics and the history of Rājputs in medieval India. Despite its many rash formulations, his often overlooked scholarship is significant for its close consideration of this relationship. He opens *Epic India*, the culmination of his trilogy on the epics, declaring, the 'Epic period…extends roughly speaking, from 3000 to 300 B.C.E. (Vaidya 1907: v, cf. 21, 28, 1905: 65–110).[14] This span however covers only the *Mahābhārata*. In treating the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Vaidya (1907: 21n, 84–85, 175, 1972: 7–43,

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[13] Compare Smith (1961; 44–60), who uses the terms 'epic period' and 'epic India'—contrasted with 'Vedic period'—as headings to cover the same issues but shies away from incorporating the terms into his actual discussion.

[14] Vaidya (1907: v, 28) is also willing to consider 1400–1250 B.C.E.—the 'latest dates assigned' to the *Mahābhārata* war—as possible, but he theorizes only about the longer span and treats the 1600-year difference as a trifle.

62–67) extends the epic period from 3500 to 100 B.C.E. The chronology is inseparable from a vocabulary of invasions and empires.

Epic India begins with credit given to Herbert Risley whose 'anthropometric labours' on nasal indexes for the 1901 Census of India 'dispelled for all time to come the doubt which was often entertained as to whether there was any Aryan population at all in this vast country of diverse races' (Vaidya 1907: 1, cf. 4).[15] For Vaidya, Risley's work confirms prior philological claims about

> the same [Indo-European] family group of languages [and shows that] students of the Rigveda, the oldest hymn-book in the world, have not created a myth of their own, when they discovered in it the traces of an Aryan people entering India through the north-west and conquering the Punjab (1907: 1).

Vaidya's challenge is to fit the *Ṛg Veda* and the 'venerable Epics of India' into Risley's 'very interesting and scientific sevenfold division of the peoples of India' (1907: 29). His only objection is to the designation Scytho-Dravidian for the population of western India, that is, the people of Maharashtra, among whom Vaidya counted himself (Vaidya 1907: 2–3, 29–47).

Vaidya's solution is a succession of three invasions. First, as reflected in the *Ṛg Veda*, Indo-Āryans entered the Punjab in about 4000 B.C.E., ridding that area of the tribes of a probably Dravidian aboriginal race. Most surviving Dravidians, 'some of whom were ferocious cannibals,' 'receded to their original home in the south' (Vaidya 1907: 6). As the Āryans fanned out to the east and south, they refrained from mixing with the Dravidians. Such was India down to the time of Rāma, ca. 3500 B.C.E. (Vaidya 1907: 4–7, 10–11).

Second, following the advance of 'colonies' planted by Brāhmaṇa Ṛṣis, the exiled Rāma 'visited all those colonies' on his 'successful march to Lanka'; just, says Vaidya, as 'nobody questions the truth of Alexander's march to the Punjab, we do not doubt its truth' (1907: 9). And indeed, in his *Rāmāyaṇa* study, its historicity is the subject of an extended analogy and a detailed comparison between Rāma and Hernán Cortés, the Spanish conquistador (Vaidya 1972: 62, 71–89, 109–12, 124–35). Drawing on William Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843), Vaidya (1972) considers Montezuma to be 'the

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[15] Vaidya cites Risley's 'The study of ethnography in India,' *Journal of Anthropological Institute* 20, which is unavailable to me.

prototype of Rāvaṇa' (83), finds similar references to unusual causeways over water (126–27),[16] and compares Rāma's and Cortés' adventures into 'unknown regions peopled by unknown races' (135) and their projects of deliverance of the Rākṣasas and Aztecs from cannibalism (84). In effect, Rāma besieges the proto-imperial Rākṣasas (Vaidya 1972: 79). If Vaidya is not persuasive in his historical argument, he uncovers an intriguing set of literary—and in particular epic—tropes of empire and invasion. Rāma's 'adventure,' however, did not result in conquest because of the area's thick population. It only gave the Āryans an early 'glimpse of the south,' which remained 'almost a "terra incognita"' to them (Vaidya 1907: 9). But the southern Dravidians 'soon gave up cannibalism after the fall' of Laṅkā and, 'easily assimilating the Aryan civilization under the tutelage of a few Brahmin leaders, became orthodox Hindus in the course of succeeding centuries' (Vaidya 1907: 9). Still, Vaidya allows that the Brāhmaṇas' 'religious domination…over the Dravidian people became in the course of time most rigid and despotic and continues to be so down to this day' (1907: 9). Here, rather ironically, he anticipates the arguments by which E. V. Ramasami contested nationalizing Brāhmaṇical uses of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (see Richman 1995), setting an antinationalist course for the Dravidian movement from 1930 to 1971.[17]

Finally, the 'second wave of invasion by the Aryan speaking people' enters India around 3200 B.C.E., not 'by the usual north-west gate but by the circuitous way via Gilgit and Chitral' (Vaidya 1907: 11). Because of the 'difficulties of the road,' they brought 'very few women' with them and were 'compelled' to intermarry with Dravidian women (Vaidya 1907: 11). This wave complexified the caste system, composed the Vedas (as distinct from the *Ṛg Veda*), and developed the Vedas' 'tortuous ritual' (Vaidya 1907: 11–13, 69). It is above all the Pāṇḍavas who 'evidence the truth of a second invasion by peoples akin in race, language, and religion to the Aryans who had already established themselves in the Punjab and spread eastward' (Vaidya 1907: 13). The Pāṇḍavas were born in the Himalayas. When they came to the city of the Kurus, 'they were looked on as intruders' (Vaidya 1907: 13). After first trying 'to reject the invaders,' Dhṛtāraṣṭra gave them half the Kuru

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[16] Bosworth (1996: 12n310), who draws a similar comparison between Cortés and Alexander, also finds an analogy here in the latter's pontoon work.

[17] Ramasami interpreted the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a Brāhmaṇical-propagated fiction justifying Āryan colonization of the Dravidian south.

kingdom in an area to the south dominated by cannibals and Nāgas. Here they built their capital of Indraprastha. The Pāṇḍavas, according to Yudhiṣṭhira, had that telling *kuladharma* (family custom)[18] of polyandrous marriage by brothers. The latter shows that they cannot be from the same family as the Kurus and they come from a people 'not in possession of a sufficiently large number of women' (Vaidya 1907: 14–15, cf. 70). The Pāṇḍavas' Himalayan births and polyandrous marriage thus combine to lend 'great support to the theory of an Aryan invasion coming from the Himalayas' (Vaidya 1907: 14). Also, although there is nothing to indicate their Himalayan origins, other 'kindred races' came along with, or in advance of, the Pāṇḍavas: the Cedis, Kuntibhojas, Magadhas, Mālavas, Matsyas, Śūrasenas (Kṛṣṇa's people). These settled across North India, all advancing lax marriage customs, and in at least one other case, conquering aboriginal Nāgas (Vaidya 1907: 17–18).

The *Mahābhārata* war is then 'something like a civil war between the pure Aryans and the mixed Aryans,' won by the latter, with a 'counterpart in the civil war of America.'[19] It is followed up by Janamejaya's 'war of extermination…against his hereditary enemies the Nagas' (Vaidya 1907: 19–20). Needless to say, it requires great precision to extract only what is needed to support this ethnohistorical *roman à clef.* Furthermore, when Vaidya compares the dark complexion of the 'three Kṛṣṇas' and Arjuna (see Hiltebeitel 1984, 1989, 1990: 60–76) to 'black colour coming into favour with the Aryan people of this time' (the result of racial mixing and severe heat) (Vaidya 1907: 18, 108), he must reject such evidence for Rāma: 'The complexion of Rāma is believed to have been dark or blue as that of Krishna. It is difficult to believe that it was so: Not only is it historically impossible,' but it is also contradicted by a particular verse. The passage has Viṣṇu

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[18] Vaidya seems to stretch the text at this point. He recalls without citation a 'fossil' verse 'strangely preserved from the old nucleus' in which Yudhiṣṭhira explains to Drupada: 'This is our family custom and we do not feel we are transgressing Dharma in following it' (Vaidya 1905: 123, 1907: 13–14). (I cannot find this verse in either the Vulgate or the Critical Edition, including its apparatus.) Possibly Vaidya refers to Yudhiṣṭhira's explanation by way of the Pāṇḍavas' covenant of sharing every treasure (*Mahābhārata* 1.187.24), which, together with the *dharma* of heeding the word of their highest *guru*, their mother (1.188.15), provides his justification of the practice.

[19] Aware that the American Civil War involved 'the strange instance…of Europeans coming into close contact with a black population' (1907: 55), Vaidya would seem to equate the Pāṇḍavas with the Union and the Kauravas with the Confederates.

becoming 'red and not dark' in the Dvāpara Yuga, in which Vaidya situates Rāma (1907: 112–13).

Once the Pāṇḍavas are established at Indraprastha, which 'figures throughout Indian history as Delhi, the capital of the Empire' (Vaidya 1907: 15), Vaidya's tale turns explicitly to empires. We should not underestimate the importance of this association. Janamejaya, the Pāṇḍavas' great grandson, is already a great horse sacrificer and universal conqueror in the *Aitareya* and *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇas* (Bharadwaj 1986: 126). Indeed, according to Michael Witzel (1995: 5, 9, 20), he and his father are consolidators of the first Indian state, the Kuru state in the region of Kurukṣetra. For Vaidya (1907), the epic celebrates Janamejaya as a 'great sovereign,' 'great king,' and 'great sacrificer.' Empire in India actually begins with him: 'What Akbar was in relation to Babar or Shahu in relation to Shivaji, Janamejaya may be said to have been in relation to the Pāṇḍavas, the founders of the kingdom' (Vaidya 1907: 20). Moreover, Janamejaya 'was already master of the valleys of the Jumna and the Ganges, and the Mahābhārata relates that he conquered the Punjab or the country of Takshashila' (Vaidya 1907: 20). His conquest of Takṣaśilā has also convinced the historians H. C. Raychaudhuri (1923: 34) and Asim Chatterjee (1980: 164f.) that Janamejaya held 'control over an extensive empire' (Bharadwaj 1986: 12). But Bharadwaj notes that the *Mahābhārata* refers to Takṣaśilā only once in an intertextual context, one that otherwise isolates it in a literary and geographical vacuum. He is thus 'inclined to believe that Takṣaśilā did not in reality form a part of the kingdom of Janamejaya Pārikṣita and its association with him is born out of poetic fancy' (Bharadwaj 1986: 12)—what we might call 'a poetic imperial fancy.' The epic's story of its recitation to Janamejaya at Takṣaśilā would seem to reflect Takṣaśilā's borderland reputation in Indian imperial history as a center of Vedic learning, even from the time of Alexander (Smith 1961: 85–92). A suggestion that such history may be cumulative is found in a Punjab legend, gathered by R. C. Temple (1962, 1: 494; see also Bharadwaj 1986: 123–24). Tātig Nāga, the snake who bites Parikṣit and survives Janamejaya's vengeful snake sacrifice, reads the *Qur'ān*! Known as Takṣaka in the *Mahābhārata*, he gives his name to Takṣaśilā.

Vaidya's scheme thus positions the epic period between two imperial histories: Janamejaya's, and the imperial history from Magadha through Alexander's invasion of the Punjab. It is with Janamejaya's empire that Vyāsa's original *Bhārata* swells into the *Mahābhārata*,

through the additions of Vaiśaṃpāyana who sings it during the inter-
vals of Janamejaya's snake sacrifice. According to Vaidya's twist on the
epic's story, Janamejaya performed the snake sacrifice 'in commemora-
tion of the war of extermination he waged against his hereditary ene-
mies the Nagas' (1907: 20). The impression left is that Vaiśaṃpāyana's
snake sacrifice represents a war already completed, thus transform-
ing it into allegory. In any case, Vaidya dates Janamejaya to roughly
3000 B.C.E. and 'believe[s] that the great epic was then born' in his
reign from Vyāsa's earlier and shorter version (1907: 20). Its growth
then continues until 'it assumed its final shape after the rise of Bud-
dhism' and Alexander's invasion (Vaidya 1907: 21). At this point,
Sauti (Ugraśravas) cast it in its final form, sometime during the reign
of Candragupta Maurya. 'Through Narada's mouth,' Sauti envisioned
'the rules of a well-conducted government as they must have been
enforced in the days of Chandragupta' (Vaidya 1907: 220–21), when
this emperor, tutored by his Brāhmaṇa minister Kauṭalya, brought 'the
despotic power of kings' and 'Machiavellian policy' to 'their highest
expression' (266, cf. 175). Vaidya thinks Sauti 'recast' the epic at this
time out of concern for 'the defence of the whole orthodox religion,
as it then existed, against Buddhism' (1907: 39–40). He accomplished
this task by making the more Vaiṣṇava work of his predecessors 'dis-
tinctly non-sectarian,' with a 'unifying spirit which is the charm of
this vast work from a philosophic point of view' (Vaidya 1905: 44).
For Vaidya, the epic is written—not oral—at every stage, beginning
with Vyāsa's 'history called "Triumph,"' which 'was written in glorifi-
cation of Krishna or Narayana as of Arjuna or Nara' (1907: 38). Vyāsa
was 'a contemporary of the event' who 'wrote his poem some time
after the war' in a 'simple and forcible' language that 'bears the mark
of a spoken language' (Vaidya 1907: 38). This language is 'archaic in
appearance and stands on the same level with the language of the Upa-
nishads' (Vaidya 1907: 69).[20] Vaidya (1972: 2, 5, 16, 42) also considers
Vālmīki to have written the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Positioned between two imperial histories, India's epic period thus
functions as a historiographical device to trace a potent combination
of textual growth and cultural decline. 'The Indo-Aryans were…at
the beginning of the epic period like all young and free peoples ener-
getic and active, truthful and outspoken' (Vaidya 1907: 163, cf. 1905:

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[20] Consult Yardi 1986 for his definition of five authorial styles in the *Mahābhārata*.

56–57). Indeed, Vyāsa has the Pāṇḍavas, Draupadī, and their mother Kuntī speak and act 'in true Rājpūt fashion' (Vaidya 1905: 53); 'and what should we think when we are told that Kausalyā killed by her own hands the sacrificial horse with three sword strokes.... She must have been very strong and a true Rājpūt lady indeed' (Vaidya 1972: 9). The only high moral feeling or virtue these people lacked was patriotism (Vaidya 1905: 57–58). Yudhiṣṭhira, speaking in the context of the second Āryan invasion while expressing the first 'conscious revolt against caste,' could answer Nahuṣa's question, 'Who is a Brahman?,' by citing the criterion of virtuous conduct rather than birth (Vaidya 1907: 71–75, 164). Wives could call their husbands by their first names (Vaidya 1907: 176), and women, as evidenced by Draupadī, had an 'independence of character' and knowledge of the *śāstra*s that 'is far different from the position' Draupadī 'assigns to a good wife' in a chapter 'probably...interpolated by Sauti' (98–99). Yet times changed in accord with 'that historical law which subjects the less civilized conquerors to the higher civilization and religion of the conquered' (Vaidya 1907: 22). Vaidya (1907: 35) finds other evidence for this law, and we have seen Sidhanta approximate it as well. It clearly reflects a posture toward the British.[21]

The new invaders picked up caste and the 'pompous religion' of sacrifice, which, as reflected by the 'interpolation' of the *Puruṣa Sūkta* in the *Ṛg Veda*, had become 'the chief characteristics of their predecessors in settlements' (Vaidya 1907: 21, 52–53). Then, through the long epic period that followed, racial and caste mixing and division, restrictions on women, hypergamy, and marriage by purchase increased (Vaidya 1907: 22, 48–82, 90–99, 175). Meat-eating, which earlier had accompanied the 'imperial dignity' of the horse sacrifice (Vaidya 1907: 120), gave way to vegetarianism. It was a change deserving of 'our praise and admiration and yet who can deny that the people of India have done so...only at the sacrifice of their political independence' (Vaidya 1907: 117). Similarly, at the beginning of the epic period, 'the Indo-Aryans were as much addicted to drinking as their brethren in Germany' (Vaidya 1907: 130). Both 'in battles and in war righteous fighting was the glory of the Indian Kshatriyas' (Vaidya 1907: 261), and it was only after Alexander's invasion that 'they borrowed their

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[21] As perhaps it did for Mahātma Gandhi in his famous joke that he was not aware there was such a thing as Western civilization.

evil practices in war from the Greeks' (264). Thus, the *Śāntiparvan*
(69) shows what 'despotic' kings had learned and what dastardly tactics
(destroying countryside, poisoning water, harnessing the enemy) ail-
ing kings could take in resistance against such rivals. Bhīṣma's advice
about sowing dissension is 'sickening' evidence of the end of the epic
period; the episode (*Mahābhārata* 5.138) where Kṛṣṇa sows dissension
by urging Karṇa to change sides was 'introduced by Sauti' and was
not part of the older epic (Vaidya 1907: 261–64). While Kauṭalya pro-
pounded his 'Machiavellian policies' under these 'pitiable conditions,'
Plato and Aristotle 'were writing their masterly treatises on politics
and government,' showing 'how vastly the Indo-Aryan and Greek civi-
lizations starting from a common point had diverged in the matter of
political development by the end of the epic period' (Vaidya 1907: 267,
cf. 181). In sum, chapter 228 of the *Śāntiparvan* sets 'vividly before
our eyes the idea of a demoralized state of society as conceived by the
Aryans about the end of the epic period, and we feel that it is not,
except in certain broad points, far different from our own' (Vaidya
1907: 179, cf. 196, 203).

   Most important, toward the end of the epic period, the tables on
invasion are turned. The 'Vedic period's' distinction between Āryas
and Dāsas was 'probably lost sight of during the epic period' to be
replaced by Āryas and Mlecchas (Vaidya 1907: 23). Rather than Āryas
being the supposed invaders of indigenous Dāsas, the epics tell of
Mleccha combatants in the epics—some of whom must be identi-
fied as invaders of India. As Vaidya puts it, by the end of the epic
age, the *Mahābhārata* speaks of 'the Aryans as distinguished from the
[Mlecchas] who surrounded their country' (1907: 25). Here he cites
both epics' telling of the all-conquering Kṣatriya Viśvāmitra's efforts
to drag away the miraculous cow of Vasiṣṭha. In the *Mahābhārata's*
(1.165.9–44) version,[22] once the superiority of Brāhmaṇa forbearance[23]
is established over Kṣatriya strength, Vasiṣṭha confirms the former
by allowing all of Viśvāmitra's soldiers to live. In the *Rāmāyaṇa's*

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[22] Kāmadhugdhenu ('Cow of plenty') Nandinī retaliates by creating Pahlavas from
her tail or 'arse'; Śabaras and Śakas from her dung; Yavanas from her urine; and,
Puṇḍras, Kirātas, Dramiḍas, Siṃhalas, Barbaras, Daradas, and Mlecchas from the
foam of her mouth.
[23] Forebearance or *kṣama* is one of the high *Mahābhārata* virtues, exemplified by
Yudhiṣṭhira.

(1.50–54, 53.16–54.7) more inclement version,[24] as the outcome of the narrative, Viśvāmitra determines to become a Brāhmaṇa. But there are other implications. The all-conquering Kṣatriya who violates the prerogatives of Brāhmaṇas is helpless against degrading foreign invaders (and other peoples) from the northwest (Daradas, Kāmbojas, Pahlavas, Śakas, Yavanas) as well as tribal, southern, and Laṅkan peoples. And indeed, such Mlecchas are created, or can at least be produced, by a Brāhmaṇa's cow to punish the reprobate Kṣatriya king.[25] Vaidya makes two observations about such Mlecchas. Those whom the *Mahābhārata* mentions as fighting on either side of the 'civil war' between the 'pure Aryans and the mixed Aryans' had 'no existence in those days' (Vaidya 1907: 20–21). And, though many of them were probably known in India before the time of Alexander, they reflect the 'end of the epic period' (Vaidya 1907: 26–28) when they would have presumably been 'introduced by Sauti.'

Both Hopkins and Vaidya thus see Alexander's invasion and the rise of the imperial Mauryas as pivotal to the most decisive recasting of the *Mahābhārata*. Each also appoints an Indian ruler to situate the text historically: either Candragupta as its heterodox provoker or Puṣyamitra as its 'Hindu' patron. Hopkins sees this pivotal recasting only as the most massive bulge in 'a text that is no text, enlarged and altered in every recension' (1969a: 400); but Vaidya discerns behind it the unifying motivations of the third of the text's three writing authors. Vaidya deems Sauti's 'poetical embellishments' and contributions to 'moulding a work of such enormous extent into a harmonious and consistent whole' to be estimable (1905: 31–36). But he does not find them commensurate with the splendid plot laying of Vyāsa, of which he says, 'It has often occurred to me that if the story of the Mahābhārata is not a historical one, it must indeed be the production of an imagination which is higher than that of Shakespeare' (Vaidya 1905: 49).

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[24] Kāmadhenu ('Cow of wishes') first obtains Vasiṣṭha's permission and then routs Visvāmitra's hosts by creating dreadful Pahlavas, Śakas, Yavanas, and Kāmbojas from her 'roar' or 'bellow'; more weapon-bearing Pahlavas from her udders; Yavanas from her vulva; Śakas from her anus; and, Mlecchas, Hārītas, and, Kirātas from the pores of her skin. Finally, Vasiṣṭha burns the remaining warriors to ashes with the syllable 'Oṃ.'

[25] Vaidya, however, reads the Vasiṣṭha-Viśvāmitra myth as a 'revolt by the Kshatriyas against the rising dogma' that only Brāhmaṇas could be priests (1907: 56)—a dubious proposition.

The concession is crucial since Vaidya (1905: 59) credits his authors
with the literary skills to imagine complex plot, 'chaste and power-
ful' portrayal of character, and empire itself: 'Even Duryodhana has
a charm and splendour of his own. His unswerving determination,
his ambition which knows no medium between death and the Impe-
rial crown' (51). Indeed, Vaidya's epic poets imagine Hindu empire as
having distinctive features, though not always the same. At 'the begin-
ning of the epic period,' India

> consisted, like Greece, of a number of freedom-loving peoples or clans
> settled in small patches of territory, distinguished by separate names
> either derived from their chief towns or from some distinguished king
> of theirs.... All these various clans in India as in Greece belonged to the
> same race, worshiped the same deities, and spoke dialects of the same
> language. They were with minor differences also one in manners and
> religion and had unrestricted marriage relations with one another. But
> politically they were all independent and almost always at enmity with
> one another and yet they respected one another's independence scru-
> pulously. Although one clan might defeat another and almost crush it,
> it rarely tried to efface it altogether. This state of things continued from
> before the beginning of the epic period down to very nearly its close
> (Vaidya 1907: 180–81).

Thus when Yudhiṣṭhira aspires to obtain empire through his Rājasūya,
he recognizes that there are 'kings in every house' (*Mahābhārata* 2.14.2,
cited in Vaidya 1907: 182). An epic emperor would 'never destroy these
small kingdoms entirely but always contented himself with the receipt
of tribute or mere presents' (Vaidya 1907: 182). The 'various "*digvi-
jaya*s*" [ritualized conquests of the four directions] of Yudhiṣṭhira and
Duryodhana did not result in any extension of their territories' (Vaidya
1907: 183)—as was also the case, according to Vaidya (1907: 9), with
Rāma. 'When a king was conquered he was made to pay tribute; if
slain he was replaced by his own son or other relative' (Vaidya 1907:
245)—as even Rāma does with Rāvaṇa's Rākṣasa brother Vibhīṣaṇa.

Thus the permanence of each state was guaranteed though with
varying fortune. This feeling was probably due to that feeling of broth-
erhood which animated the Aryan peoples, and identity of language and
religion tended to strengthen that feeling, which Vaidya also sees 'oper-
ating' in ancient Greece and modern Christian Europe (1907: 245).

Such patterns persist 'from the Brahmanas down to the Buddhistic
days' (Vaidya 1907: 183) and undergo their great change when 'exten-
sive kingdoms in the east of India like the Magadhas,... with their

overcrowded population of non-Aryan or mixed descent, became more and more despotic' (187). Vaidya finds evidence lacking as to 'how and when this state of things changed' but emphasizes that it is the Buddhist accounts which 'give us an insight into how the kingdom of Magadha began to extend its dominations in the absorption of minor kingdoms' (1907: 189). Considering that these events were 'synchronous with the establishment of the Persian empire' under Cyrus and that Darius then 'reduced a portion of India to the west of the Indus to a Persian Satrapy,' Vaidya finds it 'not at all strange' that the autocratic type of imperium launched by Darius would have 'moulded the growth of empires in India' at Magadha (1907: 189). Vaidya observes that neither epic mentions the new Mauryan capital of Pāṭaliputra; both always give Magadha its earlier capitals of either Rājagṛha or nearby Girivraja. 'The epics do not describe also empires as they came to be' (Vaidya 1907: 190). Thus if Vaidya' s Sauti was writing in the time of Candragupta, he was not only imagining a Vedic imperium of the past in Hindu terms but also, while translating the new Mauryan Machiavellianism of Kauṭalya into Bhīṣma's advice to Yudhiṣṭhira, refusing to imagine the historical reality of the new Mauryan capital. Likewise, the usually 'incompetent' 'last editor' of the *Rāmāyaṇa* probably took his exaggerated descriptions of Ayodhyā from what he 'actually saw of a great city like Pāṭaliputra' (Vaidya 1972: 96; cf. Sircar 1969: 45–61). Alles (1989: 225, 227, 231, 241) also remarks on the absence of such imperial cities as Pāṭaliputra and Kauśāmbī in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, while Hans Bakker (1986) notes how both epics are the first texts to call Sāketa by the name Ayodhyā, the Invincible. The *Mahābhārata*'s treatment of Takṣaśilā would then be an exception, seemingly to assert ancient Hindu empire on the boundaries while denying its erosion at the center.

Translating for the Imperial Invaders

When British and other colonialists constructed a Hinduism to suit their needs, they thus did not entirely invent it on their own. Yet if they reinvented it, they did so by virtually omitting the epics and by reducing the Kṣatriya to the issue of 'ascribed' genealogy, which they could arbitrate with their research, histories, and *darbār*s. The British were motivated to both *dis*invent and *re*invent the Indian national epics in their own image, more or less simultaneously.

Thomas Metcalf provides background to this rhetorical climate: 'The British conceived that India's buildings provided the best, if not the only, book from which long periods of its history could "satisfactorily be read"' (1995: 151, cf. 159). Metcalf also remarks on how the 'Sepoy Mutiny' was 'cast in heroic form to create a "mythic" triumph' and 'monuments associated with the events of 1857 were organized in a sacral way' (1995: 156). A dismissal of the national epics is logical in this context, which partook of the general view that India was a land without a history of its own. Along with genealogies, the British could control museums, monuments, and ethnography as exemplary records of the past. But India's classical epics would elude them. Until very recently, Monier Monier-Williams' *Indian Epic Poetry* (1863) remained the only serious British work concerning the epics, one which quickly yielded to work done by Americans, Dutch, French, Germans, Indians, Russians, Scandinavians, and others.

Monier-Williams ties the 1862 Oxford lecture that forms the basis of his study—delivered, let us note, in the immediate aftermath of 1857—entirely to British imperial interests: 'The Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata, unlike the Iliad and the Odyssey, are closely connected with the present religious faith of millions; and these millions, be it remembered, acknowledge British sway' (1863: iii). 'British India' is now so close by steam and electricity

> that the duty of studying the past history of our Eastern empire, so far as it can be collected from ancient Sanskrit literature, can no longer be evaded by educated men. Hitherto the Indian epics, which, in the absence of all real history, are the only guides to the early condition of our Hindu fellow-subjects, have been sealed books to the majority of Englishmen (Monier-Williams 1863: iv).

One easily appreciates the distinction between history and condition.

We need not detail Monier-Williams' reliance on Orientalist tropes or Homeric and biblical higher criticism. Suffice it to say that the Sanskrit epics, especially the *Mahābhārata*, were 'tediously spun out,' with occasional 'beautiful episodes' (Monier-Williams 1863: iv–v). They contrasted with the Homeric epics by their 'gigantic scale,' 'Oriental luxuriance,' and 'confused congeries of geological strata' (Monier-Williams 1863: 1, 17, 44; see Inden 1990: 85–89). Interesting is Monier-Williams' insistence that Sanskrit epic poetry, like the Greek epics, 'may be called natural and spontaneous as distinguished from artificial' (1863: 1n), by which he means Sanskrit *kāvya* poetry on epic themes. The 'spontaneous production of epic song' about 'stirring incidents of exagger-

ated heroic action' is what 'makes epos the natural expression of early national life' (Monier-Williams 1863: 3). Monier-Williams makes an interesting move from 'nature' to 'nation.' He begins with the assumption that Greeks and Vedic Indians shared with other 'Indo-European races' in 'worshipping the principal powers and energies of nature' (Monier-Williams 1863: 48). Next he states that the 'Aryan family' carried this 'simple religion of nature' with them when they separated, providing them with

> the germ of their subsequent mythological systems. Once settled down in their new resting-places, simple elemental worship no longer satisfied the religious cravings of these giant-races, awakening to a consciousness of nascent national life. A richly peopled mythology arose in India and Greece as naturally as epic poetry itself (Monier-Williams 1863: 48).

Monier-Williams thinks the epic songs were first

> the property of the Kshatriya or fighting caste, whose deeds they celebrated; but the ambitious Brāhmans, who aimed at religious and intellectual supremacy, would soon see the policy of collecting the rude ballads which they could not suppress, and moulding them to their own purposes[—for example, the portrayal of] King Daśaratha at the seat of his empire…surrounded by wise Brāhmans (1863: 10, 10n).

A reinvention of the Kṣatriya is thus accomplished through his appropriation and suppression: 'Those ballads which described too plainly the independence of the military caste…were modified, obscured by allegory, or rendered improbable by monstrous mythological embellish-ments' (Monier-Williams 1863: 10–11).

All this anticipates ideas on oral—instead of written—origins of the Indian epics, and some who advocate oral theory probably inherit these ideas. It also presupposes the categories of natural versus revealed religions: 'Soon the Hindu, like the Greek, unguided by direct revelation, personified, deified, and worshipped not only the powers exhibited by external nature, but all the internal feelings' (Monier-Williams 1863: 48). Thus while the Sanskrit epic poets are 'unrivalled' in expressing 'universal feelings and emotions which belong to human nature in all time and in all places' (Monier-Williams 1863: 58), certain feelings are 'natural' only to Hindus. When the poet takes his account beyond the Pāṇḍavas' triumph—where a European poet would have left it—to a final heavenly journey, he betrays 'a deeper knowledge of human nature, or at least of Hindu nature' (Monier-Williams 1863: 28). And whereas 'to an extent, it is natural to all eastern nations' to seclude women and treat them as inferiors, 'chivalry and reverence for the fair

sex belonged only to European nations of northern origin' (Monier-Williams 1863: 55, 55n).

All this builds to Monier-Williams remarkable conclusion:

> Until Asiatic women, whether Hindu or Muhammadan, are elevated and educated, our efforts to raise Asiatic nations to the level of European will be fruitless. Let us hope that when the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata shall no longer be held as sacred repositories of faith and storehouses of religious tradition, the enlightened Hindu may still learn from these poems to honour the weaker sex; and that Indian women, restored to their ancient liberty and raised to a still higher position by becoming joint-partakers of Christ's religion, may do for our Eastern empire what they have done for Europe—soften, invigorate, and ennoble the character of its people (1863: 59).

After Monier-Williams' publication, British historians like Vincent Smith and Frederick Pargiter would look to the epics only for the extraction and sanction of royal genealogies. No matter that most of this was invented as well; the British were determined to reinvent the historical in it. Generally, British writers who took interest in India's regional martial oral epics rather than in its classical Sanskrit epics had much the same concerns (see Burnell 1894, 1895, 1896; Elliot 1992; Temple 1962; Waterfield and Grierson 1923).

Meanwhile, as the project of periodizing the epics went on apace, many of the ideas that went into it were incorporated into the first English translation of the *Mahābhārata*; translated by Kisari Mohan Ganguli, and published by Pratap Chandra Roy. What is interesting is not these two authors' periodization of the *Mahābhārata* itself but the periodization of their translation of it. J.A.B. van Buitenen discourages non-Sanskritist readers of his own translation from bothering with it at all: 'The English is grating and refractory in the extreme, and does not allow for comfortable reading even to one used to Victorian English' (1973: xxvi). Granted that it 'was by no means a careless job,' only the Sankritist need consider van Buitenen's aside that 'the reader who patiently compares it with the vulgate text…may protest many renderings, but still recognize that the attempt was a scholarly one. I have of course consulted it often' (1973: xxxvii). Those who compare both translations with the Sanskrit texts will, I am afraid, often find that van Buitenen should have consulted it more often. The Ganguli translation still deserves more serious attention than it receives.[26]

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[26] What follows on this project restores my original discussion of it, shortened for its journal publication.

The "Prefaces," "Notices," and "Appeals" in the fascicles of the first edition describe the hardships that Roy undertook to publish not only an English *Mahābhārata*, but three editions of a Bengali translation of it, and Sanskrit editions of the *Mahābhārata*, *Harivaṃśa*, and *Rāmāyaṇa*. Roy was determined to distribute all copies of these books gratis, not only in India but in Europe and America, through his home-publishing venture, the "Datavya Bharata Karyalya."[27] This, he wrote, is "no institution belonging to any private individual but is rather a national concern supported by a nation's patriotism" (1884a: 4). Once his "only daughter had been disposed of in marriage and was happy with her husband possessing a decent independence" (1884a: 7), Roy began his venture with his modest savings as a former rent-collector and bookseller (1884: 1). He supported it with arduous fund-raising tours that undermined his health, and with repeated appeals for support—from European and American scholars, from British government officials in India, and from Indian princes to "the Zemindars and merchant-princes of India, the vast body of my countrymen, and, I am proud to say, my countrywomen" (1884c: 2). Roy assessed the work toward funding as "pre-eminently one which suits a Rajah or a mendicant. I am not a Rajah. I can, however, without shame, betake myself to mendicancy" (1891: 4). This formulation was changed after a donation by the Nizam of Hyderabad: "The Nizam is a Mahomedan prince. Any contribution coming from him in aid of a work like the Mahābhārata could not but indicate His Highness's enlightened sympathy for literature in general, irrespective of the nation or creed which that literature represents" (1893: 6–7). Henceforth, Roy would say, "An enterprise like the one in which I am engaged is suited, by its very nature, to an Emir or a Fakir. I am no Emir. I have, however, that within me in consequence of which I can call myself a *Fakir*, for like a *Fakir* I have renounced many of the vanities of the world, and

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[27] Roy was struck that "[t]he press of England…has been comparatively indifferent" to his project, attributing this to the small number of Sanskritists there (the two he cited, Max Müller and Reinhold Rost, Librarian of the India Office, were apparently Germans; see 1884b, 1–2). In contrast, "As yet, of all countries, however, America—enlightened and liberal and generous America,—with a heart brimful of sympathy for everything that is humanising, has accorded me much encouragement" (1884c, 2). American Sanskritists mentioned include Charles Lanman who visited the Roys with what Mrs. Roy called "his angel of a wife," Maurice Bloomfield, H. Reese of Westminster, Maryland, and W. E. Coleman of San Francisco (1888, 2; 1891, 5, 1993, 1; 1896c, "Post-script," 15–16).

am prepared to beg from door to door for accomplishing the purpose I have in view" (8; cf. 1896c: Post-script, 2).

Roy did not live to see "the dream of [his] life, *viz.*, the completion of the *Mahābhārata* of Krishna-Dvaipāyana Vyasa into English!" (1888: 2). After his death from complications of diabetes on January 11, 1895 at age fifty-three,[28] his second wife Sundarī Bāla Roy, whom he married in 1886 (Lal 1980: 393), remained dedicated to the project after his deathbed appeal. Left only the house and a few volumes of the *Mahābhārata*, and unable as a widow to go on tour, she sought funds by appeals in the final six fascicles, while selling her last jewelry, mounting up debts, and facing homelessness should she be reduced to selling the house that had been home to the entire venture.[29] Whereas Roy took to scolding "Bengal millionaires" who showed indifference to his project (1893: 3), Mrs. Roy named two Rajas who did not fulfill their promises (1896b).

In launching the publication, Roy begins his first Preface by thanking those in Europe who encouraged him, notably Max Müller, who wrote, "I expect the time will come when every educated native will be as proud of his Mahabharata and Ramayana as Germans are of their Nibelunge, and Greeks, even modern Greeks, of their Homer" (1884a: 1). Epics are treated as if by nature they are national epics.[30] Moreover, they link nations with empire. Roy considers it "providential" that England with its dim past and bright present and future has linked with India, implying a contrast with India's epic imperial past and present "dependency." Although there are "lapses" of "repression" by some who are "untrue to the traditions of Empire and the instincts of their own better nature," the "Queen-Empress…enunciates the noblest principles of government, and confesses to her determination of founding her rule upon the love and gratitude of the people" (1884a: 2). Roy's appeal for divine and financial help through the epic-like perils of publishing the forest-book begins, "Next to the slayer of Madhu, on earth there is Her Gracious Majesty the Queen-Empress of India, the incarnate Divinity on earth as my scriptures teach me"

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[28] 1984a, "Notice" of K. M. Ganguli, 1; 1894b, "Notice" of Mrs. Roy, 1.

[29] 1894a, "Appeal"; 1894b, "Notice"; 1896a; 1896b. Roy's widow's "Appeal" dated January 21, 1895 appears in 1894a. Similarly, 1894b contains Roy's own last "Notice" with a picture of him (1–7) and a further "Notice" by Mrs. Roy (1–4).

[30] "The German epic was to be carried along on the campaign against the Ossian-bearing Napoleon" in a "conflict between France and Germany, played out through rival medieval epic poems" (Quint 1993: 356).

(1884c: 1). Near the end of his life, Roy mentions that, "Some years ago I received permission to lay before Her Majesty, for her gracious acceptance, a copy of the English translation" (1893: 5).[31]

In these circumstances, the publication of the *Mahābhārata* in English is undertaken so that, "instead of looking upon the conquered people as…barbarians, those in authority over them" can follow up their "sincere desire to enter into their [subjects'] feelings and understand their aspirations…by a study of their national literature" (1884a: 2). The availability of the Sanskrit epics in translation will thus be a "valuable contribution to the cause of good government" (1884a: 3), just as it has already been "drawn on" by "Aryan poets and prose-writers of succeeding ages…as on a national bank of unlimited resources" (1884a: 3). When pressed by "the orthodox," who viewed "every attempt to translate the Hindu scriptures into a foreign tongue as an act of impiety," Roy reiterated this defense (1891: 6).

For Roy, the *Mahābhārata* is "the grandest epic which the world ever produced" (1889: 1); "the encyclopedia of the heroic age of the Hindus"; "a repertory of innumerable legends more or less based on facts" (1890: 2); "the great Hindu Epic" (1891, 5); and "a monument of ancient Aryan genius" in which "[t]he Rishis always sought to inculcate the awful idea of unending Eternity" (1893: 2–3). Roy hoped that the epic's publication in English would encourage the "patriotic hearts" of his countrymen by deterring them from the "sensational literature of the present day in which, under the pretence of improvement, the plots and situations of fifth-rate French novels are introduced, vitiating the manly Aryan taste." Rather, it should turn

> them to contemplate the purity of Aryan society, the immutable truths of Aryan philosophy, the chivalry of Aryan princes and warriors, the masculine morality that guides the conduct of men even in the most trying situations, etc. (Roy 1884a: 10)

> The age is past when Indian students used to spout Byron over dishes of beef with the glass circling round in quick succession. Under influences more wholesome and due to a variety of reasons, the English-educated native of India has learnt to respect his ancestors. (Roy 1884b: 2)

For Mrs. Roy—well informed of the epic's political and astronomical contents (1896c: "Post-script," 4–5)—completion of her husband's

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[31] Lal (1980: 393) mentions that "in 1889 he was made, by Queen Victoria, a Companion of the Order of the British Empire."

project became "this national enterprise" (1986c: Notice, 1). Her husband's "cause" as a "poor" *Faqueer*—"the cause of the diffusion of Rishi-literature"—had been "the diffusion of the ancient intellectual wealth of India over the whole civilised world" (1896c: "Post-script," 2–3, 11).

Paradoxically, the Sanskrit epics are thus translated not only to serve the national aspirations of Indians, but the British empire in understanding those aspirations. Roy's first Preface closes: "Homer lived as much for Greeks, ancient and modern, as for Englishmen or Frenchmen, Germans or Italians. Valmiki and Vyasa lived as much for Hindus as for every race of men capable of understanding them" (1884a: 5). National and imperial epic opens onto a global civilizing mission.

Yet Rudyard Kipling, writing in 1886, typically belittles the Sanskrit epics in their first English translations[32] and particularly the Ganguli translation of the *Mahābhārata* for 'its monstrous array of nightmare-like incidents,…its records of impossible combats, its lengthy catalogues of female charms, and its nebulous digressions on points of morality' (Pinney 1986: 177). Kipling makes his trumps with typical Orientalist cards: broad hints at an underlying theory that epics begin with historical cores; that they can be riddled with interpolations and fancifully embellished. To Orientalists, he concedes:

> The two national epics have their own special value, as the *Rig Veda* has for students of early forms of religious belief; but the working world has no place for these ponderous records of nothingness. Young India, as we have said, avoids them altogether…; the bare outlines of their stories are known and sung by the village folk of the country-side as love ditties; but as living forces, they are surely dead and their gigantic corpses, like whales stranded by the ebbing tide, are curiosities to be regarded from a distance by the curious, and left alone by those who look for any solid return from laborious reading (Pinney 1986: 177–78).

Although he makes it sound like he has full translations before him, writing by 1886 Kipling could have read no further into the *Mahābhārata* than its fifth book, the *Udyogaparvan*. For that is as far as the Ganguli-Roy translation had proceeded by that point. Ganguli anticipated such reaction in his 'Translator's Preface' of 1884:

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[32] By Ganguli of the *Mahābhārata*, and Ralph Griffith of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Pinney 1986: 177–78).

> In regard to translation from the Sanskrit, nothing is easier than to dish up Hindu ideas so as to make them agreeable to English taste. But the endeavor of the present translator has been to give in the following pages as literal a rendering as possible of the great work of Vyāsa. To the purely English reader there is much in the following pages that will strike as ridiculous (1884a: 11).

Around the same time, Ravi Varma finds the two epics a storehouse of images, using them to enthuse large audiences as poster art in homes, museums, and royal courts across India. According to E.M.J. Venniyoor (1982: 27), Varma invented the saree as the national epic dress for women and at the same time researched and painted the regional outfits of contemporary, especially rural, women, whom Kipling expected to remember the two epics only as 'love ditties.' When the Gāekwāḍ of Baroda commissioned fourteen Varma pictures in 1888, they were to

> convey the drama of the two great texts of the Hindu religion, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*; they should evoke the beatitudes of *Satyam, Sivam, Sundram*, the True, the Good and the Beautiful, and should proclaim to all the world the splendour of India's heritage (Venniyoor 1982: 27).

The seeming allusion to Plato is striking.

ROLE, ROLE MODEL, AND FUNCTION: THE SANSKRIT EPIC WARRIOR IN COMPARISON AND THEORY

Although things are always more complicated on the ground, let us begin at the level of theory. In theory, or more exactly in a theory generated in ancient and classical Sanskrit texts, Hindu society is or should be composed of four 'classes' or *varṇa*s. Brahmans, the priests and literati, are at the top. Kṣatriyas or warriors are second only to them, and have rank over those below them. That would include Vaiśyas, who undertake trades and engage in agriculture, and Śūdras, who are supposed to serve the three Ārya or 'noble' classes above them. This theory slots no place for anyone else: all others would be *avarṇa*, 'unclassified', and are sometimes given that very designation.

The theoretical character of the Indian warrior class, our subject here, is well brought to light in an intriguing remark by the Indian Marxist historian/archaeologist D.D. Kosambi, In a letter to the French anthropologist-historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet, dated 4 July 1964, and quoted by the Delhi historian Romila Thapar (Thapar 1992, 106),[1] Kosambi writes: 'Don't be misled by the Indian *kshatriya* caste, which was more often than not a brahmanical fiction….' I believe we can read Kosambi as telling us, or at least permitting us to understand, that the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* are brahmanical fictions that reinvent the Vedic Kṣatriya both to project an image onto a glorious mythic past of long ago ages, and to provide certain role models for uneasy presents and uncertain futures.

The first part of this chapter will be concerned with ambiguities in the ways the two epics construct such models, particularly with regard to relationships between Kṣatriyas and Brahmans, and in connection with what may be called a theory of Kṣatriya decline. The second will consider ways in which the role of the ever-declining and, necessarily, repeatedly reconstructed Kṣatriya has been reinvented in some specific medieval and recent historical circumstances. I will close with some consideration of the notion of 'role model' as applied to such subjects.

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[1] Thapar's essay on Kosambi in this volume (1992, 89–113) is an appreciation.

Old Kṣatriyas and New in the Sanskrit Epics

The Sanskrit epics' noble heroes and heroines are known to be noble even in their flaws. They can be taken as the role models that the Sanskrit poets bequeath. With this in mind, we can follow literary and media critic Purnima Mankekar's account of a recent debate on Indian national television and the follow-up poll in a 'leading news magazine' that asked 'which of the two better represented "the modern Indian woman",' or 'Indian womanhood': the *Mahābhārata*'s fiery and polyandrous Draupadī with her 'rage' or the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s gentle and monogamous Sītā with her 'resilience.'[2] As Mankekar observes, the debate turned towards an 'Ideal Indian Womanhood' that is, 'constructed in terms of values deemed fundamentally womanly, and essentially Indian: modesty, patience, and, above all, a strong sense of duty towards the family, the community, and the nation.' No surprise here: Sītā wins (Mankekar, 1993, 552–3):[3] 'Draupadi was not considered a role model for Hindu women in the same way Sita was' (Mankekar 1999, 246). Yet these are uneasy conclusions. As Sanskritist Shalini Shah observes, although various: classical 'epic heroines…are seen as the role models for women in this country,…these role models are the products of and [are] fashioned by millennia of patriarchal norms' (Shah, 1995, 2).[4] Noting his use of this same term, 'role model,' we can begin to ask why the Rajasthani folklorist Kamal Kothari argues that classical epic heroes and heroines supply role models for Indian society but heroes and heroines of vernacular regional oral epics do not (1989, 115).

To my mind, one should begin by asking how the Sanskrit epic poets have left the impression that their poems supply society with such positive role models. To answer this, we must consider who the poets were and how they situated their primary heroes and heroines.

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[2] Draupadī, chief heroine of the *Mahābhārata*, is married to its five chief heroes, the Pāṇḍavas. Her rage at being treated abusively by the Pāṇḍavas' cousins, the Kauravas, motivates the plot toward its terrible war. Sītā, chief heroine of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, is the single wife of that epic's main hero, Rāma. Her exemplary resilience is shown when she accompanies Rāma to the forest, withstands the abduction and captivity of the demon Rāvaṇa, and maintains her composure when Rāma submits her not just once but twice to public 'tests' of her chastity.

[3] For fuller treatment, see Mankekar 1999, 165–266.

[4] Shah mentions 'Savitri, Gandhari, etc.' *Cf.* 82 on Draupadī, who hears about Sītā as a 'role model' during her forest exile.

First of all, the two epics were composed by Sanskrit-knowing Brahmans in their aforementioned role as literati. These Brahmans placed the Kṣatriya at the centre of their compositions as heroes and heroines of a past these authors wanted to exalt. They made their Kṣatriya characters into the ancient kings, queens, champions, and villains of a freshly constructed classical world order that was in-all-but-the-name Hindu. As a new genre in India, epic served as a medium in which to coin and amplify such new normative terms as *sanātana dharma* ('the eternal law'), *rājadharma* ('the king's law' or 'king's duties'), *dharmarāja* ('the just or lawful king'), *dharmayuddha* ('just war'), *puruṣārtha* ('the goals/meanings of human life,' central among which is dharma) and *karmayoga* ('the discipline of action'). Through an ingenious weave of narrative and didactic delivery, the poets gave these norms shape and scale by confronting the heroes and heroines with new conceptual distinctions or oppositions. Among these, those with the greatest power and impact included the tension between *pauruṣa* ('manliness' or 'heroism') and *daiva* ('submission to divinely ordained fate'); *pravṛtti* ('orientation toward this world') and *nivṛtti* ('orientation toward liberation'); *śruti* (revelation, Veda 'that which is heard') and *smṛti* (tradition, 'that which is remembered'); *āstikya* ('orthodoxy' or 'those who say "It is"') and *nāstikya* ('heresy' or 'those who say "It isn't"'); and Ārya (the 'noble' as members of the upper three classes) and *mleccha* ('those who speak "*mlecch*"'—i.e., barbarians). If we assign the composition of these epics broadly to the period between the two Buddhist emperors Aśoka and Kaniṣka—that is, from the third century B.C. to the second century A.D.—as current discussions would seem to allow,[5] then this new classical world order simply could not have existed in the poets' historical experience. Yet the epic poets make their heroes and heroines the primary audiences *for*, as well as the secondary exponents *of*, this new classical combination of ideas, norms and values, which they combine with remodelled Vedic ideas about *varṇa* and *āśrama* (class and life stage)—values that the heroes and heroines also take on in the roles they play.

Note, however, that the epic Kṣatriyas are primary audiences but only secondary exponents. The primary exponents in the epics are either

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[5] I argue more narrowly for a span from the mid-second century B.C. to the turn of the millennium, and also (preliminarily) against a later Gupta touch-up, in Hiltebeitel 2001a, 1–31.

Brahmans themselves or those who speak on their behalf. In the first case the heroes and heroines encounter such Brahmans as the putative authors of the epics, Vyāsa and Vālmīki, who pop in and out of their text;[6] or they meet Vedic Brahmans, usually in the forests—this with special frequency in the *Rāmāyaṇa*; or they are visited by 'new' bhakti-oriented Brahmans like Nārada and Mārkaṇḍeya, who make most of their interventions in the *Mahābhārata*.[7] In the second case, they hear such values promoted by divine or Brahmanically inspired figures like Kṛṣṇa and Bhīṣma, or, once educated by Brahmans in the course of the story, they become the exponents of such values themselves, as with Rāma and Yudhiṣṭhira.[8] The epics position such heroes and heroines to learn these values, and then sometimes debate them. Typical are the debates over *pauruṣa* (heroism) versus *daiva* (submission to fate). Junior heroes like Lakṣmaṇa and Bhīma stand for *pauruṣa*, but the exemplars of the highest values of the new Kṣatriya ideal—their older brothers Rāma and Yudhiṣṭhira—subordinate *pauruṣa* to *daiva*. And Arjuna and Karṇa, the two most virile heroes who advocate *pauruṣa* and test it to its limits, make their doing so heroic by realizing that *daiva*, ultimately personified by Kṛṣṇa, sets those limits.[9] As Kṛṣṇa says to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gītā* (11.33), 'Be thou the mere, instrument....'

This 'new Kṣatriya ideal' is constructed over against various intimations within the epics of an alternate 'old Kṣatriya ideal' that the poets deem to be now *passé*, or to have become *en passant* in the course of the stories they tell about it, but which they construct the 'new Kṣatriya' over and against. One way they have done this is through what Sanskritist Robert P. Goldman has called 'a kind of *janapāda* nostalgia'.[10] *Janapāda*, literally 'foothold of the people'[11] is a term used for the old Vedic 'republics', and Goldman's phrase captures a major feature of the epic poets' retrospective mood: a melancholic sentiment

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[6] See Hiltebeitel 2001a, 32–91, 278–322 on Vyāsa; 317–22 on Vālmīki.

[7] Nārada appears at the beginning of the *Rāmāyaṇa* to inspire Vālmīki to compose the poem and then flies off (1.1–1.2.3), and is otherwise barely mentioned (see 2.85.43); Mārkaṇḍeya is not mentioned in the *Rāmāyaṇa* at all. In the *Mahābhārata*, this pair plus Vyāsa are the main intervening Ṛṣis.

[8] This is only to speak generally. There are also distinctions to be made in the ways these two 'kings of *dharma*' do this: Yudhiṣṭhira is more probing, questioning, and anxiety-ridden, while Rāma is always more ready to be convinced.

[9] On Karṇa, see Hiltebeitel forthcoming.

[10] Personal communication, Pondicherry, January 1997.

[11] *Cf.* Thapar 1993, 34: 'where the tribe places its feet.'

for what they recalled—no doubt in part historically—of pre-imperial small Ārya kingdoms, sixteen known by name, that is, a nostalgia for a time when there were direct ties between kings, lands, and peoples. C.V. Vaidya, an early twentieth-century historian and Sanskritist, who seems to be the only scholar to have combined skillful interpretation of the epics with a study of Rajput history (1924, 1926), exemplifies such *janapāda* nostalgia. He argues that the 'Vedic' societies that the epics describe, in what he construes as their 'original' versions, were in essentials like those of medieval Rajputs. Vaidya poignantly notes that the *Mahābhārata* contains long, depressing segments that pre-scribe the new Kṣatriya as an answer to Alexander the Great's invasion of northwest India in 327 B.C., and the subsequent rise of Mauryan imperialism that culminated in the rule of the Buddhist emperor Aśoka from Magadha in north-eastern India and the erasure of the ancient janapādas. Vaidya's feel for what the original epics contained posits an actual 'epic period' that began when 'the Indo-Aryans were…like all young and free peoples energetic and active, truthful and outspoken' (1907, 163 cf. [1905] 1966, 56–7). He finds lesser Rajput moments for epic males, such as when royal lineages are recited at Rāma and Sītā's wedding in 'true Rajput fashion' (1907, 182), or when the Pāṇḍavas demand only five towns to avoid the war ([1906] 1972, 94). But his main Rajput moments come from epic women: 'And what,' he asks, 'should we think when we are told that [Rāma's mother] Kausalyā killed by her own hands the sacrificial horse with three sword strokes…She must have been very strong and a true Rajput lady indeed' ([1906] 1972, 9).[12] Similarly, Draupadī and her mother-in-law Kuntī speak and act 'in true Rajput fashion'—Kuntī, in her 'stirring call to fight' ([1905] 1966, 53), while Draupadī is 'a Rajput woman with a Rajput's bravery and determination illuminating her face' ([1905] 1966, 53). Vaidya projects these anachronistic martial nostalgias mainly on heroines. Yet he alerts us to ways the epic poets did something similar.

Along with nostalgia, however, there is also a bitter edge to epic portrayals of the 'old and new Kṣatriya.' The *Rāmāyaṇa* makes the old order only nascent by focusing on a remote golden age with but one ideal king, only a few other realms in north India (either required for the story by marriages, or founded by Rāma's brothers), and the rest

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[12] Goldman translates, 'Kauśalyā…. with the greatest joy cut [the horse] with three knives' (1984, 151; *cf.* 306).

of South Asia ruled by kings who are monkeys or demons. But the *Mahābhārata* vividly describes the old Kṣatriya order in the throes of its passing. To take one example, James Fitzgerald sees Bhīṣma on his bed of arrows as 'the dying exemplar of the old Kṣatriya order'; a 'constant reminder…of the fratricidal and patricidal war' just finished, who for a 'new age' promulgates 'a new statement of all the facets of dharma [that] has its ultimate source in Kṛṣṇa' (Fitzgerald 1980, 142, 364).[13]

Many epic passages also disparage the new Kṣatriya in the course of explaining his expendability. When Yudhiṣṭhira asks Bhīṣma about the sorrow of the Kṣatriyas who gave up their lives in the epic battle, and this seeming waste of human birth, Bhīṣma answers with the story of a conversation between Vyāsa, the *Mahābhārata's* Brahman author, and some kind of biting worm (*kīṭa*).[14] 'Knowledgeable about the course of every creature and understanding the language of animals' (13.118.8), Vyāsa asks this worm, whom he sees hastily crossing a busy road, why it doesn't prefer to die, being just a worm. The worm explains how each creature finds its own life dear, and says he became a worm because in his last life as a wealthy Śūdra he was, 'unfavourable to Brahmans (*abrahmaṇya*), cruel (*nṛśaṃsa*), stingy, a usurer' (18), envious and vile in countless other acts 'fraught with the quality of cruelty' (25). Yet he honoured his mother; and he once honoured a Brahman: that preserved his memory for him in this current life as a worm. Vyāsa then reveals that he can rescue the worm by the sight of his own person, and tells the worm this means that he can become a Brahman, or any other status he prefers. But just then a chariot comes along, cuts the worm to pieces, and, lo and behold, it turns it into—a Kṣatriya! In gratitude, the new being exults at the difficulties he has overcome to reach this birth: he now recalls that he had been a hedgehog, an iguana, a boar, a deer, a bird, a dog-cooker (outcaste), a Vaiśya, a Śūdra, and now a worm; now, he says, 'having obtained wormhood, I have become a Rājaputra!' (119.11)—that is, a Kṣatriya. Vyāsa, however, now reveals that the worm has become *only* a Kṣatriya because

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[13] On this and other 'old order Kṣatriyas', see Hiltebeitel 2001a, 181–92.

[14] On this story, see also Hiltebeitel 2001a, 197–9. A *kīṭa* also bites or bores into Karṇa's thigh: in one version of the two versions of that story, Indra sends a *kīṭa* that Karṇa allows to do this boring while his preceptor Rāma Jāmadagnya sleeps with his head on Karṇa's lap (8.29.5). Only a Kṣatriya could endure such pain, says Rāma upon waking, seeing through the disguise that Karṇa had hoped would allow him access to Rāma's knowledge of weapons. *Kīṭa* can also be scorpion or a kind of insect.

he has yet to destroy the sins of cruelty he committed as a Śūdra. But Vyāsa holds out the higher hope: 'Here, from the status of a Rājaputra, you will obtain Brahmanhood, having offered up your own breaths for the sake of cows or Brahmans, or on the battlefield' (21). The newly minted Kṣatriya will furthermore enjoy in heaven the imperishable happiness of one who has attained the highest spiritual reality known as *brahman*, showing that one may rise from the lowest animal to the highest human and divine births (22–6). So, concludes Bhīṣma, just as the worm obtained the 'highest eternal *brahman*,' you, Yudhiṣṭhira, should not grieve over the slain Kṣatriyas (120.13–14). This is one of our epic poets' most trenchant dismissals of Kṣatriyas, and one of their clearest indications of the correlation between the law of *karma* and what Arthur Lovejoy has called the great chain of being ([1936] 1960), or in this case, beings. But it only restates a more famous passage of the *Mahābhārata*. In the *Bhagavad. Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa's *karmayoga* teaching of 'disinterested action,' or 'action without the desire for its fruits,' also instructs Arjuna to be a disinterested warrior when it comes to worrying about killing: for in truth, there is only the unaffected Self, which, as Ralph Waldo Emerson caught on in his poem 'Brahma,' is neither the slayer nor the slain.

The epics thus make their reinvention of the Kṣatriya a matter of design. One sees this most clearly in two stories, both well developed in each epic, that tell about two stalwarts of complementary but opposite tendencies who are engendered when a woman and her daughter eat two bowls of porridge destined to make them pregnant, but with each digesting the portion intended for the other. Thus one son, Paraśurāma, is born a Brahman with martial tendencies, and the other, Viśvāmitra, is born a Kṣatriya with eventual inclinations to Brahmanhood (*Mbh* 3.115–16). Each of these mirror stories concerns the mistreatment by Kṣatriyas of a Brahman's cow or calf.

In the first story, Paraśurāma—Rāma Jāmadagnya or Bhārgava Rāma as he is first known in the epics—is the son of the Brahman Jamadagni, and when Jamadagni's cow is stolen by errant Kṣatriyas, who then kill Jamadagni in the aftermath, it provokes Paraśurāma to annihilate the Kṣatriyas twenty-one times over.[15] But to empty the earth of Kṣatriyas twenty-one times means that the job is never complete. In the

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[15] Summarizing *Mbh* 3.116–17 (Kārtavīrya steals the calf); 12.49–50.4 (Kārtavīrya's cruel [*nṛśaṃsāḥ*] sons steal it). See Hiltebeitel 1999a, 458–62.

Rāmāyaṇa when prince Rama meets Paraśurāma, the extermination of the Kṣatriyas is something the latter did 'long ago' (*Rām. 1.*73.20; 74.24–6). Yet the *royal* Rāma, a scion of the solar dynasty and thus a descendant of the Sun god, is a Kṣatriya who is still around. Rāma does not press the matter of his dubious Kṣatriya ancestry. As we shall see in a moment, such probing is left to Yudhiṣṭhira. But Paraśurāma's appearance before Rāma has its own timely message. Paraśurāma appears just after Rāma and Sītā's wedding, and withdraws only after he has learned from seeing Rāma's prowess with the bow that this new Rāma is no *mere* Kṣatriya but Viṣṇu (75.3–17). That he comes just after Rāma and Sītā's wedding, where it now becomes a question of the resurgence of the solar dynasty, the most important Kṣatriya lineage, suggests that had Rāma been just an ordinary Kṣatriya and not an incarnation of Viṣṇu, Paraśurāma was ready to kill him as he had killed his precursors.

   As to the *Mahābhārata*, where Paraśurāma's story recurs constantly, Yudhiṣṭhira, a scion of the lesser lunar dynasty, and thus a descendant of the Moon god, hears the story twice: once in the forest, and the second time after the war from Kṛṣṇa, who tells it to deter Yudhiṣṭhira from disavowing his hard-won kingdom and giving the earth to Brahmans all over again.[16] Once Paraśurāma had exterminated the Kṣatriyas, says Kṛṣṇa (12.49.66–75), Śūdras and Vaiśyas united with Brahman women to produce a kingless condition in which the strong ruled the weak.[17] Unprotected by Kṣatriyas, the goddess Earth entered the netherworld, until the Brahman Kaśyapa bore her on his thigh and listened to her. She told him where she had concealed Kṣatriyas in strange places, and implored him to reinstate them as kings to protect her. Kṣatriyas were raised by cows, the Ocean, apes, and bears. The Ṛṣi Parāśara (Vyāsa's father) nurtured some who were raised by cows in the forest, while the Ṛṣi Gautama helped with others on the bank of the Ganges who were further raised by apes on the Vulture Peak.[18] Of those protected by the Ocean, some northern texts add that they lived among black-smiths, goldsmiths, and such (*vyokāra-hemakārādi*). When the amazed Yudhiṣṭhira, upon hearing this, realizes how the very Kṣatriyas who

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[16] Goldman 1970 discusses contrasts between these two versions.
[17] *Mbh* 12.49.61–2. The Southern Recension adds that Brahmans abandoned their dharma and turned to heresies (*pāṣaṇḍān* 111* line 4 following 49.62).
[18] *Gṛdhrakūṭa* (12.49.73): the peak near Rājagṛha of Buddhist fame. The combination of vulture, monkeys, and bears evokes the 'warriors' who rescued Sītā and Rāma.

fought and died at Kurukṣetra, and the few still extant, had been so regenerated in this only partial way, he responds: 'Ah! This world is rich indeed, and men on earth fortunate, where a feat so righteous as this was performed by a Brahman' (50.3–4). The regeneration of the entire Kṣatriya class is thus accepted by Yudhiṣṭhira as the work of the goddess Earth, with Brahmans as her instruments of both holy terror and miraculous nurture.

As to the second story, in the *Rāmāyaṇa's* version, when the all-conquering king Viśvāmitra carries away the Brahman Vasiṣṭha's cow Kāmadhenu after he has just seen her feed his entire army, Kāmadhenu obtains Vasiṣṭha's permission to retaliate. She routs Viśvāmitra's hosts by creating dreadful anachronistic[19] Pahlavas, Śakas, Yavanas, and Kāmbojas from her 'roar' or 'bellow' (1.54.17; 55.2); more weapon-bearing Pahlavas then come from her udders, Yavanas from her vulva, Śakas from her anus; Mlecchas, Haritas, and Kirātas from the pores of her skin; and finally Vasiṣṭha burns the remaining warriors to ashes with the syllable '*Hum*.'[20] The *Mahābhārata* makes it further clear that the non-Aryans or Mlecchas are defined by what these orifices secrete. The 'cow of plenty' (*kāmadhugdhenu*), here called Nandinī, retaliates by creating Pahlavas from her tail or 'arse' (*pucchāt*), Śabaras and Śakas from her dung, Yavanas from her urine, and Puṇḍras, Kirātas, Siṃhalas, Barbaras, Daradas, and Mlecchas from the foam of her mouth; but here, once the superiority of Brahman forbearance (*kṣama*) is established over Kṣatriya strength (*bala*), Vasiṣṭha confirms the former by letting all Viśvāmitra's 'foreign' soldiers come back to life.[21] As is often the case, the *Rāmāyaṇa's* tale reaches the stricter conclusion.

In brief, when Kṣatriyas default in their duties, violate their dharma, oppose Brahmans, steal cows, and ravage the earth, Brahmans can retaliate. The Paraśurāma and Viśvāmitra cow stories teach comple-mentary lessons. Where 'legitimate' Kṣatriyas attack a Brahman directly after stealing his cow, retaliation is swift, dire and unend-ing in its repercussions. But where a Brahman's cow is under attack yet capable of defending herself, 'prehistoric' barbarian warriors are

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[19] These events are supposed to have taken place in the hoary past, not in any time of contact with the peoples now mentioned.

[20] See *Rām* 1.50–54, and 1.53.16–54.7; also Goldman 1984, 226–7.

[21] *Mbh* 1.165.9–44, especially 34–5—to which the Southern Recension and certain N{*NOT n}orthern texts add (as in the *Rāmāyaṇa*) Yavanas from her womb (*yonideśāt*; 1.1768*). *Kṣama* is a high *Mahābhārata* virtue of Yudhiṣṭhira.

only momentarily created for effect, as a lesson to the errant Indian Kṣatriya. Meanwhile, whether exterminated by Paraśurāma or elevated like Viśvāmitra to the rank of a Brahman,[22] the 'real' Kṣatriya has forever disappeared.

Thus were it not for the seminal intervention by Brahmans with Kṣatriya widows after the extinction of the Kṣatriyas twenty-one times over by Paraśurāma, Kṣatriyas would have been extinct even before the time of prince Rāma, not to mention that of the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas. Put simply, all epic Kṣatriyas descend on their male sides from Brahman ancestors, and are not of paternal descent from either the Sun or Moon, or from the primal Kṣatriya (or more correctly, Rājanya) born from the arms of the cosmic man known as Puruṣa, from whose dismembered body parts come all four *classes* (it does not say *ancestors*) that 'originated' in the taxonomy of *Ṛg Veda* 10.90.12, the caste-'chartering' verse of the highly influential *Puruṣa Sūkta.*

I suggest that the epics' Brahman poets, writing during a period following the rise of the Magadhan metropolitan and imperial state and the repeated incursions of such aggressive Mlecchas as the Greeks and Iranians, considered contemporary Indian Kṣatriyas barely worth the name and, in practical terms, to have been annihilated.[23] The Kṣatriya 'role model' that runs through both epics via their chronology of prior ages thus entails a theory that Kṣatriyas decline, have been effaced, and can be regenerated only by Brahmans, who reserve for themselves the authorship of the texts and the performance of the rituals that make Kṣatriyas truly what they *should* want to be.

If, then, Kosambi's remark helps us to see that the epic Kṣatriya is 'oftener than not a brahmanical fiction,' we may look briefly at some of the uses to which this construct has been put, and consider the conditions under which it has been activated. The topic is vast, and many examples could serve. I will only touch on a few.

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[22] The Kṣatriya Viśvāmitra's elevation to Brahman is, I believe, the sole example in Indian literature of anyone succeeding in such a transformation. See now, however, Brodbeck 2009, 139 and n. 24, correcting this, and citing *Mbh* 9.38.31–33, which mentions three others along with Viśvāmitra.

[23] See Witzel 1997, 305 n. 6, 318; 327 on 'the contempt for the Ikṣvāku as downtrodden Kṣatriya' already in the Brāhmaṇas; 308–21 on the mixed non-orthoprax peoples associated with the Kosalas, Videhas, and Magadhas—the latter earlier shunned by Brahmans. Witzel posits continuous Sanskritization in these lands 'carried out by the well-tested alliance of the Kṣatriyas and Brahmans' (333–4), but the epics' thematization of Kṣatriya discontinuity suggests that continuity is not the whole story.

The Kṣatriya Role Model in Post-Epic Histories

If we turn first to the medieval period (roughly the seventh to the six-teenth centuries A.D.), we come to the problem of the 'real historical origins' of the Rajputs, which, as the historian B.D. Chattopadhyaya puts it, has become a 'red herring...dragged about in historical writings on early medieval and medieval India' (1994, 161). There seem to have been three equally one-sided solutions to this problem:[24] the Rajputs descend directly from Vedic and epic Kṣatriyas; they were originally barbarian invaders slotted into Kṣatriya status; or they were originally Brahmans who became kings and thus Kṣatriyas in troubled times. As is now well known, however, the 'ascribed' rather than 'achieved' side of Rajput culture, especially as it developed in what Dutch historian Dirk H.A. Kolff (1990) calls the 'Rajput great tradition' of Rajasthan, relied upon Brahmans to sanction their Kṣatriya-Rajput ascription by according them Sanskritic descent from the Sun, Moon, or Fire gods. Especially interesting are the so-called Fire-Lineage (or Agnivaṃśa) Rajputs—most prominently, the north Indian Chauhāns, Caulukyas, Paramarās and Pratihāras—who present the most innovative solution to reinventing the Kṣatriya, since neither of the epics ever mentions the Agnivaṃśa. Some, looking behind the myth in which Agnivaṃśa Kṣatriyas are born to defend against demons, explain their creation by a Brahman sage (either Vasiṣṭha or Viśvāmitra) on Mount Abu in Rajasthan as an allegory for the Agnivaṃśa's alleged service against Buddhists or Muslims. Alternately, the *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa's* version of the Hindi martial epic, *Ālhā*, makes the Agnivaṃśa's rise to imperial status under Prithviraj Chauhan the very reason that Kṛṣṇa agrees to support the demon Kali and make it his divine game (*līlā*) to eliminate the Agnivaṃśa and favour the Mleccha (Muslim and eventually Brit-ish) intruders. According to Kṛṣṇa, the Agnivaṃśins are little kings and, as Kṣatriyas, degenerate and undifferentiable from Muslims (see Hiltebeitel 1999a, 253–61, 265–8, 271, 276, 281–3).

Second, also in the medieval period, but from another direction, the emergence of a low status 'achieved,' rather than 'ascribed', mobile and highly disseminated 'little Rajput' culture found common fronts with certain Muslims—particularly Afghans, Isma'ilis, and Sufis. These 'proto-Rajput,' early little tradition Rajput and Rajput-Afghan

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[24] See Hiltebeitel 1999a, 439–45 for fuller discussion.

cultures, which had south Indian counterparts (see Hiltebeitel 1999a, 439–75), also reinvented the Kṣatriya themselves by, among other things, presenting their lifestyles through regional oral versions and sometimes cultic adaptations of the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, and regional oral martial epics in which heroes and heroines reincarnate figures from the orally known classical epics.[25] Here, one could argue, is a place where the construction of the Kṣatriya is by and large *not* a brahmanical fiction, but rather the work of low-caste, and often Dalit or Untouchable, bards. Indeed, such oral epics and their bards often rather trenchantly reinvent the Brahman. In reinventing the Kṣatriya, they also frequently give their heroes Muslim and Dalit sidekicks, and define the culminating moment in the life of virtually every heroine around the Rajput practice of *satī*. Draupadī, for instance, eventually becomes a satī by being reborn as a north Indian Rajput princess in the Hindi folk epic, *Ālhā* (see Hiltebeitel 1999a, 476–511). As the folklorist Kamal Kothari observed, such oral epic heroes and heroines are *not* 'role models' for society at large. We may now say that this is because they are not 'brahmanical fictions'.

   Finally, for more recent times, let me just note two counter-tendencies.[26] One is that of Hindutva ideologues to use the ancient Kṣatriya in general, the epics more particularly, and still more particularly Rāma, to reinvent a heavily Brahmanized Kṣatriya role model for modern times. Here, to run things in sequence, I have in mind Indian national television's use of the epics for 'national integration' in the 1980s and early 90s (Mankekar 1993, 544);[27] BJP leader (and since mid-1998 Home Minister) L.K. Advani's dressing up, a Brahman himself, as Rāma bow-in-hand to ride a chariot to Ayodhya (Rāma's birthplace and the solar dynasty's capital in the *Rāmāyaṇa*) in 1990 to inspire construction there of a temple at Rāma's supposed birthplace, with the destruction of the Babri Masjid on 6 December 1992 as an outcome; the new militant Rāma looking like Śiva against Ayodhya's red doomsday sky on new poster art for the decade; and such claims that have been aired recently (though not only recently) that from Vedic through to epic times, India knew the technology of nuclear

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[25] See Waterfield and Grierson 1923; J. D. Smith 1991; Roghair 1982; and Beck 1992 respectively, and Hiltebeitel 1999, 48–296.

[26] *Cf.* also the debates over the *Rāmāyaṇa* between E. V. Ramasami and Rajago-palachariar, astutely treated in Richman 1995.

[27] *Cf.* Lutgendorf 1990; Mankekar 1999; Rajagopal 2001.

weapons. As Dr Krishna M. Bhatta asked, for instance, in 1998, in his BJP policy notice on National Security and Defence, intending to show 'how Hindutva is our forgotten identity':

> Does [the] BJP believe in Peace? The answer is an emphatic yes. India has always been a proponent for peace. All our ancient shastra[s] start and end with Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti. We do, however, say that we do not believe in peace at any cost. More important to us than peace is dharma and truth. More than likely, a deliberate de-arming occurred in [the] Indian subcontinent after the Mahābhārata when high technology was abandoned. We will fully support and comply with any plans to a nuclear abolition policy (Bhatt 1998, 1).

More wonders of invention. Meanwhile, from the opposite side come the highly polemical warnings of social historian Kancha Ilaiah, a Śūdra in class terms, whose recent book *Why I Am Not a Hindu* argues that Brahmans and merchants are deploying a Hindutva version of what can be called the classical Kṣatriya role model to draw Śūdra landlord populations into the aspiration to become 'neo-Kshatriyas.' In what is perhaps Ilaiah's best-argued chapter, he positions the neo-Kṣatriya on the current power-faultlines between the upper Brahmanized castes and those whom he dubs—using a combination of modern Dalit and ancient Buddhist terms—Dalitbahujans, 'the oppressed many-folk': politically and census-wise, the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes over whom neo-Kṣatriyas seek 'to lord it.' According to Ilaiah, 'The neo-Kshatriyas have become the saviours of Brahminism'; 'they hang between democracy and dictatorship'; 'to acquire...new cultural status,' they bring up '[t]heir male children...in an artificial heritage of martial culture' (1996, 38–9, 52–3).

Once again, Kṣatriyas are a renewable resource, even as fictions. As the *Puruṣa Sūkta* puts it for all times, the Rājanya is arms without a mouth.

Functional Fictions, Role Models, and Role Play for Real

One of my surprises in researching this chapter, which can only be stated tentatively since I have hardly exhausted the literatures, is that in the two disciplines—sociology and psychology—where I expected to find it having some prominence, the concept of role model is only episodically used, rarely indexed, and very minimally theorized. On the contrary, the concept of *role*—beginning with Talcott Parsons' emphasis on 'the role of ideas in social action' (Parsons [1949] 1964, 19–33; 1951, 326–83), and on to professional roles ([1949] 1964, 38),

sex roles (89–103), sex role strain (Ravinder 1987, comparing India and Australia), status roles, multiple roles, role-creating, role-making, role-taking, role-framing, role-interaction, and role-conflict (Parsons [1949] 1964, 244), is frequently used, richly indexed, and heavily theorized.[28] It would seem that while the term 'role model' has had limited use in such areas as gender studies, media criticism (on both, see, e.g., Tuchman 1979), adolescent psychology (e.g., Muess 1996), and the sociology of single-parent families, its greatest currency has been in public and especially media discourses that popularize and oversimplify these two social sciences. Perhaps one could trace the term's media surge in the USA to the mid-1990s when basketball maverick Charles Barkley announced in a tongue-in-cheek Nike commercial, 'I am not a role model.' The public debate soon thereafter raged around Dennis Rodman, Bill Clinton, and Madonna: 'What kind of role model…?' It would seem that the US media has found the question less pressing during a Republican administration. If so, the American sample might suggest that it would be worth investigating how societies (or elements of society, like academics and the media) project and resolve their role model anxieties.

Nonetheless, I am not unhappy at having used the term to describe the Sanskrit epic Kṣatriya. Here I think we can build upon a useful distinction between 'role' and 'role model' that emerges from a prior distinction proposed by the sociologist Robert K. Merton, who, according to *New York Times* reporter Patricia Cohen, 'developed the idea of role models' (Cohen 1998, A19). The distinction is one between 'reference individual' and 'role model.' According to Merton, although these latter two terms are often treated as 'conceptually synonymous,' that treatment:

> obscures a basic difference in the matters to which they respectively refer. The person who identifies himself with a reference individual will seek to approximate the behavior and values of that individual *in his several roles. The concept of role model can be thought of as more restricted in scope, denoting a more limited identification with an individual in only one or a selected few of his roles.* To be sure, a role model may become

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[28] See Outhwaite and Bottomore 1993, 554–6 on 'roles' in twentieth-century social thought, with nothing on 'role model'. Similarly Parsons [1949] 1967 and 1951, especially 201–427; Wallace and Wolff 1986, one of whose co-authors, my colleague Ruth Wallace, indicated her shared sense that the term 'role model' is less academically theorized than its public uses would lead one to expect (personal communication, June 1998).

a reference individual as his multiple roles are adopted for emulation rather than emulation remaining confined to the one role on the basis of which the initial psychological relationship was established…(1957, 303; my italics and underscoring).

Merton observes that 'patterns of social interaction…may set limits upon the sheer possibility of selecting certain persons as reference individuals. If the interaction is segmental and confined to certain role relationships, this alone would allow the emergence only of a role model rather than a more comprehensive reference individual (except in fantasy)' (303). These observations would apply to the way the Kṣatriya is theorized within the limits of caste categories: those who could widen the Kṣatriya 'role model' into a 'reference individual' could only be Kṣatriyas. But if Kṣatriyas were 'oftener than not brahmanical fictions,' what we would expect to find would (in Merton's words) be 'only one or a selected few' Kṣatriya traits that would serve society as Brahman spokespersons sought to define it. And we would also expect a certain amount of legerdemain in determining who could bear these traits legitimately. With vernacular epic heroes and heroines, low-caste upstarts, foreigners, and Brahmans excluded, and with Rajputs a medieval invention, the only real Kṣatriya role models left would have to be both epical and Sanskritic.

Still more usefully, Merton's theorizing about the restrictiveness of the concept 'role model' sets it over and against the more elastic concept of 'role.' One thing that comes across clearly about uses of this more expansive term is that social scientists have done their theorizing across the disciplines by drawing primarily from the domains of literature and drama (Outhwaite and Bottomore 1993, 554). Literature and drama construct roles, characters are given roles, authors frame roles, and role-conflict is certainly one of the things that makes literatures like the Sanskrit epics, *and* dramatizations of them, interesting. Moreover, we should find the notion of role helpful in thinking about the various uses that have been made of the Kṣatriya role: BJP activists are certainly role-creators in inspiring landlords to become neo-Kṣatriyas; such landlords in turn are willing role-takers; and L.K. Advani is certainly role-playing when he dresses up as Rāma. The term 'role' in its elasticity is useful to the human sciences because it allows one to play back and forth between society and the arts. Even if it is playing with fictions, such role-creating and role-playing involves playing interactively with other role-players, usually playing conflictually, and basically playing politics: that is, playing for real.

Here too we should note the arena in which the concept of role was most richly theorized—that is, by Talcott Parsons. Parsons sought to assess 'typical [national] character structure[s]' (Parsons [1949] 1964, 238), most notably those of America, Germany, and Japan, in the context of contributing to American understanding of the latter two countries and their anticipated reconstruction after World War II. This involved assessing the 'structurally important roles' of national institutions, and theorizing 'the problem of institutional change' as it differently affects the status and roles of both groups and individuals (239, 244), Parsons was in favor of using redefined occupational roles to change more deeply rooted family and gender roles (260). And at the heart of his analysis of occupational roles were those centered on the professions and business. Parsons sought to show that although 'the professional type is the institutional framework in which many of our more important social functions are carried on, notably the pursuit of science and liberal learning, and its practical application in medicine, technology, law, and teaching' (48), there is in American society a diminishing difference between the claimed 'disinterestedness' of the professions and the 'self-interest' that governs the world of business (35–6). Parsons seemed to think such a diminishing differential was a good thing not only for America, but for America to export to post-war Germany and Japan (see, e.g. 296–7) to erode the institutionally embedded roles and values typified by long-standing oppositions between Junkers and Bureaucrats, or Samurai and Chonin. Thus for Germany, Parsons concentrated on the role of 'Prussian Junker families' in setting the 'tone' for the officer corps (106), in combining 'a patriarchal type of authoritarianism with a highly developed formal legalism' reinforced by a Kantian sense of 'duty' (109), and in supplying, 'a heroic "ideal" of the fighting man…[that] could be propagandistically contrasted with the money-grubbing capitalist of the "plutocracies"' (122–3). And for Japan, he stressed 'aristocratic classes of the type which idealized the military virtues and a corresponding code of honor…[that] looked with extreme contempt on the merchant and tradesman' (281). Building upon Max Weber's comparativism, Parsons also sought to extend this inquiry to India and China, but only in relation to oppositions between 'professionalism' and 'commercialism' (162) and between ascribed versus achieved status (78). Tellingly, he did not address the profession of the Indian Kṣatriya as a parallel to the German or Japanese warrior.

Such comparisons, however, were more interesting to Parsons' contemporary Georges Dumézil. It was this French comparative mythologist and historian of religions, and the Swedish historian of religions Stig Wikander, who, in 1966, first interested me in India's Sanskrit epics. In 1939, Dumézil had developed his theory that Indo-European societies had carried with them—across Eurasia from India to Iceland—a 'trifunctional ideology' whose traces could be found in Indo-European myths, rituals, legends, laws, philosophies, and social structures. The three functions, in brief, were, from the top down: (1) a sovereign sacerdotal and juridical function; (2) a warrior function; and (3) an economic and fecundating function. By 1947, first Wikander and then Dumézil had discovered that the heroes of the *Mahābhārata*, the five Pāṇḍavas and their wife-in-common, Draupadī, could be interpreted as providing a striking articulation of these three functions (see Dumézil 1948; Wikander 1948): the eldest Pāṇḍava, king Yudhiṣṭhira, has both sacerdotal and juridical traits; the next two brothers, Arjuna and Bhīma, have pronounced warrior characteristics; and the twins and Draupadī have associations, respectively, with pastoralism and the earth's fecundity. We now know that Dumézil's project was not unaffected by the wartime period in which he lived, and it seems as if some of his enterprise was motivated by a wish to contrast German society, which he saw as having truncated its trifunctional ideology by leaving its warrior function unchecked by any superior sacerdotal/juridical function, with other Indo-European societies that, he thought, kept their trifunctional ideology more fully (see Lincoln 1991, 244–58; 1999, 121–40). This included French society which, in his view, had inherited a transformation of the three functions, hierarchically intact, into the medieval three estates and the subordination of kings to the papacy (see Duby 1978). In this context, Dumézil developed the idea that the Indo-European warrior's traditional 'function,' which Germanic traditions had intensified, was to subordinate himself to sacred and juridical authority while defending that authority and protecting the society's economic resources. And he saw the warrior function to be 'split' between a chivalric side exemplified by such heroes as Achilles and Arjuna, and a brutal side exemplified by Heracles and Bhīma—the latter more heightened in Germany than elsewhere. For present purposes, what is important here is to observe that Dumézil's warrior function was pivotal to his trifunctional theory, and that the theory was developed to make comparative points about modern and,

in particular, German society and its uses of unchecked mass-techno-logical warfare. Dumézil of course had no difficulty in seeing the four Indian classes as another modification of the basic three hierarchical and reciprocally ordered functions—this time by an addition at the bottom rather than a subtraction from the top.

Dumézil's theory of 'function' and Parsons's theory of 'role' thus emerge from the same period, and with similar purposes and designs. Indeed, in puzzling through such questions about the social functions and roles of warriors, Parsons is a liberal American counterpart to the royalist Dumézil. It is also worth noting their different debts to Emile Durkheim. But for Parsons, Indian Kṣatriyas had no Indo-European allure; indeed, the role of the Indian Kṣatriya would not have been likely to command his attention in the mid to late 1940s. As political scientists Lloyd and Suzanne Rudolph have argued, the mainly Jain and Vaiśya inspirations for Mohandas K. (Mahatma) Gandhi's non-violent civil disobedience campaigns made the Kṣatriya role superfluous for the achievement of Indian Independence (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967, 155–249), and post-Independence India had not yet begun to reinvent it. However, while it had no prominent Kṣatriyas, India had a long-serviceable Kṣatriya role that, as we have seen, was only waiting to be re-'played' and re-'presented.'

If the concepts of role and function carry a surcharge of political overtones, so all the more does the concept of role model, which is inherently prescriptive. Following Merton, this latter concept invites one to extract from the play of roles to single out one or just a few of an individual's roles for others to model themselves upon. The San-skrit epic poets have indeed bequeathed Kṣatriya role models of this type centered on such monochrome values as Rāma's steadfastness to truth, Sītā's embodiment of pativratā (fidelity to a husband) and Arjuna's exemplification of *karmayoga* (disciplined desireless action). Indeed, the ideal 'disinterestedness' of the Kṣatriya—whether male or female, as seen in these three figures—is precisely the point of such portrayals, which are constructed by the very inscribers and beneficia-ries of this 'professional' Kṣatriya trait. Just think of poor Karṇa, ever ready to give anything to a god, so long as the god disguises himself as a Brahman.[29] The Sanskrit epics carefully contrast such Kṣatriya role

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[29] This happens doubly: not only in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, where Indra disguises himself as a Brahman to trick Karṇa out of his earrings and gold-armoured birthday

models with more ambiguous counterparts, such as Vālin, Sugrīva, and Hanumān; or Draupadī, Bhīma and Yudhiṣṭhira. And, as we have seen, they further define them over and against more generalized foils such as the 'old Kṣatriya.' To again borrow from Kosambi, such Kṣatriya role models are a useful 'Brahmanical fiction'; and where they continue to be used, 'oftener than not' that is what they remain.

In closing, I realize that in showing how Brahmans have 'constructed' the Kṣatriya, I have come close, much too close, to an obvious danger: that of essentializing the Brahman. To that extent, I too have sustained a convenient fiction, and I am cognizant of its dangers. It has, however, been a useful one to make a point. All four of the Hindu *varṇa*s or classes are ascribed; they are not essences. Yet they become virtual essences by the inscribed norms that are endorsed in Sanskrit texts, the epics included. In the Sanskrit epics, at least, the difference between Brahmans and other classes is that, whereas Brahmans ascribed a rich variety of rewarding and often concealed *roles* for themselves, they ascribed *role models* only to Kṣatriyas. There is no sustained treatment of a Brahman role model in the Sanskrit epics,[30] and the lower classes are *nearly* entirely ignored.

In conclusion, I am not sure whether one can *misuse* a role model any more than one can constrain the warrior 'function' by sacred and juridical norms. Yet if pressed for a positive Indian role model that one *might* use, why not, at a time when the Indian Council of Historical Research has (since early June 1998) been reconstituted by the BJP with new members chosen to rewrite Indian history, and in particular the history found in school textbooks, as Hindutva history, why not, I repeat, consider a critical historian/archaeologist like D.D. Kosambi?

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suit, but in Tamil *Mahābhārata*s where, at Karṇa's death, Kṛṣṇa disguises himself as a Brahman to induce Karṇa to give him the very last thing he has: his merits—that is, his assurance of heaven. See Shulman 1985, 389–92; de Bruin 1998, 233–7; 1999, 292–3.

[30] Since the point could be developed, I make it only briefly. Martial Brahmans like Droṇa, Kṛpa, and Paraśurāma are too flawed to be role models. Author Brahmans like Vyāsa and Vālmīki are too remote. Consultant Brahmans like Dhaumya, Vasiṣṭha, and Agastya are too episodic. *Bhakti* Brahmans like Mārkaṇḍeya and Nārada are too limited.

IV. APPARATUS

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INDEX

1. *List of Sanskrit terms and notable words/concepts*

2. *List of authors*