



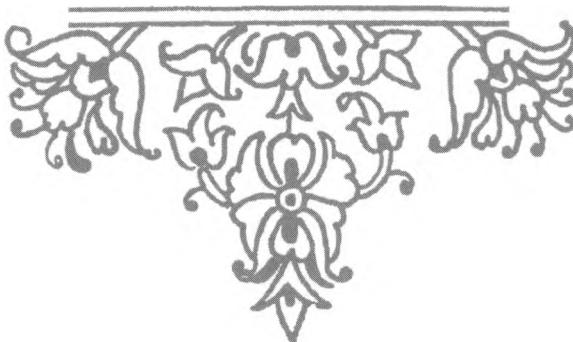
# A Rasa Reader

CLASSICAL INDIAN AESTHETICS

*Translated and edited by*  
SHELDON POLLOCK



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## Introduction

### *An Intellectual History of Rasa*

*kān pr̥cchāmaḥ surāḥ svarge nivasāmo vayam bhuvi/  
kim vā kāvyarasaḥ svādhuḥ kim vā svādhīyasi sudhā//*

The gods live in heaven and we on earth, so whom can we ask  
which is sweeter, the rasa of poetry or the nectar of immortality?

—ANONYMOUS

#### 1. WHAT WAS “AESTHETICS” IN CLASSICAL INDIA?

What exactly we are experiencing when we see a play or read a novel is one of the core questions of the humanities, because that experience is one of the core aspects of what it means to be human. Entering into another world, by some measure an unreal one, and losing ourselves in it completely is an almost everyday occurrence, but one that only gains in mystery because it is quotidian. To watch ourselves watching something unreal, and willingly embracing that real unreality, no matter how sad or terrifying, is to enter into a fascinating hall of mirrors. Making sense of the reflections in this hall is what “aesthetics” in part is concerned to do. Although storytelling in drama or poetry is a universal human practice, few people have meditated as deeply and systematically on the questions it raises as thinkers in India, who over a period of 1,500 years, between the third and the eighteenth centuries, carried on an intense conversation about the emotional world of the story and its complex relationships to the world of the audience.

In gauging the contributions of what, for reasons I will specify momentarily, we may call Indian aesthetics, it would seem prudent to put the empirical horse before the theoretical cart and ask first what the thought world of classical India actually looked like, and only then to see how, if at all, it might align with present-day conceptual categories. The series in which this book appears, however, is intended not

only for specialists but also for generalists and comparativists, who not unreasonably would want to know at the outset something about how their own thought world maps against what they are about to encounter.

To this end, it makes sense to begin by clarifying what we mean by “aesthetics” and asking how it has come to be what it is today. To address the first question, it is less helpful to know what people now abstractly take “aesthetics” to mean than to see what they pragmatically do with it. We can gauge something of this pragmatic understanding by looking at a contemporary overview of the subject, like a recent Oxford anthology.<sup>1</sup> This consists of six sections of readings; the titles of four are: “Why identify anything as art?”; “What do artists do?”; “Can we ever understand an artwork?”; and “How can we evaluate art?” These are all questions no Indian thinkers before modernity, at least none who wrote in Sanskrit, ever systematically raised, not because of their incompetence but because of their different cultural presuppositions and conceptual needs. For one thing, there was no unified sphere with a particular designation we could translate by the English term “art.” There were separate cultural domains of poetry (*kāvya*), drama (*nātya*), music (*sāmgīta*, consisting of vocal and instrumental music and dance), and less carefully thematized practices, with terminology also less settled, including painting (*citra*), sculpture (often *pusta*), architecture (for which there was no common term at all), and the crafts (*kalā*), which could include many of the preceding when that was deemed necessary. In these separate domains there was never any dispute, at least overtly, about what was and was not to be included, though sometimes works passed into and out of a given category, according to historically changing reading or viewing practices. Furthermore, almost everything outside the literary realm, let alone the cultural realm, remained outside classical Indian aesthetic analysis (including nature: though Shiva was a dancer, God in India was generally not an artist). There are exhaustive normative descriptions of painting and music technique, but these comprise no systematic aesthetic reflection. Painting is referred to only once in all our texts, in a celebrated analogy on imitation framed by Shri Shankuka around 850 and repeated down the centuries.<sup>2</sup> Music is mentioned only a handful of times in passing, and although a celebrated musical treatise does frame rasa as its central aesthetic problem, what it offers is standard literary rasa;<sup>3</sup> the question whether music can be narrative or programmatic, or why and how we respond emotionally to it at all—questions that intrigue contemporary aesthetics—was never asked. Indian aesthetic theory was founded upon representation of human emotion in the literary artwork and our capacity not just to find the representation “beautiful” but to *get inside* it.

As for questions of creativity and genius (*pratibhā*), Indian thinkers certainly were interested in them,<sup>4</sup> but they never thought it necessary to develop a robust theory

to account for their nature or impact on the work. Interpretation was never thematized as a discrete problem of knowledge in literary texts. Hermeneutical theory was expanded from scriptural to literary studies beginning in the mid-ninth century, but literary interpretation as such was something to be pragmatically addressed in the course of exegesis. And although larger theses were offered about how meaning is produced, a work's overall meaning was rarely posed as an explicit, let alone as a theoretical, question.<sup>5</sup> Critical judgments were certainly rendered, strengths and weaknesses were recorded, and forms of practical canonization were widespread (in anthologies, praise poems, imitation), but literary evaluation itself was not framed as a philosophical problem. Last, while careful attention was directed to beauty (*saundarya*), especially in literature (which does have a role to play in aesthetic reflection), beauty was typically disaggregated into its constituents—figuration, naturalistic description, verbal texture, modes of meaning production (such as implicature), and emotional register—and never became an object of abstract consideration in and of itself.

In two other sections of the Oxford anthology, however, the Indian and the contemporary Western disciplines overlap: “Why describe anything as aesthetic?” and “Why respond emotionally to art?” Although the second would never have been framed as an option in India, these two questions bring us to the core of the Indian concern with aesthetics, a term we may therefore unhesitatingly adopt despite the fact that no single word in Sanskrit is available to translate it.<sup>6</sup> (Remember that even in English “aesthetics” is not found in the intended sense before the eighteenth century.) What Indian thinkers wanted to figure out above all was what exactly distinguishes an aesthetic from a nonaesthetic object or event, and how that distinction plays out in audience response. But this was something they were able to do only once they had analyzed how emotion was *formally* created—and the analysis they developed provides something as yet unavailable in Western aesthetics: a systematic account of how emotions are represented, a “general inquiry into the character of the emotional structure specific to what we call literature.”<sup>7</sup>

As for the particular history of aesthetics as a discourse in the West, we need only delineate what that means for our understanding of the Indian case and provide a few benchmark questions to bear in mind as we proceed. There is now widespread agreement that the origins of what we recognize as Western aesthetics have something centrally to do with the coming of Western modernity. In the eyes of Max Weber, the leading exegete of that historical rupture, art in premodernity everywhere was completely subordinated to the religious sphere. Only with the growth of the “rationalization” of life that defines modernity, and the associated shrinking, in Weber’s assessment, of religion’s capacity to provide salvation did the aesthetic sphere

for the first time become autonomous, initially as a surrogate for and then as a competitor of religion, with its own value system of taste contending with that of religious morals (a view for which Matthew Arnold was a key representative in England). A more politically textured reading would understand the aesthetic sphere as an ideological form constructed at once in connection with the rise of class society and as a challenge to it, but also deeply shaped by the European experience of colonialism. Hegel's aesthetic theory, for example, emerged not only from the new bourgeoisie's contemplation of its own world but also from its confrontation (represented in Hegel's comparative method) with what was not of its own world.<sup>8</sup>

Aesthetics was famously invented as a European academic discipline by Alexander Baumgarten in 1735, though philosophical aesthetics has its origins a decade earlier in Francis Hutcheson's *An Inquiry Concerning Beauty* (1725). By far the most influential contribution to the field has been Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790). For Kant, "taste is the faculty for judging," and judgments of "taste" determine whether or not something is beautiful and are based on feelings of pleasure. His principal concern is with the subjectivity of such judgments; they have nothing to do with what in his view constitutes real knowledge. The most important modern account of the modern aesthetic revolution, at once intellectual-historical and philosophical, is that of Hans-Georg Gadamer. The rise of what he calls "aesthetic consciousness" in Kant and especially Schleiermacher refers to the devaluation of aesthetic knowledge. True knowledge became exclusively scientific; the hermeneutical "knowledge" rendered by art experience was shunted off to the purely subjective realm and relegated to a place between the skeptic's quotation marks.

Core to the dominant views on the rise of Western aesthetics, then, is a set of shared assumptions: that the creation of a domain of art entirely separate from religion is a phenomenon associated with, even partly defining, modernity; that the rise of the discourse that takes this domain as its object was conditioned in part by modernity's work of "purification," to use Bruno Latour's idiom, and in part by the cultural problems posed by its evil twin, colonialism; that the rise of scientific rationalism was accompanied by a devaluation of what was not science, and that therefore the knowledge, moral and emotional and otherwise, that art offers and aesthetics aims to explain was rendered nonknowledge. This is the horizon of interpretation that modern students by default bring to the study of classical Indian aesthetics and that shapes their understanding. How far Indian thought corroborates these assumptions, or instead explodes them, will emerge from our reconstruction. This raises intellectual-historical problems of its own, as do the many parallels between the Indian and Western traditions—not least, the use of the category "taste" itself, the most literal translation of the word *rasa*.

One of these parallels lies in the overall conceptual configuration of the problem of emotion in literature. Theorization in the West, at least in the modern period, often juxtaposes concerns with the author's emotion in the creation of the literary artwork (as in "expression theory") with the emotion embedded in the text by virtue of its formal properties (as in American New Criticism) and with the reader's emotional engagement with the text (as in some versions of reception theory).<sup>9</sup> A strikingly analogous set of concerns can be found in India, but here the ideas take on the contours of a sharp historical development.

The earliest evidence we have of rasa, or at least a component of the rasa complex, lies in the story of the "first poet" and the creation of poetry; this was followed by a long period of intense analysis of the formal structure of the aesthetic object, beginning with the foundational text of the discourse, the *Treatise on Drama*. The aesthetic revolution in the tenth century brought to the fore the aesthetic subject—the audience and its response—though older conceptions would persist, if sometimes in strikingly new formulations.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. RASA IN THE POET

In the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Valmiki (last centuries B.C.E.), the first work of what would come to be called *kāvya*, or classical Sanskrit literature, the poet recounts how a sage passed on to him a tale about the deeds of the great Prince Rama (who, along with his wife, Sita, would supply the paradigmatic examples of hero and heroine throughout the history of Sanskrit aesthetics). When Valmiki later sees a hunter kill a bird in the act of mating, he experiences a transformative moment of *soka*, grief, and he spontaneously utters a curse in a form of language utterly unfamiliar to him, namely *śloka*, versified poetry. In this story we find the first acknowledgment not only that the specific power of literature lies in the expression of emotion—the phonemic correspondence *soka/śloka* maps an ontological one—but also that the expression of the poet's own emotion constitutes this power.

That "the poetry is in the pity" of the poet was a conception still alive almost a millennium after Valmiki, though now couched in a more theoretically sophisticated idiom. The mid-ninth-century thinker Anandavardhana, when arguing that it is rasa that makes literature literature, explains that it was to demonstrate this fact that "the grief of the first poet . . . was shown to be transformed into verse. For grief is the stable emotion of the tragic rasa."<sup>11</sup> The idea that the literary artwork is an expression of the author's own emotion is summarized in an oft-quoted verse of Ananda's: "If the poet is filled with passion, the whole world of his poem will consist of rasa; if not, it will be completely devoid of it."<sup>12</sup>

This Indian version of the expression theory of literary creation informs some of the earliest systematic thinking about rasa. We find it in the *Treatise on Drama*, in one definition of the all-important term “emotion”: “‘Emotion’ (*bhāva*) is also so called because it serves to ‘bring into being’ (*bhāvayan*) the poet’s inner emotion (*bhāva*), by means of the four registers of acting: verbal, physical, psychophysical, and scenic.”<sup>13</sup> And it reappears in one of the earliest discussions of rasa in the rhetorical tradition. Around the beginning of the eighth century Dandin declares that “Rasa is found in both the language and the subject matter, and insightful people become intoxicated by it like bees by honey”; his tenth-century commentator Ratnashrijnana explains that “by ‘insightful people’ is meant poets who understand rasa. . . . It is they who become intoxicated by a poem filled with rasa”—that is, no doubt, by their own poem.<sup>14</sup>

Yet over time, Indian thinkers would move far away from this view and never really return, for they came to understand that rasa cannot be a response to the real world, the world outside the theater, for there, grief is truly grief. It was precisely the difference between the two experiences that became their preoccupation. The poet would continue to be included, if with ever diminishing frequency, in discussions of who really experiences rasa. In fact, it is surprising to see Bhatta Tota, the teacher of the celebrated Abhinavagupta (c. 1000), still asserting on the threshold of the aesthetic revolution (and in a way irreconcilable with his student’s later views) that “the protagonist, the poet, and the audience . . . all have the same experience,” and even the author of that revolution, Bhatta Nayaka himself, maintaining the position.<sup>15</sup> At the end, however, these references are more commendatory than substantial. The poet’s emotion becomes a vestigial question, found only in a type of literature containing not rasa but only emotion, given that the feelings involved (“desire” for God, for example) are excluded by the canonical definition of rasa and hence can never develop into it. The “predominant element” in such work remains the speaker’s, that is the poet’s, emotion. Elsewhere, what the poet himself felt would become irrelevant to Sanskrit poetry and its theory.

### 3. RASA SEEN, IN THE PLAY

The organized presentation of aesthetics, beyond the desultory remarks of early poets, forms a subordinate component of two closely related bodies of *śāstra*, that is, a body of systematic thought, or theory. One of these, which was both earlier and more consequential for the history of classical aesthetics, is *nātyaśāstra*, the theory of drama. Its origins are unknown, but as a structured form of thought it is unlikely to predate the early centuries C.E. The other is *alaṅkāraśāstra*, poetics or literary the-

ory generally, which arose around the sixth century but gradually appropriated the discourse on aesthetics, especially with the demise of dramaturgical theory after about the thirteenth century (most of the texts here are in fact from works on poetics). A key problem in aesthetic theory was finding ways to connect these two disciplines, which meant extending a system originating in “visual literature,” or drama, to “aural literature,” or narrative poetry.

The oldest extant text on dramaturgy in India is itself titled *Nātyaśāstra*, the *Treatise on Drama*, and is ascribed to the sage Bharata. The original composition (early centuries C.E.) was revised at some point, most probably in ninth-century Kashmir, where we observe a new and intense commentarial interest in the work. The *Treatise* is a comprehensive account of everything from the ritual preliminaries of a theatrical performance to the various types of acting (language, gestures, facial expressions, costume and makeup) to music, dance, and stage design, clearly addressed in the first instance to those who create and perform drama. Chapter 6 is the closest thing we have to a foundational text of the discipline of aesthetics, where the celebrated “aphorism on rasa” is found: “Rasa arises from the conjunction of factors, reactions, and transitory emotions.” Explaining this compact statement remained for a full millennium and a half what it meant to explain aesthetic experience.<sup>16</sup>

It is in keeping with its purpose and readership that the *Treatise* should be concerned with rasa as something generated by the formal features of the drama. The analytical dissection of objects in the world that present themselves to us ready-made is at the very heart of the Sanskrit intellectual tradition, most prominently on display in the work of the Sanskrit grammarians. One of the aims of the *Treatise* is accordingly to break down the phenomenological unity of the drama into its constituent parts. These include the “leading male character” and “leading female character,” the bases of the emotional structure of the play: depending on which aspect of this structure is emphasized in the story, the man can be represented as the “foundational factor” of sexual desire, say, for the woman, or (more frequently) she the foundational factor for him. Other beings (or things) function as the foundation for other emotions, but the set of emotions available for representation is finite; there are eight and eight only, the dominant or basic emotions. The characters move through different scenic contexts that stimulate their desire (moonlit nights, for example, or pleasure gardens), and can therefore be identified as “stimulant factors.” No one experiences a basic emotion pure and unmixed, but rather conjoined with other feelings of a more ephemeral nature—the “transitory emotions,” longing, disquiet, or despair, for example, in the case of sexual desire. These, which number exactly thirty-three, are more complex than the translation “emotion” might suggest, since they include physical events such as torpor, sickness, possession, and

dying, and traits such as sagacity that we commonly understand as inhering in a person in a stable way. Such emotions are interior phenomena, unknowable to others except through the physical “reactions” with which they are invariably connected: seductive glances, for example, in the case of desire (physical reactions constitute an open category, and therefore are not numbered and listed). Finer distinctions can be introduced in these physical reactions by identifying those where the psychological dimension (*sattva*) is more prominent: the perspiring, horripilation, and pallor that occur in connection with desire are different from those that have purely material causes (heat, cold, illness), and may therefore be classed as “psychophysical responses” (*sāttvikabhāvas*), eight of which are identified.<sup>17</sup>

From such an analytical perspective the play looks like a jumble of disconnected components, but the very performative—and almost alchemical—process that characterizes drama and that forms the subject matter of the *Treatise* subordinates and homogenizes them. They are ultimately combined into a whole, where each component is at once preserved and subsumed, that constitutes the unified emotional core of a given scene and of the play as a whole. This core is its rasa, or “taste,” which may be likened to the flavor of a drink of multiple ingredients, complex but unified.

Many readers new to the analysis of rasa—and some in the tradition itself—react unfavorably not only to its apparent numerological obsession, its mania for counting and listing, but also to the very supposition that emotional phenomena can be listed and counted. Yet making sense of emotion in literature is partly about making sense of emotion as such, and thus defining and delimiting it. This is all the more the case for authors and actors, who are concerned with *making emotion*, not just making sense of it. Every tradition of inquiry into the emotions, ancient Greek or imperial Chinese or early or late-modern European, has sought to define and list them, especially those held to be basic.<sup>18</sup> If we think carefully about the list of eight in the *Treatise*—desire, amusement, grief, anger, determination, fear, revulsion, and amazement—we will recognize that it comprises only those that can actually be communicated in performance. For “literature meant to be seen,” one descriptor coined early on and perhaps in the *Treatise* itself for distinguishing drama from other types of belles lettres, emotion that can be seen was naturally counted as basic.<sup>19</sup> Some scholars who have studied the question of emotion and physical expression, like the philosopher William James, have found a very close, even defining, connection between them: “A woman is sad,” he wrote somewhat counterintuitively, “because she weeps.”<sup>20</sup> But others have held, more persuasively and more in harmony with the Indian view, that there are invisible emotions, such as motherly love. As Darwin described it, “No emotion is stronger than maternal love, but a mother may feel deepest love for her helpless infant, and yet not show it by any outward sign.”<sup>21</sup> Such

emotions could never be rasa—until such time as the boundaries of “literature that can be seen” would no longer define what rasa could in fact be.

One of the most important and fertile yet intractable questions for the entire subsequent aesthetic tradition is what Bharata thought rasa is—or in the terms that would later be used, where it resides and who experiences it. Given that the fundamental concern of the *Treatise* is performance, and that, as a result, its analytical concern is the formal features of drama, it is understandable that Bharata should consistently discuss rasa as something located in the performative event, in the actors and the characters they represent (as also, as we have seen, in the heart of the playwright). In the *Treatise*, as one scholar has observed, the words *rasa* and *bhāva* (emotion) “invariably” refer to the activity of the artist and not the spectator, “the aesthetic situation, the art object outside,” not any subjective state of reception.<sup>22</sup> Both the *Treatise* taken as a whole and its earliest interpretations corroborate this judgment. The text’s overriding concern and its typical descriptions show that for Bharata, rasa was an emotional state in the character that “arises” when the various formal components of the drama enumerated are successfully “conjoined” in performance. And this assessment is exactly what is presupposed by the contentious course—whose contentions would otherwise make no sense—taken by the entire later history of aesthetics.

There is more to the organizing metaphor of “taste” than the combination of diverse ingredients into a unity. A thing can certainly be said have a taste in itself, but the very idea of taste also of course presupposes a taster. The text itself unpacks the metaphor in a prose passage (most of the work is in verse): “Just as discerning people relish tastes . . . discerning viewers relish the stable emotions . . . and they feel joy.”<sup>23</sup> We do not know whether the passage is original to the unreconstructed, pre-Kashmirian *Treatise* (aspects of its phraseology suggest it is not), but even so, it does not cloud the primary focus of the work, the “art object” of the drama itself rather than the “subjective state” of the viewer. It would be some six centuries before the formal analysis of rasa would give way to the phenomenology of its reception.

#### 4. RASA HEARD, IN THE POEM

What happens when a theory developed for drama, for “literature that is seen,” is appropriated for poetry, “literature that is heard”—read out before an audience but certainly also read privately? The fact that such an appropriation took place in classical India is transparent in the historical record, but Indian thinkers themselves were also fully aware of it. “Generally speaking,” wrote one poetician at a time when the extension was already well under way, “the nature of rasa has been discussed by

Bharata and others in reference to drama. I shall examine it here, according to my own lights, in reference to poetry.”<sup>24</sup> The consequences of this far-reaching expansion of rasa theory can be charted principally in three domains: the discursive, where a dramaturgical concept was assimilated to a new knowledge structure, the theory of rhetoric, to which it was alien; the conceptual, where the specific nature of the art form—narrative, not performative—required a new linguistic analysis of rasa; and the categorical, for the defining condition of rasa as something actually visible on the stage no longer constrained the understanding of what emotions could count as a rasa. In all three domains, however, the discourse on rasa remained formal, and attention was still squarely focused on the text.

#### 4.1 As Figure

The theoretical analysis of poetry, which, as noted, came into being much later than dramaturgy, centers on its figurative nature. For the early theorists, poetry was above all language usage marked by “indirection,” that is, by figures of sense such as metaphor or metonymy. Literary theory, hence, was predominantly a theory of “ornaments,” rhetoric, or figures (*alaikārāśāstra*; the term itself is late); other early concerns, with language “qualities” (such as phonemic texture), for example, or regional styles, would eventually fade. The question itself, why it was felt necessary to assimilate a dramatic theory of aesthetic emotion into such a poetics, was never raised. Perhaps we need look for an explanation no further than the growing intellectual dominance of the idea itself, as embodied above all in the maturation of Sanskrit drama (the works of Kalidasa, late fourth century, are exemplary). At all events, by the ninth century thinkers like Rudrata were insisting that writers “take all possible care to endow a literary text,” that is, a poem, “with rasas,” for people recoil from literature without rasa—the “juicy” parts of the text, after all—as they recoil from a dry moral treatise.<sup>25</sup> The only way to effect this assimilation, given rhetoric’s discursive constraints, was to think of aesthetic emotion as one more type of figure, and this was the course followed for the first several centuries.

In the simplest terms, the new “emotion tropes,” as we might name them, all represent expressions of heightened feeling: where a given emotion clearly manifests itself; where a warmly felt compliment is conveyed; where a character’s arrogance or vehemence is expressed.<sup>26</sup> While not embodying the indirection that defines other figures, these remain specialized uses of language and hence may be conceived of as “ornaments” and thus objects suited to a theory of ornamentation. For the early authors (of whom only the works of Bhamaha, mid-seventh century, and Dandin, early eighth century, survive), rasa was clearly subordinate to and therefore easily sub-

sumed under the larger discourse on figures; it did not yet constitute the heart of literariness.

The last formulation of the rhetorical analysis of aesthetic emotion, and now a somewhat dissonant one, is marked by the work of Udbhata (c. 800). On the one hand, as we might expect from the first known commentator on the *Treatise on Drama*, Udbhata radically redefines the emotion tropes to approximate the full rasa typology. What for earlier writers was the “expression of heightened emotion” becomes in Udbhata the “full realization” of rasa with the complete panoply of aesthetic elements; the “emotional compliment” now becomes the “intimation” of an emotion; the “prideful expression” becomes the “semblance of rasa,” defined as feeling marked by social impropriety. And along with these redefinitions, a fourth figure is added, the quiescence of an existing rasa.<sup>27</sup> At the same time Udbhata lists the components conducive to the full creation of rasa: a stable emotion, transitory emotions, foundational and stimulant factors, reactions, and, controversially, use of the rasa’s “proper term.”<sup>28</sup> In all these cases the conception of rasa remains precisely what it was in the past: a phenomenon immanent in the text, a formal feature related to the characters in the narrative.

However, the internal strain in the system has become apparent: despite his effort to approximate the dramaturgical model, Udbhata continues to categorize all these as figures of speech, and, like Bhamaha and Dandin, to group them with such tropes as “disingenuous expression” and the “description of providential help.” By the end of the ninth century, Udbhata’s commentator Pratiharenduraja was confessing how markedly the conceptual terrain had shifted from the time of his author: “Whether the rasas and the emotions, given that they are the source of the highest literary beauty, are ‘ornaments’ of literature or its very life force will not be a subject for consideration here lest it unduly lengthen the book.”<sup>29</sup> The commentator’s question would be answered almost immediately.

#### 4.2 As Implicature

The primacy of rasa in literature and the difficulty of containing it within the conceptual framework of figures was first recognized by Rudrata sometime in the early ninth century. But it was Anandavardhana a generation or two later who made rasa the central organizing concept of literary analysis in his *Light on Implicature*. Adopting an idea from Mimamsa, scriptural hermeneutics or the “science of sentence meaning,” foundational to the great transformation of rasa in the following generation, Ananda reasoned that, just like sentences, literary texts were “teleological,” defined by having a single end or meaning, which in the case of the literary text he

identified as its rasa, or emotional core.<sup>30</sup> The idea that rasa, thus transformed into the ultimate goal of literature, could be subsumed under the logic of tropology and function as a figure—something that ornaments something else of greater significance in the economy of the poem, the way a metaphor ornaments the message—ceased to make sense for Ananda. Or more precisely, it made sense only according to the relationship just mentioned for metaphor. Thus, where the dominant element in the poem can be clearly seen to lie in its narrative content, such as the grandeur of God or flattery of a king, any emotional expression such as the tragic or erotic would have to be ranked as subordinate. Some thinkers, like Kuntaka in the century after Ananda, would insist that even in such poems as prayers to gods or encomia to kings the rasa remained dominant, “the thing to be ornamented”—“There is no separate thing to be apprehended beyond the mental state itself that constitutes the narrative content,” he argues passionately—and hence could never itself constitute an ornament.<sup>31</sup> For still others, by a tendency toward preservation widespread in Indian intellectual history, the notion that rasas are indeed figures of speech would survive into the thirteenth century and beyond.<sup>32</sup>

Anandavardhana's liberation of the rasa of poetry from the prison house of rhetoric, however, is not what earned him his important place in the intellectual history of aesthetics. His most historically consequential idea concerned the communicative medium of rasa in a world purely textual and no longer performative. How, he asked—or at least this is the question buried below the surface of his answer—can rasa be made known when there is nothing to see, when it is the rasa of “literature that is heard”?

Here again the central concern remains a formal, textual, and more specifically a linguistic process. Surprisingly, Ananda never defines rasa, just as he never discusses its reception (the Sanskrit word for “audience,” *sāmājika*, key to so much later discussion, is absent from his treatise). He is concerned exclusively with poetic expression. Just as in much poetry (especially the early Prakrit tradition that first suggested the idea to Ananda), the narrative element that has overriding importance is the one that is *meant* without being directly *expressed*,<sup>33</sup> so rasa, Ananda argues, can never be a matter of direct denotation. Explaining how something intended but unspoken could be communicated, whether it is an emotional or narrative or even rhetorical element, and especially the first of those in a nonperformative literary environment, required hypothesizing a new linguistic modality. This Ananda named *dhvani*, “implicature,” and through this, rasa (and the rest of the unsaid) is “manifested” the way an object in a dark room is manifested by a lamp.<sup>34</sup> The vast taxonomic elaboration of implicature that Ananda developed can be divided into two main types: “where the literal meaning is not intended at all, and where it is in-

tended but subordinated to some other meaning.” The implicature of rasa occupies a special conceptual niche: it is the only type in the second category where the succession of meanings, from literal to intended—that is, from the disaggregated aesthetic elements to the unified emotional “meaning” produced by them and viewed as a totality—is not registered by the reader but instead arises with apparent (but only apparent) immediacy.<sup>35</sup>

The claim that normal linguistic processes failed to explain the formal production of rasa and a new one had to be postulated would be hotly contested in the century after Ananda, most notably by Bhatta Nayaka (c. 900), who sought to completely overturn the notion of “manifestation” by rethinking the nature of rasa itself—a venture unimaginable, it would seem, to Ananda. Others, like Dhanika (c. 975) in his only fragmentarily preserved *Analysis of Literature*, insisted that the older doctrine of sentence intentionality (*tātparya*) was adequate, or, like Mahima Bhatta (c. 1000), reduced implicature to logical inference.<sup>36</sup> The prehistory of Ananda’s theory is equally important. Udbhata had claimed that the “proper term” for a rasa—“the actual lexeme, ‘desire,’ for example” (as his commentator explains)—is as essential a factor in its creation as the stable emotion and other “aesthetic elements.” This “gives us to understand the presence of the emotion because it refers to it.”<sup>37</sup> The point seems natural enough, indeed inevitable: is it possible to express passion without using the word “passion”? In a poem, unlike a drama, emotions cannot be shown but have to be told—but how can you tell without naming? And in fact early writers, such as Bhavabhuti (c. 800), seem to bend over backward to meet the requirement enunciated by (though not necessarily originating with) Udbhata.<sup>38</sup> But some before Ananda contested the idea, and others after him saw it as a literary flaw: if rasa can only be implied, then directly naming it was automatically a defect. As a late writer put it, “The allure of things that should be covered, like a woman’s breasts, is diminished when they are openly shown; so too are transitory emotions expressed by their own words when they should be indicated by physical reactions and the like.”<sup>39</sup> Shri Shankuka’s critique a few generations before Ananda was based on a powerful and convincing distinction he was the first to draw, between mere referential language and the expressive language required for rasa, while Kuntaka’s response—long after the transition of rasa from dramatic to poetic theory was made, and its original problems were no longer thinkable—was simply ridicule.<sup>40</sup>

If Ananda turned this problem into a cornerstone of his theory,<sup>41</sup> his commentator Abhinavagupta reflected more insightfully on the matter, and, surprisingly, reasserted something of the validity of Udbhata’s view. “It is essential,” he says (not in his commentary on Ananda, understandably, but in *The New Dramatic Art*) for words such as those for the transitory emotions to be “expressive of rasa,” because if it were

not possible to use the actual words for transitory emotions, reactions, and the like, they could never be communicated; it would be “virtually impossible to comprehend them,” and the words themselves would have no signification at all.<sup>42</sup> However interesting, even profound in its own way, this dispute may be and however complicated its history, the key point has again to do with the extension of the rasa template from play to poem. Udbhata’s position becomes less controversial when viewed within the problematic of the *textual* constitution of aesthetic emotion, and in the historical context of trying to solve the problem of producing rasa not in performance, where it (or rather, its signs) can actually be seen, but in narrative, where it can only be imagined when “heard.”

#### 4.3 New Categories

Indian thinkers would puzzle over the relationship between drama and poetry for centuries. Around 950, Abhinavagupta’s teacher Bhatta Tota argued that “Rasa exists only in drama, and in poetry only to the degree that it mimics drama”; it “comes into being,” as Abhinava paraphrased, “only when a state of awareness simulating perception comes into being.” A little later Bhoja asserted, contrarily, the primacy of poets over actors and poetry over drama, on the grounds that

A subject does not expand the heart / so powerfully when we see it portrayed  
as when it flashes forth from the words / of great poets declaimed with art.<sup>43</sup>

Or, as an early thirteenth-century scholar put it, the superiority of poetic language to dramatic acting lies in “the range of its narrative power.”<sup>44</sup> Yet, if poetry is comparable to drama in the deep visuality it can produce through that power, it offers in the end a radically different aesthetic experience.

As a consequence, the extension of the theory of aesthetic emotion from drama to poetry entailed confronting the major challenges in the discursive and conceptual domains we have reviewed: the topological assessment of rasa in early rhetoric texts (since there was no other way to assimilate it to the discourse), and the semantic rethinking felt to be necessary by Anandavardhana (since there was no other way to make sense of its purely verbal mode of representation). It remains to explore the third domain of impact: the categorization of rasa. Once visibility had ceased to limit the understanding of what emotions could count as a rasa, a Pandora’s box was opened. It was no longer a question of being able to tell simply by showing; now one could show by telling (or “implying”), and the palette of rasas could be increased theoretically to the very limits of expressive language and psychological

complexity. Eventually, as the extension of rasa theory to poetics had become naturalized and its origins in dramaturgy ceased to provide justification for any limits, Indian thinkers began to react as unfavorably as their modern counterparts to the closed list of emotions (dramaturgical theorists, however, such as Dhanamjaya and Dhanika, still resisted).<sup>45</sup> “The conventional wisdom that the term rasa refers only to the heroic, the fantastic, and the remaining six,” says Bhoja at the start of his *Light on Passion*, is mere “superstition”: “our intention in this work is to put it to rest.”<sup>46</sup> He accordingly adds a wide range of new rasas, including the vainglorious, the noble, and motherly love—this last being the most telling, since it explains all the others given its inherent lack (as Darwin argued) of visual expressibility. No longer limited by physical performability, the category of rasa was now open, and would be expanded over the centuries, sometimes—as in the case of the “devotional” rasa—in the face of intense scholarly opposition.<sup>47</sup> The dispute over the peaceful rasa, the emotion of emotionlessness, speaks not only to the difficult extension from performance, where it could not be represented, to narrative, where it could, but also to the movement from formalism, where it could not be embodied, to reception, where it could be felt.<sup>48</sup> And such rethinking was not just about classification. The expansion of rasas in narrative poetry and fiction reflects an expansion of the emotional imagination of writers as they explored new areas of human feeling.<sup>49</sup>

In all this intellectual ferment sparked by moving from stage to page, rasa remained what it was from the start, a phenomenon of the text, a formal feature pertaining to the characters, just as earlier it had been analyzed as a phenomenon of the performance, whether pertaining to the actor or to the character with which the actor identifies. That rasa was conceived of as a textual object, the stable emotion of the character when “strengthened” or “enhanced” by the aesthetic elements, was explicitly acknowledged by Abhinavagupta as “the view of the most ancient authorities” such as Dandin three centuries earlier: it is “the stable emotion alone”—the stable emotion of the character—“that, once intensified by the causes, reactions, and the rest, becomes rasa.”<sup>50</sup> And this is precisely the view of our oldest preserved commentator on the *Treatise on Drama*, Bhatta Lollata, according to whom “rasa in the primary sense of the term exists in the character.”<sup>51</sup>

Early scholars wanted to understand how rasa “arises” (Bharata’s word) in the character, in other words, how the elements of the artwork formally combine to create what the American New Critics would call a “formula of emotion.”<sup>52</sup> When they raised epistemological questions—do we “infer” rasa, for example; is it something “manifested” to us?—the object of analytical primacy always remained the emotion of the character, how it is “strengthened” (Bhatta Lollata) or attains “enhancement”

(Anandavardhana).<sup>53</sup> This was also the concern of the poets themselves: when Bana (c. 650) exclaims how hard it is to produce a beautiful poem and make “its rasa clear,” he is referring to emotions in the text, not its impact on the reader.<sup>54</sup>

This view would be maintained in some quarters up to the time of Bhoja, who in this regard appears as its last great exponent. As the selections here make clear (and his commentator corroborates), Bhoja, like all the earlier thinkers, thought of rasa first and foremost as something in the character.<sup>55</sup> The later steps in the aesthetic process—where poetic language communicates rasa to the reader, who can be said to experience it—are only implicit, never actually discussed. Bhatta Nayaka of Kashmir was the first to turn his attention principally to those later steps, which prompted him to rethink both the ontology and the epistemology of rasa—the question of how and where rasa exists always being related to how and where rasa is made known—and thereby to spark a true Copernican revolution in Indian aesthetics.

## 5. RASA IN THE READER

Bhatta Nayaka’s transformation of rasa theory seems to owe something to his special combination of intellectual gifts. He was celebrated as both a scholar of scriptural hermeneutics and a littérateur, a man “at once learned in the four Vedas and himself a veritable temple for poets,” according to a medieval chronicle that places him around 900, a generation after Anandavardhana, whose theory of “manifestation” it was part of his goal to refute. The claims of hermeneutics as a broad heuristic were being ever more widely asserted during this period; literary studies, as Ananda shows, and jurisprudence in particular were much influenced. But Bhatta Nayaka’s hermeneutic approach to aesthetics lay not just in general analogies, like Ananda’s teleological comparison of sentences and literary works. It lay in full-scale homologies: between the literary text and the scriptural text, the reader and the worshiper, and aesthetic pleasure and spiritual beatitude. Aesthetics itself became a form of hermeneutics, not only in the traditional Indian sense of the term, insofar as the same interpretive method could be applied to it, but in our contemporary philosophical sense, insofar as the subjectivity of the reader became the central concern.

The most grievous loss to Indian aesthetics is Bhatta Nayaka’s masterpiece, the *Mirror of the Heart*. From the extant fragments and the detailed exposition provided by the late tenth-century scholars Dhananjaya and Dhanika, however, we can get a reasonably good sense of his thought. The aim of his critique of traditional aesthetics was to redirect attention away from the formal process by which emotion is

engendered in and made accessible through the literary work, toward the reader's own experience of this emotion: away, that is, from the response to form and toward the form of response. And to make better sense of what actually occurs in the experience of response, Mimamsa theory proved especially revelatory.

Bhatta Nayaka's reconstruction was predicated upon a critique of all earlier assessments of rasa, on two scores: its ontology (how it exists, whether in the character, the actor, or the poet) and its epistemology (how it comes to be known, whether through perception, inference, or "manifestation"). Rasa now refers to an actual experience and hence cannot belong to a character like Rama, who is dead and gone; if it were something truly present in the character who appears before the audience members, they would in effect be observing someone's private life, and hence feel such entirely nonaesthetic emotions as embarrassment; in any case, the whole purpose of literature is enjoyment of rasa, and so it can only belong to the viewing or reading subject.

If Bhatta Nayaka's critique sounds more stipulative than analytical, that is no doubt a consequence of our sources. Three points come through clearly, however: the positions on rasa he was refuting were real (you do not contest ideas no one holds); they were the sole positions on offer; and his refutation of them was profound. For the reconstructive part of his project it was obviously crucial to understand how a text can actually produce a response in a reader. The preeminent method available for this was Mimamsa, and Bhatta Nayaka's genius lay in understanding how precisely to explain literary textuality by the procedures Mimamsa had perfected for scripture, and above all, the incitement to action that textuality—rather mysteriously, if we pause to think about it—can summon forth.

To put his complicated argument in simple terms, we can imagine Bhatta Nayaka starting with the basic questions his two disciplines would have forced upon him. The Veda is concerned, axiomatically for Mimamsa, exclusively with commanding religious action (which in this thought world meant sacrificial offerings), but how does the Veda actually prompt a person to act? At the same time the Veda is replete with narrative passages that seem to have nothing to do with commandments as such but merely describe meritorious ritual acts of other people at other times and places: "Now, Indrota Daivapa Shaunaka once performed this sacrifice for Janamejaya Parikshita," runs a typical instance, "and by performing it he extinguished all evildoing."<sup>56</sup> How do such narrative texts relate to the principal deontic thrust of Vedic commandments, such as "One who desires heaven should sacrifice"? And what can any of this tell us about literary texts in general—which qua texts should be amenable to Mimamsa's hermeneutic—and specifically about how and why readers here and now are able to experience a literary narrative that always concerns

other people at other times and places? Is there some force in the literary text prompting the reader to respond that can be compared to, or elucidated by, the force in scriptural commandment and narrative?

The two cases, Bhatta Nayaka concluded, are precisely homologous, since the linguistic force that Mimamsa named the “actualization” or production of action works in both. In the operations of this force in literature, literary language plays a crucial role. Its formal properties, above all its figurative dimension, render it completely different from everyday referential language. When a word like “Sita” is used in a poem, it no longer refers to the particular historical personage who was Rama’s wife—if it continued to do so, she could never become a licit “foundational factor” for the viewer or reader’s desire, and hence rasa could never arise; in poetry “Sita” instead signifies woman as such. This is part of what Bhatta Nayaka named the process of “commonization,” which enables the reader to make the character’s emotional experience his own in such a way that he “actualizes,” or reproduces, it.<sup>57</sup> The reader of poetry comes to feel what Rama once felt, just as the reader of scripture is prompted to do what Janamejaya once did. If Bhatta Nayaka had spoken the language of European hermeneutics, he would have said that the text can really be experienced only when one feels addressed by it, when one “applies” it to oneself.<sup>58</sup> This second moment, actualization, made possible by the first moment, figurative, or literary, language, is followed by what Bhatta Nayaka, with another neologism, terms the “experientialization” of the literary work, which engenders in the reader not sacrificial action, like a scriptural commandment, but aesthetic pleasure, an end in itself.<sup>59</sup> Although the notion of actualization is one of linguistic mediation, the focal point for both scripture and poetry is action, not understanding.

However complex Bhatta Nayaka’s ideas about rasa may appear in the shape we have them now, it is easy to appreciate their brilliance. They are clearly of an order of magnitude more profound than anything earlier, and they were to utterly transform aesthetics. Henceforth nearly every thinker would return to the question “Who has rasa?” and would conclude that it belongs to the viewer/reader, that in fact his “stable emotion” is what is actually at issue in rasa theory, not the character’s, and is what the aesthetic elements “enhance.” The physical reactions that are effects of emotion in the character, for example, are causes for rasa in the viewer/reader;<sup>60</sup> later thinkers even argue that his own reactions become diagnostic of his own rasa (and not just the character’s reactions for his). Rasa thus became entirely a matter of response, and the only remaining question was what precisely that response consists of. Even here Bhatta Nayaka set the agenda, when he described it as a state of total “absorption,”<sup>61</sup> where the subject experiences the pleasure of a consciousness untouched by the things of this world, superior even to the religious experience

analogized to it: “Nothing can compare with aesthetic rasa,” says Bhatta Nayaka, “not even the rasa spiritual adepts bring forth.”<sup>62</sup>

Once Indian thinkers realized that the key thing about rasa is the reader’s or viewer’s experience, it no longer mattered whether rasa is engendered, inferred, or manifested in the character—indeed, talk of engenderment, inference, and manifestation no longer made much sense. They began to ask how literary language transforms discourse about people one does not know (Rama, Sita) into something one as a reader is somehow able to enter into and find applicable to one’s own self, and how that produces a unique kind of experience and knowledge. The paradigm had truly been shifted.

## 6. RASA AFTER THE REVOLUTION

Nowhere did Bhatta Nayaka’s new ideas exert greater influence than on the scholar who most vehemently criticized him, Abhinavagupta. Readers will see at the very beginning of Abhinava’s “purification” of rasa theory in his *New Dramatic Art* that he is entirely dependent on his predecessor’s hermeneutical theory.<sup>63</sup> In fact, Abhinava’s brilliant elaboration of that theory is what enables us, in the absence of the *Mirror of the Heart* itself, to understand its full implications. But the new hermeneutical aesthetics had another equally dramatic impact that needs explaining, through the transubstantiation that Abhinava effected in the understanding of Anandavar-dhana’s work.

From his formalist perspective Ananda was concerned to make sense of the text-internal mechanisms by which the sense of an emotion was created. To explain how rasa can be communicated at all if it cannot be an object of denotation or even connotation, he hypothesized as we saw a new linguistic modality (*śabdavr̥tti*) he called “implicature” or “manifestation” (the two terms here being synonymous). In the wake of Bhatta Nayaka’s ideas of rasa as reception, however, Ananda’s formalist account no longer had much traction, and if the theory was to be saved in the face of the new paradigm, the concept of “manifestation” would have to be reinterpreted. For his commentator Abhinava—a century after Bhatta Nayaka and even more after Ananda—what was now “manifested” was a newly activated psychological modality, the “mental state” (*cittavr̥tti*) of the viewer/reader.<sup>64</sup> This he equates without hesitation with Bhatta Nayaka’s “experientialization”—“The so-called ‘process of experientialization’ is nothing but the poem’s implicature of rasa”<sup>65</sup>—even though the refutation of implicature, in the form of the linguistic phenomenon it originally referred to, had been one of Bhatta Nayaka’s principal objectives. A linguistic phenomenon is admittedly at the same time a cognitive phenomenon, but the two can

be analytically separated, and when Ananda and Nayaka spoke of “manifestation” it was in the former sense. And as Dhanika would make clear (and logic suggests), there is a very close linkage of the epistemology of rasa with its ontology. Rasa can only be said to be “manifested” if it is in fact located in the character, because it already exists in him (having gotten its existence from elsewhere, like a pot from clay) and is only being brought to light (like a pot by a lamp). If rasa is located in the viewer or reader, however, it must be “actualized” in them by the literary artwork.<sup>66</sup>

Abhinava fuses the two ideas—manifestation of the latent meaning of a text and manifestation of the latent predispositions in the viewer—in order to preserve the now enlarged concept when moving from Anandavardhana’s text-centered view of the concept of rasa to his own new reader-centered view. There is no question that Abhinava “has taken over most of the new ideas” of Bhatta Nayaka, but there is also no question that these cannot fit into the “general view” of Ananda.<sup>67</sup> On the contrary, Abhinava transformed the general view, but in accordance with a much broader current of thought.

The dividing line between rasa in the character and rasa in the audience would remain blurry for some time. Dhanika, writing around 975, appears to have been the first person to draw a distinction between what he calls “real-world” or mundane rasa and the “rasa of drama” and the “rasa of poetry.” The distinction leads to serious conceptual difficulties if we take the terms literally.<sup>68</sup> For aesthetic emotion does not in fact exist in the real world, nor even in the world of the actual historical person on whom the literary character is based. The affective life of the historical person, just like our own, consists not of rasa but of emotion, the response to real pleasure and pain. For such a response, as our authors never tire of reminding us, we have the “causes” of the real world; and precisely because we do not have such responses in art, the new vocabulary of “foundational factor” and the like had to be invented. What Dhanika means by the term “real world” is the world *inside* the drama or poem—the storyworld, or, more technically, the diegetic level of the narrative (for which Sanskrit lacks any other term of art save for the confusing one Dhanika introduced). In that world people can experience rasa only and precisely because they have ceased to be historical persons and have become “characters.” The contrastive notion of “real-world,” i.e., storyworld, rasa can have arisen only given its new counterpositive, the “rasa of drama,” produced in the dramatic performance and experienced by the audience. Scholars in later periods were to make further modifications in these concepts. Abhinavagupta, for example, appears to have found Dhanika’s type of binary misleading. For him, there is no “real-world” rasa, certainly not in the real real world, but not even in the storyworld. Rasa is a phenomenon of the aesthetic event alone; for this “savoring” of rasa, or “rapture,” as he calls it, Abhinava reserves

the qualification “supermundane.”<sup>69</sup> But even this assessment, and much of the understanding of literature that accompanied it, was to be overturned in the coming centuries.

## 7. RASA IN THE CHARACTER, AGAIN

The rise of a new style of religious devotionalism in the early modern era (from around 1500) opened a remarkable final chapter in the history of the idea of rasa. Indian aesthetics had always shown a certain awkwardness in dealing with religious “literature,” the scare quotes signaling that sacred writings were expressly excluded from what our thinkers classified as *kāvya*. The fact that *kāvya* itself had its origin, or one of its origins, in Buddhist religious literature had long been forgotten; as for Vedic or even puranic works, Sanskrit poeticians never cite them when discussing rasa or rhetoric or any of the other features of *kāvya*. Bhatta Tota, Abhinavagupta’s teacher, made it very clear that the figure of “poet” (*kavi*) mentioned in India’s oldest extant religious literature was to be strictly differentiated from the poets with whom classical poetics was concerned. The latter have not only the insight of the seer but also a gift for “description,” that is, for the noninjunctive, expressive language use that constitutes literature.<sup>70</sup> Unsurprisingly, secular poetry is the exclusive concern of Abhinavagupta in his aesthetic works. Bhatta Nayaka had earlier developed a three-part classification of textual forms that put religious texts and literary texts in structurally discrete categories: in scripture wording has primacy; in historical narrative, factual meaning; “when both the wording and the meaning are subordinated and the aesthetic process itself has primacy, we call it literature.”<sup>71</sup> For the classical period the religious and the literary were separate conceptual worlds.

Poets, however, had long striven to make poetry out of prayer, from the time they began writing *stotra*, or prayer-poetry, in the early centuries C.E. From the middle of the first millennium on, and from Tamil Nadu to Kashmir, religious poets began producing works that ever more clearly sought aesthetic ends by whatever metric of “aesthetic” one might care to apply (and even began occasionally to use, or appear to use, rasa talk to describe their aims).<sup>72</sup> Eventually aesthetic theory would no longer be able to ignore such material.

The incorporation of the “peaceful” into the taxonomy of rasa (probably not much before the eighth century)<sup>73</sup> would accommodate some of this literature. For this rasa, according to Mammata (c. 1050), the stable emotion is dispassion (others would suggest impassivity), and this can be developed fully into a rasa. The example he provides is a *stotra* ascribed to the tenth-century Shaiva scholar-poet (and teacher’s

teacher of Abhinavagupta) Utpaladeva.<sup>74</sup> It quickly became clear, however, that the rasa analytic could not comfortably accommodate such literature, as an early commentator's strained effort to parse Utpaladeva's poem suggests.<sup>75</sup>

Aside from difficulties about the peaceful rasa, which much exercised our thinkers, above all Abhinavagupta,<sup>76</sup> a vast amount of religious poetry is not about dispassion at all but about passion, desire for God. Yet this too disrupted the standard typology and required a new category: "When desire is directed toward a deity," says Mammata immediately after discussing the peaceful, "we have 'emotion' rather than rasa."<sup>77</sup> The idea that in certain portions of a narrative a rasa will only be "intimated" and not fully "enhanced" had appeared already in Udbhata.<sup>78</sup> The new notion envisioned a different situation. Because desire for God, as Mammata at least conceives of it, is fundamentally at odds with sexual desire, it cannot fulfill the definition of erotic rasa as standardized in the *Treatise on Drama* (where it pertains exclusively to a young, highborn, heterosexual couple) so as to develop into rasa. Hence, the affective impact of such religious poetry must be different. But here too, disagreement among later commentators, including one in the sixteenth century who boldly rejects Mammata's position, shows the growing inadequacy of such an appraisal.<sup>79</sup>

With the composition of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, a masterpiece of Vaishnava devotionalism, in south India sometime in the tenth century and its rapid dissemination across the subcontinent, the aesthetic aspirations of religious literature were dramatically and unequivocally asserted, and aesthetic reflection began to emerge specifically to take account of them. This began with the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* itself, where "rasikas," those who can experience rasa, and "bhāvukas," those who "actualize" in themselves the emotion of the narrative—two keywords of later rasa discourse, the latter used first by Dhanika (*bhāvaka*) and almost certainly derived from Bhatta Nayaka—are called upon to "drink the *Bhāgavata* fruit that is rasa." The *Bhāgavata* elsewhere offers important hints that some version of a theological rasa concept was already known to it. The religious text was now both claiming an aesthetic position and being accorded one.<sup>80</sup>

The theologization of rasa commences, quite self-consciously, in the *Pearls of the Bhāgavata*, Vopadeva's commentary on select verses from the *purāṇa* composed in western India in the late thirteenth century. The work develops a new rasa of "devotion"—explicitly rejecting Abhinavagupta and Hemachandra<sup>81</sup>—to explain the overall aesthetic emotion of the poem, and the traditional rasas are subsumed as its subvarieties. But it was the appearance in eastern India of the charismatic religious figure Chaitanya (1486–1534) and the sacral practices he introduced—including a new definition, one might say, of what "desire" for God could mean—that would prove to be a historic watershed in aesthetic theory.

The aesthetic theology announced in the works of the Vaishnavas of Bengal constitutes one of the few major innovations in rasa theory in the early modern era, and marks the moment when all the strands of that theory are tangled into their most complicated knot. The most important is the age-old question of who feels rasa: is it located in the characters—that is, the devotees—in the tales told of Krishna, or in the devotees of the everyday world listening to or reading those tales? The great innovation of the devotion theorists lay in fundamentally redefining these long-standing alternatives.

Moving beyond Vopadeva's tentative and narrow assessment, the Bengali Vaishnavas offered new interpretations in the face of new religious realities. Kavikarnapura (c. 1600) sought to maintain something of the old tradition of rhetoric (for which he was attacked by his own commentator) and, by a set of new categories almost Ptolemaic in their intricacy, to preserve "secular" rasa while at the same time applying Vaishnava theological categories to religious literature. Far more radical are the views of Rupa Gosvamin and his nephew Jiva Gosvamin, but their radicalism, by an interesting historical irony, lies in part in their archaism. Their notion of rasa is close to the classic account of Bhoja, and thus to the oldest one we have, that of Bhatta Lollata, for whom rasa is in the character, since it is the enhancement of his stable emotion. Their dramatic innovation was to reevaluate who the "character" actually is: not only those who appear in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* as devotees of Krishna but also the real-world devotees, theologically reenvisioned as "characters" (and at the same time actors) in the drama that is God's pageant on earth, who have the same attitude toward Krishna as those primeval characters and can even take on their identity (Rupa and Jiva were viewed by their disciples as incarnations of female attendants of Krishna's beloved Radha). Why, after all, use the language of aesthetics to describe the devotee's relationship to God if that relationship were not *aesthetic*, to be conceived of as a drama in and of itself?<sup>82</sup>

Rasa theory is thus brought full circle, though the circle is now a much bigger one. In the process, the Bengali Vaishnavas transformed what for Abhinava had been the supermundane rasa experience of secular poetry into the mundane—when not denying altogether that it could even be rasa. For Jiva, "supermundane" was a status to be awarded only to the rasa of those experiencing God, whether in literature (which means effectively the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* or other Vaishnava poetry such as Rupa's own) or in life<sup>83</sup>—for "supermundane" rasa now became, however ironically, a phenomenon of the mundane world, if one transfigured by religious passion. With all this, the discourse of rasa was not just being transferred from poetry to theology, it was being restricted to theology. Religious consciousness, previously exiled from the world of rasa, eventually succeeded in exiling secular literature itself,

which now became a matter of “worms, feces, and ash,” according to one later thinker, and no longer deemed capable of producing rasa.<sup>84</sup> (In the real world of art, however, things were rather more complicated still, since actual poems and paintings were often meant to be understood as courtly and religious at one and the same time.)

In comparison with such elaborations and innovations in the Vaishnava tradition of Bengal, one other domain of convergence of religion and aesthetics in the early modern period may seem minor, but it is still intellectually significant. By the sixteenth century, for reasons that await scholarly analysis, Vedanta in general and monistic (Advaita) Vedanta in particular had come to exert a powerful influence across the traditional Indian knowledge systems, colonizing various earlier independent forms of thought such as hermeneutics. It seems inevitable that its impact would eventually be felt in aesthetics. To be sure, Vedantic aesthetics had a prehistory.<sup>85</sup> *The Ten Dramatic Forms* (c. 975), retheorizing rasa experience as something that pertains to the viewer, had already used an Upanishadic idiom when describing it as “a state of pure blissful consciousness,” “the bliss that is the self,” where “the self-other distinction vanishes,” a hallmark concept of monistic metaphysics. This too came from Bhatta Nayaka, who was the first to draw the analogy between aesthetic experience and spiritual, in particular Upanishadic, experience, when famously asserting that the spectator’s consciousness “shares something of the character of savoring supreme being [*brahma*].”<sup>86</sup> These few, undeveloped notions aside—their undevelopment partly a result of the fragmentary nature of our sources—the presence of a Vedantic viewpoint in the early thinkers can hardly be felt. Within a generation Abhinavagupta began to use the language of monistic Shaivism to describe the nature of rasa, though in the selections from *The New Dramatic Art* offered here, that philosophical framework is rather etiolated. Like his predecessors, he may describe the experience of rasa as a state of “uniformly blissful” consciousness, but he does not offer a theological-aesthetic program.<sup>87</sup>

Something quite different presents itself in the works of early seventeenth-century thinkers, among whom Vishvanathadeva and Jagannatha are especially notable. Both men hailed from Andhra and lived in Varanasi, and the latter, though far more famous, almost certainly borrowed from the former. From Vishvanathadeva’s sources, which include a key text of early modern Vedanta, and from his technical language, we can see that he brings a strong Vedantic perspective to the problem of rasa.<sup>88</sup> Clearly the disciplinary (or sectarian) affiliation was definitive for him. But there is more to his Vedanticization, and Jagannatha’s, than simply intellectual politics.

At the center of Vishvanathadeva’s and Jagannatha’s conception is the older notion of rasa, as the experience of consciousness itself, when consciousness is thor-

oughly evacuated of the dross of everyday life so as to become, as it were, self-transcendent. Vishvanathadeva authorizes this view by citing the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*'s ancient doctrine that the self is composed of five sheaths, the last of which is the "bliss component." This component is naturally obscured by the processes of phenomenal life, but in aesthetic experience, given the peculiar nature of its revelation, everything that conceals the bliss that is consciousness is removed: the "veil of unknowing is lifted."<sup>89</sup> The aesthetic experience is thus a kind of perfect, objectless state of awareness.

In line with this more explicit affiliation, Vishvanathadeva is the first to draw the analogy—original and in its own way profound—between the aesthetic process and the textual basis of scriptural revelation that is central to the Vedānta vision. Both literature and scripture are in the last analysis forms of linguistic communication, providing "direct awareness derived from words and their meanings," as Vishvanathadeva puts it. But both are unlike any other such phenomena in their capacity to produce a supermundane effect through language itself. Early modern Vedānta devotes unprecedented attention to the linguistic analysis of the "great sentences" of the Upanishads ("That art Thou" and the like) to show how this linguistic model of liberation can work. It offers a very suggestive analogy to the powers of literature, though Vishvanathadeva and Jagannatha only draw it and provide no full-scale exposition.<sup>90</sup>

Let me try now to summarize the main plot of the complicated story I have just told, emphasizing the movement of analytical focal points. In his three-part analysis of literary modalities of beauty, Bhoja distinguishes the expression of rasa from two other aspects that can make a literary work beautiful: sonic features of the text and figures of sense.<sup>91</sup> The expression of rasa differs from those aspects in that it works at the level of the text's content and thus pertains to its existence as an affective phenomenon. But what exactly does it mean to speak of the literary text as an "affective phenomenon," and what does the work of rasa consist of? In these two closely related problematics lies much of the complex historical development of the idea of rasa.

As an affective phenomenon, the literary text can be analyzed either internally or externally: as representations of people, and as representations for people. In the first case it is the characters who are taken to experience the basic emotions ("stable emotions") in response to certain objects ("foundational factors") and under certain external conditions ("stimulant factors"). These emotions are nuanced in any given case by more ephemeral feelings ("transitory emotions") and made legible by physical signs ("reactions" and "psychophysical responses"). But, to move to the second case, the literary work is always representation for people, viewers and readers. It is they who, on the phenomenological level, experience the artwork, and only

in their experiencing it can the artwork have meaning and come to life. The text can accordingly be analyzed from the inside—how the various necessary components are organized to provide a rich representation of human emotion—or from the outside—how viewers and readers respond to such representations. And depending on the analytical stance taken, our understanding of how this phenomenon is actually operationalized by the work will differ. Considered as an internal process, the “expression of rasa” may be seen as a formal capacity of the artwork for manifesting the emotional state of the character who is experiencing it; considered as an external process, it may be seen as a hermeneutical capacity of the artwork enabling viewers and readers to “actualize” such an emotional state.

Theoretically, therefore, rasa can be regarded as a property of a text-object, a capacity of a reader-subject, and also a transaction between the two. The whole process, in fact, exists as a totality even while its several moments can be analytically disaggregated. In this, rasa precisely resembles the “taste” it metaphorically references, which may be regarded as existing at once in the food, the taster, and the act of tasting. Something of this totality has been captured by the phenomenologist of aesthetics Mikel Dufrenne, who writes of the “primordial reality of affective quality, wherein that part belonging to the subject and that belonging to the object are still indistinguishable”:

It is for this reason that we have been led to say that the affective is in the work itself, as well as in the spectator with whom the work resonates. Feeling is as deeply embedded in the object as it is in the subject, and the spectator experiences feeling because affective quality belongs to the object.<sup>92</sup>

The history of aesthetic discourse in India is a history of the gradual elaboration of the components of this comprehensive view. The comprehensive view itself, however, was one Indian thinkers themselves never developed. What this means for an intellectual history of rasa will be considered below.

#### 8. NORMAL RASA, CONFLICTED RASA, SEMBLANCE OF RASA

The *Treatise on Drama* sets out the standard components for the genesis of rasa, and these were accepted without demurral over the long history of the discipline. Thus, in the erotic rasa, the “foundational factors” must be a young, highborn, heterosexual couple; the “stimulant factors” gardens, breezes, sandalwood cream, and so on; the “transitory emotions” anxiety, fatigue, disquiet, and the like; the physical “reactions” and “psychophysical responses” sidelong glances, fainting, horripilation, and

the rest that betoken the presence of the emotions. This may all sound very artificial, but Indian thinkers started from real plays and poems in their quest to understand how emotion was produced, and the analytical terminology they developed was a method for anatomizing what they found present. Aside from the dialectic typical in the history of intellectual practices, whereby description tends to morph into prescription, it was standard procedure in Indian science to reduce the phenomenal world to its constituent parts, which then come to look like building blocks. Analogous are the rules for generating correct grammatical forms that derive from an anatomy of real nouns and verbs, or the steps in producing a correct syllogism that derive from actual inference.<sup>93</sup>

Other aspects of the standard model seem less familiar and suggest something like a vernacular sociology of the aesthetic. The *Treatise* itself institutes this social aesthetics, rigorously relating rasa and status; although rarely discussed in later theory, it is presupposed everywhere.<sup>94</sup> Thus, the erotic and the heroic pertain only to characters of high status; the comic, by contrast, only to those of low or middling status. If the fearful is found in men of high status it will always be a matter of simulation: they do not, indeed cannot, fear their guru's anger, for instance, but they must simulate fear to be a dutiful devotee.<sup>95</sup> More complex than these correlations and more revealing of the history of rasa is the tragic, where kinship rather than status is the social element at issue.

Although the English word “tragic” has a complex history of its own deriving from Aristotelian poetics, it suitably captures the sense of the Sanskrit term *karuṇa*, which is usually but misleadingly translated “compassion” or “pity.” In *karuṇa* rasa, not only must someone be lost forever,<sup>96</sup> they must also be beloved to the subject; the rasa accordingly refers primarily to the sense of one’s own loss. By contrast, “The tragic rasa that arises when someone grieves for a person with whom one does not have a kinship bond,” explains Abhinavagupta, “is a *semblance* of the tragic and hence is itself comic” (for Abhinava, all semblance of rasa is comic).<sup>97</sup> Compassion, by contrast, is a generalized “pity for the sufferings or misfortunes of others,” according to its dictionary definition. This feeling, however, enters the history of Indian emotions only with Buddhism (especially Mahayana), which transvalued the dominant, quasi-aristocratic view, here as well as in other areas of Sanskrit thought. One might even say Buddhism redefined the very concept of “loved one” so as to comprise the whole world, thereby turning *karuṇa* into the active, blind (and to modern eyes almost irrational) compassion so exuberantly illustrated in the *jātaka* tales.<sup>98</sup> It was the Buddhists who invented compassion—and that is not the *karuṇa* of aesthetic discourse.

Abhinavagupta’s mention of “semblance” raises another important issue in classical aesthetics. From the late ninth century on, lists of the standard topics of

aesthetics begin to include, along with rasas and emotions, the “semblance” of rasa and of emotion.<sup>99</sup> The technical term, *ābhāsa*, is also used of the image of, say, a horse in a painting (*turagābhāsa*), or of a misleading reason in a syllogism (*hetvābhāsa*): something comparable to but not itself the authentic entity, and sometimes even fraudulent. In the case of “semblance of a rasa,” modern scholarship is uncertain about the matter, and it is unclear how far back in the tradition this uncertainty extends. The phrase “semblance of rasa” was first used (and probably invented) by Udbhata (c. 800) to characterize narrative that was “contrary to social propriety” and thereby violated a core feature of rasa, its ethical normativity. In the erotic, for example, the mutuality of desire would obviously be violated in the case of sexual assault. Udbhata offers as illustration a poem (of his own) where the great god Shiva is so overcome with desire for the goddess Parvati that he is on the point of taking her by force.<sup>100</sup> However “contrary” such an act is in itself, there may nevertheless be good narrative reasons for relating it. Without Ravana’s violent abduction of Sita there would be no *Rāmāyaṇa*. What Udbhata’s and Valmiki’s poems describe is a semblance of legitimate sexual desire; what they offer, however, is decidedly not, as some contemporary scholars have described it, only a semblance of aesthetic experience.

This point is forcefully made by Singabhupala (late fourteenth century) in the subtle interpretation offered of a great poem from the *Hundred of Amaru* (Singabhupala typically adduces as illustrations verses from the finest works of Sanskrit literature), a wife’s lament for the fading of desire in her marriage. The rasa, the emotional experience in and derived from the poem, cannot be the erotic, since the conditions for the erotic are lacking; even the “erotic thwarted” is not possible, for this is always predicated upon the possible renewal of the “erotic enjoyed.” Nor can it be the tragic: her relationship may be dead, but her husband is not. When Singabhupala tells us that the poem “fails to attain beauty,” he is not saying the poem itself is not beautiful; the poem “fails to attain” the tenderness of the erotic, but it undoubtedly possesses some other, powerful, emotional-aesthetic force, which he calls the “semblance” of the erotic. To identify something as semblance of rasa, accordingly, is to make a judgment, not on the quality of the poem, but rather on the nature of the aesthetic experience it produces, where something is, if not always “contrary to social propriety,” as Udbhata has it, at least “out of keeping.” Far from marking failure to become a “genuine aesthetic experience,” semblance of rasa offers an experience of another order, at once morally problematic, psychologically subtle, and aesthetically complex and one that great literature cannot forgo.<sup>101</sup> If rasa is the ultimate literary value, the question of how to assess the value of a literary work where rasa as such is absent—indeed, must be absent—requires real discernment, and this is what Indian thinkers brought to bear.

The modern interpretation of semblance as “failure” may not entirely contradict tradition, however. In the seventeenth century Jagannatha approached the problem with what seems to me a cultural consciousness rather different from what came before, and where “semblance” appears to have become a mark of censure. He offers a long list of themes—and he is the first to do so—that all “produce the semblance of rasa”: desire directed toward an inappropriate object (the wife of one’s teacher, a goddess, a queen) or that is not reciprocated; desire on the part of a woman for more than one lover; “a father’s grief for a son who is querulous and wicked, or grief on the part of an ascetic who has given up all attachments; spiritual disenchantment with life on the part of an untouchable”; “martial determination on the part of a low-born man,” “laughter directed at one’s father.” Although a few of these themes are part and parcel of the greatest Sanskrit literature (how could we have a *Mahābhārata* without Dhritarashtra’s lamenting over his wicked son Duryodhana, or without Draupadi and her five husbands?), the remainder would never be written. No doubt earlier critics too were concerned about literary impropriety, felt that certain kinds of morally as well as physically implausible narratives could only be used if they had the stamp of tradition, and advised revising episodes even in such narratives if they violated standards of social propriety.<sup>102</sup> But if I am right to see it as a new prescriptive turn in the history of rasa—perhaps a sort of conservative traditionalization on the threshold of modernity—Jagannatha’s very cataloguing of the transgressive subjects, the sort that elsewhere in the world would help to make modern literature modern, would mean proscribing them. And this may be a source, if we seek one in the tradition, of the understanding of semblance not as diagnostic of moral-aesthetic complexity, but as marking literary failure.<sup>103</sup>

The standard list of rasa topics also includes analysis of the actual narrative stages or conjunctures when a rasa comes into being or ceases, when it gives way to another rasa or coexists with another in a kind of mélange. These are rarely discussed in detail.<sup>104</sup> One other, however, the potential conflict of rasas, holds great theoretical interest for traditional scholars and great scope for their interpretive virtuosity.

“Flaws” were a subject of literary criticism from an early date in India, and although those relating to rasa are most fully systematized in Mammata’s *Light on Poetry* (in the same section he also examines the stages in the succession of rasa just mentioned), earlier scholars had thought long and hard about which rasas can and cannot be combined with other rasas—that is, about what makes for a coherent emotional experience in art, or indeed, coherent art. Anandavardhana offers the first account in the third chapter of his *Light on Implicature* (the source of much of Mammata), while Dhanika approaches the question from a different angle, examining the

definition of “stable emotion” and elaborately investigating the problems that arise when more than one of them is present in a poem.<sup>105</sup>

It requires no professional competence to perceive that certain combinations of rasas are inherently complementary, others inherently contradictory. The violent complements the heroic as obviously in classical India as elsewhere, while the fearful, just as obviously, contradicts it. But two qualifications must be introduced here. First, some combinations produce problems peculiar to Indian cultural sensibilities, which modern readers need to understand in order to appreciate. Second, and more consequentially, the theory of conflictual rasas encouraged especially fruitful interpretive practices.

For the first point, consider the following poem (Mammata’s example of the flaw of “the use of an antithetical aesthetic factor”):

My love, be gracious, show your favor / and put your anger away . . .  
My simple girl, time is a fleet deer / that, once fled, never returns.<sup>106</sup>

In a love poem to one’s coy mistress of this sort, the allusion to the brevity of time (a “stimulant factor,” according to Mammata) is a component of the peaceful rasa irreconcilable, for Indian readers, with the erotic rasa of the verse, and hence the poem must be judged an aesthetic failure. Alas, poor Herrick, for your admonition to virgins to make much of time.

Other poems raise far more complex questions. In some cases the apparent contradiction between rasas—say, the erotic and the macabre—is resolved by the interposition of a mediating rasa. Here is an example offered by Dhanika:

Lucky those women who get to wear / fragrance of the finest scent.  
My husband only transfers to me / the foul smell of his battle wounds.

Here the interposed heroic rasa (“battle wounds”) neutralizes the impact of the macabre (“foul smell”). Sometimes a contradiction is neutralized by the attenuated character of one of the rasas, as when a wife cries out at the sight of her husband’s dismembered corpse on the battlefield (Mammata’s example, borrowed from Ananda):

This used to loosen my belt and untie / the knot holding up my skirt, and fondle  
my heavy breasts and touch my navel / and thighs and mound—this very hand.

Here, while the erotic would appear to conflict with the tragic, it is actually present only in memory; the erotic, rather than diminishing the tragic, enhances it. The hi-

erarchy of rasas can become dizzyingly complex, as in the following celebrated poem:

Like a husband whose betrayal is still moist  
 it was driven away when trying to clutch their hand,  
 it was mercilessly struck when grasping their hem,  
 shaken off when stroking their hair, and spurned  
 in a panic when falling at their feet,  
 and when attempting an embrace forcefully rebuffed  
 by the women of the Triple City, tears brimming in their eyes:  
 may this fire of Shiva's arrows burn away your sins.

According to Arjunavarma (c. 1215), one among many who quote the poem, the erotic (the image of the errant lover) is subordinate to the tragic (the fire's destruction of the king of the antigods inhabiting the Triple City), and the tragic to the heroic (Shiva's grandeur), or perhaps (critics disagree) to the emotion of the devotee in the face of his god's power.<sup>107</sup> Rasa, as these examples show, not only explained theoretically how emotion is created in literature, it also invited readers to develop ever more complex practices of interpretation.

## 9. RASA AND INSTRUCTION

*De gustibus non est disputandum*—“in matters of taste there can be no disputes,” runs the old saw.<sup>108</sup> On the face of it, taste would seem to be an affair of the heart, not the head, and rasa as “taste” would hardly be expected to pertain to the domain of reason, preeminently moral, social, or other kind of judgment. Thinkers in classical India directly engaged this question, like their counterparts in the early modern West, though the discussion proceeded differently in the two cases, with equally divergent outcomes.

As with so much in the history of Indian aesthetics, the conversation begins with Bhatta Nayaka. Since the time of Bhamaha (c. 650) the view had been dominant that the cultivation of literature produces pleasure but also “instruction”—in this context, always instruction in the four “ends of man,” love, wealth, morality, and spiritual liberation—with the two outcomes equally balanced.<sup>109</sup> This old view came to be embodied in the very definition of rasa at a relatively early stage. For Pratiharenduraja (c. 900), the “enhancement” of the stable emotion that leads to rasa meant its development, in all its complexity and along with all its requisite contextual elements, precisely as a source of instruction.<sup>110</sup> It cannot have been much later that Bhatta

Nayaka for the first time contested such didacticism. His challenge is implied in the famous differentiation of genres that is almost certainly his own: if scripture commands us like a master and history counsels us like a friend, literature seduces us like a beloved. But it is directly expressed in one of his few surviving fragments: reading literature is about experiencing rasa, not gaining knowledge of some moral precept, something his follower Dhananjaya was thinking of when at the beginning of his *Ten Dramatic Forms* he sarcastically proclaims, “I salute the fool who turns his face from pleasure and thinks the point of literature is mere instruction, no different from historical narrative.”<sup>111</sup> This too is the position Abhinavagupta defends early in his commentary on *Light on Implicature*: in literature, “pleasure is the predominant element”; it is “bliss that constitutes the final goal of literature, taking priority over even instruction.”<sup>112</sup> Yet it is a position he would qualify and eventually abandon.

In his turn away from Bhatta Nayaka, Abhinava was taking a cue from his teacher Bhatta Tota (c. 975). Again, we have only a fragment that explains the latter’s position, but it seems clear enough: “Pleasure is constitutive of rasa, and rasa is simply drama, and drama simply knowledge.” Pleasure may still be held to be an essential component of literary art, but not an end in itself; its true purpose is “knowledge” of the four ends of man. This fragment is cited by Abhinava late in his commentary on the *Light* itself in a closely reasoned passage that seeks, or so it seems, to manage a tension with his earlier statement. Rasa, he explains,

is made possible by virtue of the “conjunction of aesthetic elements” that are themselves inseparable from instruction in the four ends of man. In composing the elements appropriate to a given rasa, the poet’s total “self-surrender to the savoring of rasa” that Anandavardhana stipulates is actually what is instrumental in making such instruction fit and apposite. Hence, literary pleasure as such is instrumental to education, as my teacher argued.

To soften the seeming contradiction with his earlier argument, he adds that pleasure and instruction are not two separate things since they converge in a single object, the propriety (*aucitya*) of the aesthetic elements: the experience of rasa is preconfigured (in terms of which elements are “appropriate” to the production of each rasa) to align with social norms (in terms of which responses are the “appropriate” ones to engender in the first place). “The source of literary pleasure as such lies, as I have repeatedly said, in the social propriety of the aesthetic elements, whereas ‘instruction’ is nothing other than the correct understanding of those elements, as being ‘appropriate’ each in its own way to the given rasa.” Instruction

through literature, he concludes, should concern itself with practices that conduce to the success of the protagonist or to the defeat of the antagonist.<sup>113</sup>

In his later commentary on the *Treatise on Drama*, a far more insistent theory of rasa as social and moral pedagogy is developed. The whole focus of aesthetic experience is shifted to the emotions that pertain to the ends of man: “The end result of the savoring is instruction in morality and the other ends of man”; the viewer of drama “comes to possess a certain form of consciousness of the sort conveyed by the deontic language of scripture—that those who do such and such a thing receive such and such a reward.”<sup>114</sup> By a virtuosic if no doubt anachronistic reading, he links Bharata’s idea of the four primary rasas, the erotic, the violent, the heroic, and the peaceful (replacing Bharata’s macabre), with the four ends of man, love, wealth, morality, and liberation. And in his account of the sixth hindrance to aesthetic consciousness (concentrating on nonessential parts of the artwork), Abhinava explains that the “most essential aesthetic components are those several forms of consciousness that pertain to the ends of man,” and again correlates with them the stable emotions, desire, anger, determination, and impassivity.<sup>115</sup> Literature’s capacity to refine our moral imagination is thus continually reasserted as a central tenet of Abhinava’s mature aesthetic theory.

It deserves noting, given Kant’s influential “differentiation” of aesthetic judgment from social and moral judgment, that the domains of these types of judgments overlapped closely in classical India. Equally notable, however, is the actual nature of such “judgment.” The pedagogy enabled by rasa experience is not learning to feel the way another has felt, to see the world through the eyes of another, to develop solidarity with another in his suffering—what the philosopher Richard Rorty, for example, understood to be the moral work of literature.<sup>116</sup> This may appear to be implicit in the discourse on rasa: how else, one might suppose, could what Bhatta Nayaka called “commonization” or the “heart’s concurrence” achieve their effect without an ethical education that made it possible to experience the experience of another as one’s own? But Indian thinkers never quite make this explicit; such an interpretation even seems to misconstrue their argument. Commonization is concerned less with positing a broadly human, and humane, way of understanding narrative—like Rorty’s (widely shared) view that “by identification with Mr. Causaubon in *Middlemarch* . . . we may come to notice what we ourselves have been doing,” our blindness to the pain of others, for example—than with applying the narrative to one’s own life by assimilating its notions of propriety. Taking pleasure in that narrative was instrumental to the creation and confirmation of the judgment of a work’s moral order, and about that order there was no dispute, since there was no dispute about the social norms with which it was to be correlated. A narrative has an essence, to which there is a “proper” way to respond.<sup>117</sup> The pedagogy of rasa was,

thus, not a matter of working through the moral ambiguity of literature (was it just that Dushyanta should reject the pregnant Shakuntala?); traditional readers never highlight such ambiguity, however much poets may have invited them to do so. On the contrary, literature was understood to present not questions but answers, which were easier to learn through literature than through other communicative forms. One could well say, then, that for Indian aesthetics, there really is no disputing in matters of taste, not because each reader has his own in accordance with the relativist-skeptical stance of modernity, but because all readers have, ideally, the same.

Nothing said so far, however, explains how viewers and readers are able to taste rasa in the first place and to grasp its social-moral logic. Is any special knowledge required? What exactly is the role, if any, of aesthetic theory itself in the education of taste? How, in short, does a *rasika*, a person able to taste rasa, come to be a *rasika*? Rasa theory would seem to be an account of everyday aesthetic experience, of how viewers and readers react. And after all, what special training is required for getting lost in a book or film? Perhaps more than we know, since although it may seem to be a natural human capacity, Indian thinkers saw “nature” quite otherwise. A *rasika* may largely be born, not made, but who is born a *rasika*?

Not many thinkers addressed this question directly. For Vishvanatha (c. 1350), only “certain special people” have the capacity for relishing rasa, those who have a “super-abundance of sensitivity” and “possess merit acquired in a former existence,” or as he puts it elsewhere, the requisite “predispositions.” Those lacking such capacities—here Vishvanatha cites from the lost work of Dharmadatta—“are like the walls and wooden posts and stone floor inside the theater.” Predispositions are acquired in one’s present existence as well as in former ones, and these are what make the savoring of rasa possible. If we did not hypothesize a causal force of predispositions cultivated in a present life, we would expect even dry-as-dust theologians to savor rasa; if we gave no causal force to those acquired in a past life, we could not explain why some who are keen to savor rasa are incapable of doing so.<sup>118</sup> There is no doubt a good answer to the obvious question why the endless cycle of transmigration would not eventually endow all people with all predispositions, but our thinkers do not provide it.

There is more to aesthetic sensitivity than simply one’s predestination for it, to be sure. Abhinavagupta argues that receptivity comes, at least in part, from a previous study of literature. But that too requires the presence of good karma from past lives, a “heart by nature like a spotless mirror,” a mind “no longer subject to the anger, confusion, craving, and so on typical of this phenomenal world.” Only those traits enable rasa to manifest itself “with absolute clarity.”<sup>119</sup> In the end, rasa theory is meant to explain the world of aesthetic response, and not—except incidentally, as knowledge that prestructures interpretation—to teach us to cultivate it.

## 10. THE INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF RASA DISCOURSE

The foregoing account is one attempt to reconstruct the historical transformations of rasa thought as plausibly as evidence permits. It must be inaccurate in some particulars, given the limits of my knowledge, but it also must be untrue, in several senses of “untrue.” I cannot have told the whole story of rasa, and not only because no one can know historical stories in their entirety. First, there is the question of sources. We are painfully aware of texts that have disappeared—in fact, no discipline of classical India has suffered greater losses than aesthetics.<sup>120</sup> In addition, some texts have been preserved in only a very few manuscripts, or only in part, or in such a state that for stretches on end they are close to unreadable, or, conversely, in so many manuscripts that the very idea of a producing coherent, let alone critical, edition seems absurd.<sup>121</sup> And this is to say nothing of the difficulties that confront the reader trying to make sense of texts that the tradition itself shied away from commenting on.<sup>122</sup>

My account can be said to be untrue in a second sense, as diverging from what the agents themselves believed about what I have come to think of as the recoding of the meaning of “manifestation,” for example, or, more consequentially, about the extension of aesthetic theory from drama to poetry or the shift from formalism to reception. Disagreement with tradition raises knotty if familiar questions about what makes an interpretation valid and for whom, and about history itself—or rather, about history (the scholar’s) against itself (the participants’).

In one last, related sense my account cannot quite be true, given that in some cases, we have access to texts that few in the tradition did, texts that scarcely entered into circulation in their primary sphere and hence had minimal historical effects. This is surprisingly the case with two masterpieces, Abhinavagupta’s *New Dramatic Art* and Bhoja’s *Light on Passion*. The contemporary scholar is thereby put in the strange position, the reverse of the first predicament, of knowing more of the intellectual history of this discourse than some of its participants had access to.

It may be useful to try more precisely to characterize the foregoing history of rasa from two different directions: from the inside out, so to speak, and from the outside in. From the first perspective we can perceive ideas, presuppositions, or objectives that the actors themselves were aware of, even though we may know little about them now; from the second, we can identify conditions that structured their knowledge that the actors themselves may not have been aware of. Each perspective comprises its own kind of historical effectiveness.

One constraint on the discourse of rasa, so far little mentioned but far-reaching and largely acknowledged by the participants, pertains to their philosophical or religious affiliations. Many of our literary theorists also wrote on philosophy or

theology<sup>123</sup> and thus, as in the Western tradition from Aristotle to Kant to Dewey, a formative if not constitutive relationship held between aesthetics and philosophical worldviews. But disentangling this relationship is no easy task in itself, and it is made harder by the unfortunate thinness in the record just where we need it to be thick: on the value commitments of most of our thinkers. If we knew that Shri Shankuka was in fact a Buddhist, we could better understand his arguments both about the place of inference in the aesthetic process (inference and perception being the only two means of valid knowledge that Buddhists accept) and, somewhat more speculatively, about the sources of his view of “imitation” (which perhaps lay in Yogachara “illusionism”).<sup>124</sup> That Bhāṭṭa Nayaka’s allegiance to Mimamsa (far deeper than Anandavardhana’s) marked his entire system is crystal clear, but if we understood precisely which brand of Mimamsa this was, Kumarila’s, Prabhakara’s, or another, we might be able to develop a richer sense of how he thought “actualization” worked, and more particularly, how the “eventful narrative” (*arthavāda*) embedded in scripture “rouses” the ritual agent to re-create the ritual act—and, homologously, the reader the literary narrative. Bhoja is more direct about his Samkhya inheritance<sup>125</sup> (less so about his Shaivism), but it is a laborious task to reconstruct just how far this inflected his aesthetic theory, beyond the obvious role of the theory of the three psychophysical elements in his understanding of the “sense-of-self” that constitutes “passion.” The situation does become more perspicuous as the meta-aesthetic discourse shifts from philosophy toward religion, where Abhinavagupta’s theory of aesthetic consciousness shares many traits with, though is not necessarily conceptually dependent on, his theory of liberated consciousness; the reverse might be posited of the later Advaita aestheticians Vishvanathadeva and Jagannatha, about whose religious views the information in the second case is sparse, in the first case entirely absent.<sup>126</sup> Rupa and Jiva Gosvamin, by contrast, are known primarily as religious thinkers, and their views help us understand how religion and aesthetics were not just related but fused into a new aesthetic theology—at the same time hinting at what we are missing more generally about the religio-philosophical context of earlier aesthetic thinking.

A second dimension of intellectual history from the inside out concerns the status and practice of intellectual history in the tradition itself—how the thinkers themselves sought to grasp the development of their discipline—and the sources they had at their disposal. Abhinavagupta is the first to have brought a chronological sensibility to rasa discourse: the prologue to his own “purified” theory in *The New Dramatic Art* is clearly meant to represent ideas that succeed one another in time and in value. He was able to reconstruct this order—going back some three centuries (to the time of Dandin, c. 700)—because the actual texts were still available to him. The number and diversity of citations in his own commentary from the early writers on

the *Treatise on Drama* attest to this availability; the same holds, naturally, for his familiarity with the works of his own teachers, Bhatta Tota and Bhatta Induraja.<sup>127</sup>

By the mid-twelfth century, however, scholars were already departing from a strict chronological approach. In his treatment of the history of rhetoric more generally, Ruyyaka places his discussion of Kuntaka and Bhatta Nayaka *before* that of Anandavardhana, a temporal displacement one of his commentators explains by noting that although both thinkers came later, they are presented as earlier “since they were following the doctrines of the ancients”; by contrast, Mahima Bhatta is said to have “put forward something of his own invention entirely” and so is treated after Ananda.<sup>128</sup> Here chronology is inflected by a kind of axiology (the validity of which we will assess momentarily) that comes to the fore in later discussions of rasa.

While many of those discussions adopt some version of Abhinava’s account, they are subject to two important limitations. First, almost without exception, no later scholar had access to any of the original texts Abhinava cites, or even to *The New Dramatic Art*, where many are discussed; they all derive their overview from the exposition in his *Eye for Light on Implicature* (which admittedly sometimes provides more detail), or, far more frequently, from Mammata’s précis of this exposition in his *Light on Poetry*. Second, and no doubt as a consequence of this documentary deficiency, the very content of the chronology and hence its structure begins to change after the eleventh century. Jagannatha (c. 1650) discusses eleven different interpretations of rasa in an order that is entirely evaluative: it starts with the doctrine he accepts (Abhinava’s) and ends with those he almost certainly invented to demonstrate the slow descent into ever greater inadmissibility. (In the same spirit of anachronism, unless it is parody, he makes Bhatta Nayaka speak in the rebarbative style of the “New Logicians” that came to prominence only four centuries after his death).<sup>129</sup> The natural conclusion to this development of the discourse—what we might call its pure logicization—is found at its endpoint, in the work of Rajacudamani Dikshita (c. 1650, not excerpted here). His “history” of rasa dispenses entirely with historical sources, becoming an account not of what the positions actually were, but of what conceptually they should have been.

It is a rather fine line that divides this practice (and tacit theory) of intellectual history from what we can perceive when we look from the outside in. This perspective offers a view of issues that those who made the history could not or did not—so far as we can tell—perceive themselves. A few examples both minor and major, which, given his prominence, are best provided by the works and practices of Abhinavagupta, suffice to give a sense of the problematic as a whole.

*The New Dramatic Art*, written in Kashmir around 1000 C.E., seems to have vanished from there almost as soon as the ink was dry. The only scholars in the premodern

era who evince direct knowledge of the work all lived in Gujarat during the twelfth century.<sup>130</sup> What others knew of Abhinava's aesthetic philosophy comes from his earlier commentary on *Anandavardhana*, *The Eye for Light on Implicature*, or from Mammata's précis (Mammata himself shows no evidence of having read *The New Dramatic Art* either, though the question awaits systematic study). What does this lacuna mean for intellectual history?

For one thing, since the views on rasa in the two works are not identical, Abhinava's mature theory was essentially unknown to subsequent scholars. Consider his understanding of the state of consciousness that the aesthetic experience represents. At various high points of his exposition, such as his definition of drama, Abhinava announces his name for this state: *anuvyavasāya*, secondary or reflexive knowledge of a knowledge, but he goes on to carefully gloss this in order to signal its newly charged meaning (it is “on the order of a direct awareness,” “consists of the light of the bliss that is one’s own pure consciousness,” and so on).<sup>131</sup> The term—Abhinava’s version of Bhatta Nayaka’s “experience” through “actualization”—is used in Abhinava’s aesthetic sense in no other text on rasa discourse, because no other text knew that sense or the work in which it was contained.<sup>132</sup>

What later texts do represent as part of Abhinava’s aesthetic theory concerns the “manifestation” doctrine of rasa that he developed in his commentary on *Anandavardhana*. As we saw, Abhinava, confronted with the potential obsolescence of Ananda’s treatment of rasa in the wake of Bhatta Nayaka’s revolution, transformed an object-oriented linguistic notion into a subject-oriented psychological one—what is now “manifested” is the stable emotion in the heart of the sensitive reader rather than rasa in the text. The core terminology for this modality, “manifestation” (*vyañjanā* and its various cognates), is virtually absent from *The New Dramatic Art*. The concept clearly had no further role to play for Abhinava, since his new theory is hermeneutical. For all subsequent thinkers, however, “manifestation” became the watchword of Abhinava aesthetics, something possible only if *The New Dramatic Art* was unknown to them.

The history of the reception of Abhinava’s conceptual leap in *The Eye* is even more revealing than this bibliographical lacuna. No later scholar ever comments explicitly on the transvaluation of Anandavardhana’s idea of “manifestation” developed by Abhinava when he moved it out of the old thought world of formalism into the new one of reception.<sup>133</sup> The fact that he appropriated Bhatta Nayaka’s concept of “experience” when reworking “manifestation” likewise went entirely unrecognized by subsequent thinkers.<sup>134</sup>

All that said, the scholarly practices in evidence here have a long history. When Abhinava ascribes to Bharata himself aspects of Bhatta Nayaka’s theory, as well as

the entirety of his own radically “purified” aesthetic theory (“It is simply what the sage himself has said and nothing new at all”), he is in quest of an old warrant for a new idea, a conventional move in classical thought and found elsewhere in aesthetics *per se*.<sup>135</sup> To assess Abhinava’s rewriting of Ananda as a commentator’s misinterpretation of his base text, however, would be to misinterpret the commentarial function in classical India. Commentary could legitimately encompass not just exegesis of the old but also promulgation of the new, no matter how much at variance the two might seem to a present-day scholar.

Beyond the transformations of rasa thought, how variously they appear when seen from the inside out and the outside in, and what the practice of intellectual history means in the two cases, there are conundrums having to do with the overall historical shape of the discourse. The three most obvious are why rasa theory came into being when it did, why it exploded into prominence when it did, and why it came to an end when it did.

Theory is related, however obscurely, to practice, and the history of rasa theory roughly maps against the history of the practice of Sanskrit literature—understanding “literature” in the sense accorded to the category in Sanskrit culture itself. In that sense, Sanskrit literature was an invention of the beginning of the Common Era, and the theory of dramatic composition arose relatively soon thereafter. The slow (and fitful) process of incorporating poetry into that theory started not much later than the true efflorescence of poetry (in non-Buddhist circles) around the fourth century.<sup>136</sup>

What is striking is how quickly rasa became so central to learned discourse in royal courts from Kashmir to southern India. Bhoja, for example, produced two works that engaged the theory of rasa head-on while ruling from a highly visible, even storied, court at Dhara in central India. Why the ruling elite’s interest in aesthetics arose when it did (though earlier thinkers like Dandin and Udbhata were also associated with courts) is no easier to answer than the parallel question of why aesthetics in Europe should have emerged first in the early eighteenth century. One can easily coordinate the interests of the court with the cultivation of courtly norms that the aesthetic imagination was meant to reproduce—indeed, perhaps too easily, for coordination all too quickly becomes reduction. It may be true, as I once put it, that good readers—of the sort Bhoja intended his work to form—make good subjects, and, as Terry Eagleton has it, that the aesthetic lies “at the very root of social relations” as the “source of all human bonding.”<sup>137</sup> But these are bare theoretical bones, and we need more resources, of the sort this sourcebook seeks to provide, if we are to put flesh on them.

Far more complicated than the beginnings of rasa discourse or its consolidation as an important cultural-political form is the question of its ending. Space permitting, I would have concluded the *Reader* with Rajacudamani’s *Mirror of Poetry* because

that work shows not only a marked discursive transformation—one entirely de-historized, as we saw, where early thinkers have become ideal types entirely disconnected from their actual works (most of which had disappeared as much as a millennium earlier)—but also a marked exhaustion. Rajacudamani reproduces the same set of topics in play from the time of Abhinava and adds nothing from his own time and place, the remarkable world of south Indian culture at the height of Nayaka power.<sup>138</sup> Later works advance in not one particular our understanding of either the substance of rasa theory or its history.<sup>139</sup> Many works purportedly dealing with rasa are actually anthologies of poetry illustrating the rasas, in imitation of Bhanudatta's *River of Rasa* (c. 1500), but containing nothing of his analytical concerns.<sup>140</sup> Clearly, if somewhat perplexingly, the analysis of literary emotion had ceded place to the creation of literary emotion. The remarkable flowering of a new rasa theory among Bengali Vaishnavas was accompanied by a remarkable flowering of new poetry, but while the production of poetry continued, no further theoretical contributions were made after the seventeenth century. The last work I examined from before the colonial caesura, Acyutaray Modak's *Essence of Literary Art* (*Sāhityasāra*, c. 1820), is fully representative of the endpoint of the discourse. His interests are altogether other (mostly rhetorical), and when he turns to rasa in the final chapter of his treatise, he does no more than offer a few verses illustrating the erotic.

The picture does not change even if we widen our lens beyond the sphere of Sanskrit intellectuals. Across the early modern vernacular world, poets were clearly fascinated by rasa; the pen names even Muslim poets adopted, “Raslin,” “Raskhan,” and the like, attest to this. Yet Sufi masters who wrote in Avadhi, aside from incorporating rasa categories into their romances, had no interest in advancing the theoretical project of classical aesthetics. Hindu intellectuals produced large numbers of studies, but again these were either restatements and anthologies on the model of Bhanudatta's specialized treatise on the typology of leading female characters (*nāyikābheda*) in his *Bouquet of Rasa* (*Rasamañjari*), or vernacularizations of older classics (like Kulapati Mishra's 1670 *Secret of Rasa*, *Rasrahasya*, a version of Mammata's *Light on Poetry*), which embody nothing of the conceptual ferment that had marked the discourse over the previous millennium.<sup>141</sup> Although many works await editing, nothing, published or not, suggests that early modern intellectuals of whatever linguistic orientation or religious persuasion had anything to add to the rasa conversation.<sup>142</sup> That the end came on the eve of colonialism is entirely coincidental, and cannot by any means be construed as a consequence.

From one angle, rasa discourse in the period 1650–1800 presents a picture of intellectual stasis. At times it was hard to move the conversation forward, since innovation in Sanskrit thought was always threatened with Ockham's Razor. Bhanudatta

in 1500 had to defend his invention of the “fantasy” rasa from the charge that it had “no traditional standing,” just as centuries earlier Anandavardhana had to defend “implicature.”<sup>143</sup> The impediment of “scholarly convention”<sup>144</sup> did not of course stop either scholar, or Bhoja, who directly attacked it. But Jagannatha in the mid-seventeenth century evinces a newly heightened sense of traditionalism when he refuses to entertain the possibility of any modification of the received aesthetic system—by the addition of the devotional rasa, for example—lest disciplinary chaos ensue.<sup>145</sup> All the other questions, of the sort that modern aesthetics learned to ask—about the criteria for identifying something as art, or interpreting it, or evaluating it beyond the traditional system of genre compliance, rhetorical exegesis, and the specification of disqualifying “flaws”—were even further removed from the agenda.

Whatever the force of such explanations for the discipline’s denouement, another seems considerably less cogent, namely, that rasa theory was simply too inflexible to account for new kinds of poetry that appeared in the early modern period, since there are two unwarranted assumptions in the argument. One is that the new literature was radically incommensurate with the old, but this has yet to be convincingly demonstrated. The other is that rasa theory as such was somehow narrowly tied to that old literature, but this is based on an impoverished understanding of the theory’s aim, which, as the materials offered in this *Reader* show, is to account for the emotional core of literature and why we respond to it the way we do, and which accordingly cannot be tied to any historical moment.<sup>146</sup> A related notion, that rasa theory was exclusive to drama and Sanskrit drama declined in the early modern era, is wrong on both counts.<sup>147</sup>

Viewed from another angle, and with greater hermeneutical charity, the fact that rasa discourse did come to an end might be taken as marking the attainment of a state of conceptual plenitude. After a millennium and a half of the most searching analysis the world had ever seen—on the basis of a carefully elaborated lexicon, stable categories, and fully shared assumptions of core questions—of the emotional structure of literary artworks, thinkers were perhaps justified in believing that they had carefully weighed every possible alternative and fully understood the nature of aesthetic response—and that there was nothing left to say.

## 11. “TASTE” COMPARISON AND THE PORTABILITY OF RASA THEORY

Why should “taste” have become the pre-eminent metaphor for understanding aesthetic response in classical India? Curiously, this is something our authorities never care to argue out on philosophical grounds. They unpack the idea only for its metaphorical implication, and then only with respect to the capacity of the aesthetic

object to combine disparate elements into a whole, the way a mixed drink combines its ingredients to produce a single gustatory experience (the asymmetry between the six sensory tastes—sweet, sour, bitter, etc.—and the eight aesthetic tastes holds little interest for them). There may have been the incidental implication that rasa theory imparts “the ability to detect all the ingredients in a composition,” as Hume famously defined taste, but this was never directly stated, and the very relationship between knowing rasa theory and improving reading practices went largely unexamined.<sup>148</sup> Occasionally the image is extended to the “chewing over” required to get the full sense of a poem, the way sugarcane must be slowly chewed to extract its juice.<sup>149</sup> But generally speaking, the metaphor did no further work. In particular, Indian thinkers seemed unconcerned to explain the relationship, obscure on the face of it, between nonrational “taste” and the highly rational social and moral judgments in which the rasa experience of literature is meant to school the reader. Perhaps it was too obvious to them, and only modern Western readers feel the need for such an explanation, living as they do in a world where knowledge has become the preserve of reason alone, with the relationship between taste and moral judgment severed and the “aesthetic concept of morality” lost for good.<sup>150</sup>

Even more curious than the presence of the metaphor is the fact that a second great tradition of aesthetic analysis, at the start of the modern era, should have independently settled on the same way of expressing the response to art. True enough, for both traditions it would have been obvious that this response occurs initially at the experiential, even physical level, and only subsequently at an intellectual one. “Aisthēsis” in the radical Greek sense of the word, as a general term for this object of study—the “feeling” part of art—makes very good sense. But “taste”? Does it really offer a “natural” metaphor for the aesthetic sensibility, and if so, in what sense?<sup>151</sup> It may be only their vagueness that makes other metaphorical locutions for aesthetic experience, such as being “touched” or “moved,” any less curious. But on the face of it, to say, however figuratively, that taste is the medium of our interaction with art is no less strange than saying it is smell.

Unlike smell, taste admits of degrees; as a bodily sense it also has a more direct relationship with the object as well as with the object’s pleasure than the “distance” senses such as sight (we *like* tastes in a more intimate way than we *like* sights).<sup>152</sup> Though natural, it can in principle be improved with training, the sort of training that, in the case of artworks, aesthetics would hypothetically be able to provide (as we have seen, there is uncertainty about this in India). It can also be “acquired.” But additionally, taste seems to capture that special phenomenological truth formulated by Dufrenne. Feeling is embedded in the object no less than in the subject, and the viewer experiences feeling because affective quality belongs to the artwork; in the

same way, we have the taste of a thing only because the thing itself has taste, as it does not have sight. The long debate over rasa's location can be seen as a search for an understanding already gained by the metaphor itself—this is just what Abhinavagupta argued<sup>153</sup>—one not attained in the West until the rise of phenomenological aesthetics.

The use of the metaphor in European intellectual history seems to have begun with the Jesuit thinker Balthasar Gracian in the early seventeenth century, for whom taste functioned more as a moral category than an aesthetic one: it is possible to refine the taste as well as the mind; in taste begins the drawing of distinctions and hence social cultivation.<sup>154</sup> Taste became central to aesthetics, however, only when aesthetics was first invented as a discipline in the mid-eighteenth century, in a world where the hereditary prerogatives of aristocracy were weakening and judgment itself was becoming the foundation of a new society. Hume's concern, like that of many other eighteenth-century thinkers, was to establish a standard of taste in the face of subjective aesthetic sentiment, which he does by tracing the diversity of taste to a diversity in capacities to register what are, for him, objective qualities of beauty. His emphasis on judgment may set him apart from our Indian theorists; however subjective “taste” may seem to us, there was never any doubt for Indians that a single standard could apply.<sup>155</sup> Yet like them Hume holds that the cultivation of art is essentially the cultivation of moral awareness, though the process is very different in the two worlds. For Hume, passion is linked with taste; it is something to be disciplined by taste, which is the true source of happiness; art refines our feelings.<sup>156</sup> For Indian thinkers, the relationship of emotion to reason was in general a question of little philosophical interest, but neither was emotion something to be subordinated to or dominated by knowledge, as it was for Plato and most of his successors. And in any case, aesthetic pedagogy unfolds for Indians in a far more explicit manner: the viewer of a play becomes suffused “by the desire to attain the good and to avoid the bad,” as Abhinava puts it, and “he actually comes to do the one and to shun the other, given that he has now gained an understanding to this end.”<sup>157</sup>

What is most fundamentally constitutive of the Indian discourse on rasa, namely, the relationship between taste and social propriety (“The one thing that can impair rasa is impropriety,” says Anandavardhana. “Composing with customary propriety—that is rasa's deep secret”), is also most occluded, for the sources of social propriety lay far below the level of analysis. Propriety was simply a given.<sup>158</sup> This “misprediction” of the social determinants of judgment was largely the case in the West as well, until critique became a component of criticism and taste was identified as a marker of social status. The distinctions social subjects make—between the beautiful and the ugly, or whatever—serve to distinguish themselves (“Taste classifies, and it

classifies the classifier").<sup>159</sup> "Good taste," "bad taste," "tasteless": these are things for which we can easily provide Sanskrit translations (*sarasa*, *virasa*, *nirasa*, etc.), but the latter carry, or are permitted to carry, no hint of the social origins that would impugn their naturalness. Whereas the English term "taste" is always applied to the capacity of the social subject, the Sanskrit term is typically tied to the aesthetic object.

As for the Weberian account with which we started, not much is left. There was indubitably an autonomous domain of art in India before the coming of European modernity, one fully distinguished from the religious sphere. No Indian Arnold may have ever suggested that poetry could replace religion as a source of salvation, though Bhatta Nayaka came close. But it was only in the sixteenth century that thinkers claimed, or came close to claiming, religion could replace poetry. Before this, literature for Sanskrit thinkers was an affair of this world, and aesthetic theory was a way of making sense of how the world produced rasa, and rasa helped reproduce the world.

## 12. RASA PAST AND FUTURE

There is a proclivity in a certain strain of postcolonial thought to assert claims to conceptual priority: the precolony is always supposed to have preempted colonialism in its theoretical understanding of the world. This is demonstrated for classical Indian aesthetics by awarding it a kind of superior insight and universal applicability ("Rasa in Shakespeare" is the genre of study I have in mind). To understand rasa as a historical form of thought, however, as I try to enable the reader of this *Reader* to do, is to confront a theory clearly contingent on a nonmodern worldview and understanding of literary art. Its full conceptualization is intimately tied to a number of primary, uncontested, and largely nontransferable Indian presuppositions—about the threefold psychophysiology of Samkhya, for example, or the storage of memories of past lives, or even transmigration. That said, rasa theory does offer an account of widely shared mental processes and an analytic procedure that enable us here and now to think through more clearly and talk more precisely about features of our own aesthetic experience for which we have no ready-to-hand concepts or language. Even more fundamentally, it allows us to admit that we have such experiences in the first place.

For in fact, reading with emotion in the modern West was until recently viewed as a fallacy—indeed, it was called the "Affective Fallacy." Even before W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley coined the phrase in their well-known essay, René Wellek sought to proscribe the "emotive" criticism of literature, reducing it to "the labeling of works of art by emotional terms like 'joyful,' 'gay,' 'melancholy,' and so forth," and

denying that “even if we define these emotions as closely as we can, we are still quite removed from the specific object which induced them.” Emotion “has nothing to do with the actual object” of literary study; in addition, its analyses are unverifiable and cannot contribute to a “cooperative advance in our knowledge.”<sup>160</sup> For Wimsatt and Beardsley, attempting to understand what a poem is from what the poem does, far from being a route to overcome the obstacles to objective criticism, actually leads “away from criticism and from poetry” toward impressionism and relativism. What counts is referential meaning, not emotion: “It may well be that the contemplation of this object, or pattern of emotive knowledge, which is the poem, is the ground for some ultimate emotional state which may be termed the aesthetic. . . . But it is no concern of criticism, no part of criteria.”<sup>161</sup>

In the last decade there has been a growing unease with these grand dismissals.<sup>162</sup> Emotion, in literary criticism, philosophical aesthetics, and even social theory, is staging something of an insurgency, with the rise of an “affective turn” prompting new histories of the emotions, new studies of the emotions in history, and new cognitive theories of the emotions.<sup>163</sup> And here rasa theory and its history may have some role to play. The theory offers an acute dissection of the elements that produce—as they undeniably produce—emotion in the literary artwork, and a perceptive analysis of the psychological process of viewer or reader response, while the very disputes that marked the theory’s historical development contain a whole universe of enduring, contending assessments. In the best of cases it may even help us unlearn old modes of reading while gaining new ones, to better understand what it means to experience art and hence to be a full human being.