THIS IS NO LOTUS, IT IS A FACE:
POETICS AS GRAMMAR IN DANDIN’S INVESTIGATION
OF THE SIMILE

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1. Introduction

The notion that Sanskrit poetics, *alāṃkāraśāstra*, functions as a kind of grammar to the language of its accompanying literature, *kāvya*, should not come as a total surprise to the students of this tradition. As Sheldon Pollock has recently put it, the discipline’s premise is that “what makes *kāvya* different from everything else has essentially to do with language itself,” and that, hence, it focuses on exploring how “*kāvya* works as a specific language system.” Still, our understanding of the precise nature of this linguistic analysis and its internal logic is far from satisfactory, and many basic questions remain to be addressed. For instance, if Sanskrit poeticians are grammarians of sorts, what aspects of the poetic language do they set out to describe? The analysis of any language system may expand to include anything from phonology and morphology to syntax, semantics and pragmatics. It may also examine the way a specific culture interprets or makes reality. What of all these phenomena is the scope of *alāṃkāraśāstra*? Moreover, the specific language system of poetry is defined by its ability to please the readers. How does the linguistic analysis of *alāṃkāraśāstra* account for poetry’s aesthetic effect?

Speaking of a grammatical analysis of poetry, one has to bear in mind that we are dealing with a culture where grammar is a dominant intellectual tradition, if not the most paradigmatic of all systems of knowledge. This gives rise to another subset of questions. What exactly is the relationship between *alāṃkāraśāstra* and Pāṇini’s Grammar? Does it

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1 Pollock 2003, 46–47.
2 Thus while Arjunwadkar (1996, 23) claims that “no serious student of Sanskrit poetics can deny that in the absence of the foundations the Vaiyakaranas and the Mimamsakas have laid. Sanskrit theory of poetry would not have scaled the heights it undoubtedly has, particularly since Anandavardhana,” he hardly addresses the question of the grammatical nature of the poetic analysis.
form a mere extension of his project of fully describing his language to a more recent linguistic domain, namely poetry? Did poetics consider Pāṇinian categories to be beautiful in and of themselves? What is the relationship between the tools they developed and those provided by the grammarians?

It is these and similar questions that I intend to explore by closely examining a single passage from alamkāraśāstra's long history—Daṇḍin's investigation of the simile (upamā). The choice of this case study merits a brief explanation. Daṇḍin, a scholar and a poet who worked in South India sometime around the year 700 AD, represents a crucial moment in the evolution of his discipline. He and his near-contemporary Bhāmaha composed the earliest extant works on Sanskrit poetics. Previous scholarship did exist, but the fact that it did not survive, and that after Daṇḍin and Bhāmaha there is no reference to it, suggests that this lost corpus represented a relatively undeveloped stage of alamkāraśāstra. Apparently, there was no need to look back to such prior works once the treatises of Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin came to light, and the two, who may have been in conversation with one another, came to form a shared basis for thinkers to follow. It should thus be noted that despite the major shifts the tradition later underwent, many of the basic concepts of Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin proved to be extremely resilient.3

Daṇḍin's treatise itself, despite its falling out of favor in Kashmir—which between the ninth and thirteenth centuries was the Mecca of Sanskrit poetics—was a highly influential work that had a great impact on the literary cultures of Sri Lanka, the Indonesian archipelago, Tibet, and also on the vernacular literatures of the South Asian peninsula itself, such as Kannada and Tamil. And indeed, as I show elsewhere, later alamkāraśāstra recognized Daṇḍin's pivotal role, and there were those who tried to resurrect him as something of a founding father.4

II. The Simile and Daṇḍin's Discussion of It

The choice of Daṇḍin's simile section is not random. There is a growing awareness among Sanskritic literary thinkers that the simile (upamā) is the paradigmatic poetic ornament, or alamkāra—the major analytical category of the field which gave it its name.5 Thus Vāmana, about a century after Daṇḍin, labeled the simile the root (mūla) of all alamkāras, and selected for discussion only those ornaments which could be analyzed as offshoots of this root phenomenon (upamā-prapāṇcāh).6 The idea was further developed a few centuries later by Vidyācakravartin (c. 1300), who set out to show in detail how the proposition "your face is like the moon"—the stock example for similitude—stands at the basis of a vast host of poetic devices.7 Later, the great sixteenth century polymath Appayya Dīkṣīta, elegantly expressed the very same notion.8

Simile is the sole actress on the stage of poetry, and yet she performs a vast variety of roles.
When she dances
she captivates the hearts
of those who know her secret.

All types of poetic language are really the simile in disguise, and it is its capability of literary masquerading that accounts for poetic charm.

We will return below to this observation and its possible implications to our question of poetics as grammar. For now let us note that the notion of the simile's centrality to poetic charm is already suggested by the earliest extant works of Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin. For one thing, both allot the simile far more attention than any other figure. Moreover, Daṇḍin's specific placement of this figure in his book is particularly revealing. His Mirror of Poetry (Kāvyādāraśa) is dedicated primarily to the three traditional topics of Sanskrit poetics, namely poetic qualities (gunaś), faults (dosaś), and ornaments (alamkāras). Of the three, the latter is the main focus, which is not too surprising given Daṇḍin's unequivocal statement, coming to discuss the alamkāras, that these are the factors which make poetry pretty.9 Having said that, Daṇḍin moves to inventorize and analyze the alamkāras. The first figure he mentions is svabhāvaki, that

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3 On the temptation to assume direct correspondence between Daṇḍin and Bhāmaha see Gerow 1977, 228. On the resiliency of the old poetic categories see Pollock 2003, 42–3.
4 See Bronner 2002.
5 See also Gerow 1971, 35–7.
6 Kāvyālakṣaṇavrataśrītīr of Vāmana, 4.2.1 (introducory note to the sūtra); 4.3.1.
7 Alamkārāravavasā of Ruyyaka, p. 36.
8 Citramiṃmāsā of Appayya Dīkṣīta, p. 33: upamāikā śaṣai saṃpraptā citra-bhāmikā-bhedaṇ | rājyāvai kāvyā-rahe nṛtyanē tāv-vidānē cetaḥ || (All translations in this paper are mine.) Appayya goes on to compare the relationship between the simile and the rest of the figures to that of the absolute (brahman) and the phenomenal reality (ibid., p. 35). For more on his discussion see Bronner 2002.
9 Kāvyādāraśa of Daṇḍin 2.1: kāvyā-sobhā-kārān dharmān alamkārān.
is, speaking of things the way they are. Such detailed observations of the true nature of things are, as far as Sanskrit poetics is concerned, rather marginal to poetry. As Daṅḍin concludes, such factual descriptions of the nature of an entity—consisting of its genus, mode of action, characteristics, and particular appearance—have science as their kingdom, even though they may occur in poetry as well.\

So, having mentioned svabhāvokti as part of his catalogue of poetic devices, but really setting it aside, Daṅḍin now turns to the mainstream of poetic ornamentalism—the description of entities the way they are not. It is this counter-factual or "crooked" speech (vakrokti) that has poetry as its kingdom, and all the remaining alankāras are its instances. Daṅḍin later points out that all manifestations of crooked speech are enhanced by punning, thereby adding another distinction between them and realistic observations. It is this special language—counter-factual, crooked, punned—that forms the primary focus of the Mirror. About two-thirds of it, to be precise.

The possibilities of describing something other than the way it is are numerous, perhaps infinite. Of these, the tradition of Sanskrit poetics is particularly interested in descriptions of one entity as another, through similarity, identification, and the like. The most paradigmatic trope for such an expression of a thing not as itself but as another is, as we by now have come to expect, the simile. It is thus no wonder that having done away with the topic of naturalistic description, Daṅḍin immediately turns to the simile, quite possibly the "seed" (bijā) of all figurative phenomena to which he has earlier referred, and his discussion of the upamā is by far longer than that of any other figure.

All this suggests, then, the relevance of Daṅḍin's analysis of the simile to our question. To recapitulate: The things which make poetry beautiful are its ornamental elements, the alankāras. These have to do with a particular type of language, consisting almost exclusively of crooked or counter-factual statements, in particular those which connect between one entity and another. Daṅḍin seems to single out the simile—perhaps for the first time in the history of his tradition—as the quintessential alamkāra. Judging by both its placement and size, its treatment of this ornament is clearly meant to be exemplary. It is thus a perfectly suited case study to the question of the grammaticality of poetics.

Daṅḍin begins by defining the simile as: "a passage in which some palpable similitude is suggested in whatever manner." This seems more like an introduction into an extended discussion rather than a conclusive definition, and indeed, in what appears to be a direct comment on the open-endedness of the initial formulation, Daṅḍin immediately states his intention to "demonstrate the simile's vast phenomenology." We may identify three distinct parts in his discussion. First, he defines and illustrates thirty-two subtypes of the simile. Then he discusses possible defects, which hinder its aesthetic effect. Finally, there is an appendix-like list of language used for expressing similitude. Of the three sections, the first is the longest, and seems to be the most important, as it holds the key for what makes an expression of similitude pleasing. After all, the subtypes chosen must be those which Daṅḍin considered to create a special charm. Given the importance of this section, we shall keep our analysis of it at bay, and follow Daṅḍin's discussion from the middle, leaving our investigation of its first portion to the end.

III. The Defects of the Simile

The middle portion of Daṅḍin's discussion of the simile deals with factors that may obstruct its aesthetic effect. Daṅḍin is concerned here with comparisons between entities which disagree in gender, number, and hierarchical status. His main thrust is to show that such a dissonance need not necessarily hinder the aesthetic charm. The discussion is therefore framed by the question of what does not amount to a fault:  

10 Ibíd., 2.13:
ja-ta-kriya-guna-dravya-svabhavakhyam idam |
satrayasya samrajyam kayasya apy etad ipstitam ||

11 Ibíd., 2.360:
desah sarva vamati prayo vakrokti asi tasyam |
bhinnam avidha svabhavoktir vekriti ceti vayMayam ||

12 Ibíd., 2.1: kas tan kārtasyena vakṣyati?

13 This is the interpretation of all of the commentators, though other interpretations are, perhaps, possible.

14 51 verses are dedicated to the simile. The average for the remaining figures is about 10 verses each. The entire length of the Mirror is 657 verses.

15 Ibíd., 2.14:
yathā-katham-cit sākhyam yatrodhiham pratīyate |
upamā nāma tasyaḥ prapaśco 'yam pradarsīyate ||

16 Ibíd., 2.51:
na linga-vacane bhūme na hinādiḥkāti vā |
upamā-dīśanayālam yatrodveśo na dīmaṁ ||
Neither a disagreement of gender and number, nor a relationship of an inferior with a superior, suffice to flaw the simile, unless there is something [else] to disturb the wise.

There is nothing inherently wrong in comparing a male to a female, or between entities which belong to different natural and social hierarchies. On the contrary, sometimes such differences are the sole purpose of the analogy. One may wish to use the proposition of the simile precisely to say that a male behaves in a feminine manner, that a king follows a divine model, or that his bodily radiance resembles that of the sun. In such examples, asserts Daṇḍin, the charm of the simile is not even slightly effected by the discrepancy in gender and status.17 These are perfectly pleasing similes.

Nor is there any fault in a simile such as "you (singular) are dear to me like my life (plural)." Here, however, the underlying reason seems to be different, as the commentators explain. The word prāṇa, "breath," is inherently plural when used in the sense of "life," since a person is believed to have five life-breaths. So this is a plural noun which refers to a single, collective entity. This noun simply cannot appear in the singular when used in this sense. Likewise, the word dhanam, "wealth," is a collective noun and hence has a singular form even when compared to a plural entity as in the example: "the acquisition of various knowledges is like that of wealth." In this last example there is also a gender discrepancy, for all Sanskrit words for knowledge and intelligence are in the feminine while wealth is in the neuter. Here, unlike in the analogy between a man and a woman or king and god, the incongruity in number or gender seems quite incidental to the comparison. Still it is unavoidable, given the nature of the Sanskrit lexicon, and hence perfectly acceptable.18

There are, however, poetic passages where the wise would find incongruity in gender, number, and status to be troubling (udvega), and which are hence considered faulted. A poet is not supposed to say, for instance, "the moon (masculine) is like the (female) goose" or "heaven is similar to lakes." One should also avoid comparing a devoted servant to a dog, or a firefly to the sun. Why are these formulations to be avoided?

Daṇḍin explicitly declares his reluctance to address this question. "You have to figure out the reason for yourselves," he tells his readers. "The wise should discern between faults and flaws on their own."19

Despite Daṇḍin's indisposition to spell out his criteria, we can still make a few generalizations about them based on his positive and negative examples. One possible conclusion is that when gender and number are incidental to the poetic statement, the poet should avoid discrepancy whenever an alternative is easily available. Take the case of the moon and the female goose. We already know that there is nothing inherently wrong in comparing a male to a female. We should also note that it is perfectly normal, indeed conventional, to compare the moon to the goose, based on their whiteness, despite the otherwise recognizable differences between the winged creature and earth's satellite. Poetry, after all, is the kingdom of crooked speech (vakrokti), not of naturalistic descriptions of the moon as it is (svabhāvoktī). Yet the comparison of the moon to a female goose serves no poetic purpose. It is not the gender of the goose which gives rise to the similitude but its color. Nor does the language determine the use of the feminine. Geese come in both genders and the poet could have easily used a gender as his standard. Likewise, lakes have a perfectly common singular form in Sanskrit. In contrast to nouns such as prāṇāḥ or dhanam, which may appear only in the plural or singular respectively, or those words for knowledge which are inherently feminine, there is nothing here to restrict the lexical and morphological choice. Nonetheless, the poet sloppily introduced an irrelevant distinction, thereby unnecessarily spoiling the pleasing effect of the simile. All things being equal, one would like number and gender to be equal as well.

A second possible generalization is that when the distinction is not incidental but indeed purposeful, it is acceptable so long as it does not offend cultural concepts and codes. It is fine to compare a king to the gods, for both are related and take care of similar duties, whether on earth or in heaven. Juxtaposing a faithful servant with a dog, on the other hand, is too downgrading, and measuring up a firefly to the sun is simply over the top. Unlike the case of the moon and the goose, such

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17 Ibid., 2.54: saubhāgyam na jahāty eva jāttucit.
18 Ibid., 2.52 and the Hṛdayaṅgama commentary.
comparisons are not normative. As one of the commentators points out, comparing the servant to a close friend and the firefly to a lamp would have better suited Sanskrit’s poetic sensibilities. 20

All in all, Daṇḍin’s examples of the simile’s faults suffice to suggest that his analysis of poetic tongue has its roots in grammar, and is based on a grammatically-trained attention to categories such as number and gender. We may also note that in his listing of simile-related faults, social hierarchy naturally follows the grammatical. It is as if the social and moral orders form a mere extension of the grammatical order, a potentially more basic principal of organization of the world. Moreover, we know from his discussion elsewhere that ungrammatical use immediately qualifies as a poetic fault.21 But even beyond the question of correctness, grammar continues to play a role in obstructing or allowing poetic charm. For one has to be careful not to sloppily create a grammatical disharmony while in the process of creating a poetic harmonization, as in “the moon is like a goose.”

At the same time, it is precisely examples such as these which also allow us to realize that aesthetic judgment is not reducible to Paññinian grammar. After all, both the negative and the positive examples supplied by Daṇḍin are perfectly correct from the grammatical point of view. Poetic sensitivity clearly amounts to more than a grammarians ear, even if such an ear seems to be a prerequisite for making aesthetic judgments in the Sanskrit world. There is thus continuity and even partial overlap between the grammarians analysis and that of the poetician, but there is also a difference between the two. Yet the discussion of simile’s defects does not allow us to say more about this nuanced relationship, partly because Daṇḍin trusts his readers to be quite capable of making both grammatical and aesthetic judgments and sets out, it would seem, only to amend those fault-finding habits which he found too sweeping.

IV. The Language of Similitude

The last nine verses of Daṇḍin’s discussion of the simile survey the ways in which Sanskrit expresses similarity. The close relationship with the grammatical tradition is at once apparent. The observations of grammarians that similitude can be denoted by a specific set of particles (iva, etc.), suffixes (vat, etc.), words (tulya, etc.), and compounding techniques (e.g., bahu-vrthi, -kalpa, etc.), while using various syntactic structures (x is like y, x is on par with y, etc.), account for a significant portion of the list. It seems clear that such grammatical categories and insights are incorporated wholesale into the investigation of poetic tongue.

Yet we may also recognize in this last section of Daṇḍin’s discussion another layer of expressivity, one which is not a direct product of Paññinian analysis. Here there are words and structures which do not directly denote similitude but hint to it. Saying that one entity rivals, mocks, or steals the beauty of another, to give but a few examples, is to imply that it resembles it. Even the denial of a semblance between X and Y, argues Daṇḍin, may serve to indirectly affirm its existence.

What is worthy of note is that there is a division of labor between these two layers of expressivity, between expressions of similarity which are in the domain of grammar proper (particles, suffixes, compounding techniques, syntactical structures) and those which fall in the domain of pragmatics and suggestion (such as a negation suggesting affirmation, or rivalry hinting at similarity). For as we shall see, expressive means belonging in the first layer do not necessarily make for separate simile subtypes with distinct aesthetic flavors (as in the initial portion of Daṇḍin’s simile discussion). One may say that a face is like the moon, or moon-like (using a nominal ending), or speak of the moon-face (using a compound), or describe the face as equivalent to the moon, comparable to it, parallel to it, on a par with it, reaching its status, and being of the same type, form, color, or kind as it (using a variety of lexical items and syntaxes). All of these possibilities require mention in Daṇḍin’s appendix-like list of “words expressing similitude.” But none is worthy of mention as responsible for a unique kind of simile.

The words in the appendix’s other layer, however, are treated differently. For instance, as soon as we say that the moon is the “rival”, “competitor” or even the “enemy” of the face, or that the face “outdoes”, “mocks” or “defeats” the moon, we immediately enter the domain of distinctive simile types, wherein similitude is conjured on the basis of the notion of rivalry or some kind of an evaluative comparison. Such vocabulary, when properly used, amounts to a unique kind of simile-making, with a unique aesthetic effect, and hence merits classification as an independent category of this poetic ornament.

Thus, even in this innocent looking appendix to Daṇḍin’s discussion, we find an analytical program which is at once continuous with and distinct from the grammatical analysis proper. We still need to understand

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20 Ibid., 2.56, cf. the Ratnasiri commentary.
how both layers of expressivity get combined in Dandin's vision of the simile, if not in his analytical project at large. The key to these questions may be found in the first portion of his discussion, to which we shall now turn.

V. Simile and the Intertextual Grammar of Poetry

As mentioned above, Dandin lists thirty-two varieties of the simile, for each of which he offers a brief definition and an example. The illustrations are highly uniform in their use of poetic materials. With only a few exceptions all compare a small set of female body parts, the face in particular, to a very limited list of natural objects, primarily the lotus and the moon. Dandin says nothing about this choice—why the face is worthy of being the subject of comparison, and why the lotus and moon are chosen as its standards. The cultural and aesthetic value of such conventions is taken for granted. It is not the notion that face and moon may be seen as similar that is of interest to him, but rather the ways poets manipulate language to express it in a particularly charming manner. What, then, characterizes his analysis of the various simile subtypes and their distinctive aesthetic flavors?

A central feature of Dandin's analysis is its attention to the propositional structure of any given simile. Take the following categories as an example. Dandin's first simile subtype is dharmopama, namely a simile in which the shared characteristic (dharmas) is explicitly mentioned. The example is: "your palm is red-hued like the lotus." This generic formulation is immediately followed by its mirroring category, vastupama. Here the entities (vastus) alone are explicitly mentioned whereas the shared characteristic is implied (pratityamana). For instance: "your face is like the lotus," or "your eyes are like dark water lilies." Here radiance is understood as shared by the face and the lotus, and a dark hue by the lily and the eye. These are followed by the "inverted" (viparyasa) simile, where the order of the proposition is reversed ("The blooming lotus is like your face"), and the "mutual" (anyonya) simile, where the basic formulation is repeated both ways ("the lotus is like your face, your face

23 Kavyadarsia of Dandin 2.15:
   ambeho-ratam ivatamrān mugdhie kara-talam tava
   iti dharmopamā sāksāt tulya-dharma-nidarsanāt

24 Ibid., 2.17–18.
25 Ibid., 2.21; 2.40.
26 Ibid., 1.2: pūrvātāstrāni samhṛtya prayogāni upalakṣya ca
27 Ibid., 2.18: anyonyokara-sambhini. In later tradition this is often taken as an independent dhanapraka, the purpose of which is the exclusion of any third entity from the relationship of similarity.

is like the lotus"). Then there is the "aggregate" (samuccaya) simile, where there is more than one shared characteristic ("Your face follows the moon not just in radiance, but also in its capability of delighting"), and the "plural" (bahu) simile, where a single tenor is compared to a whole list of standards ("Your touch is as soft as sandal-paste, moonlight, moonstone, and the like"). All these subtypes are summarized abstractly in Table 1, using X for tenor, Y for the standard of comparison, and Z for the shared characteristic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simile Subtype</th>
<th>Propositional Structure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dharmas (characteristic)</td>
<td>X is like Y in that both are Z.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vastus (entity)</td>
<td>X is like Y (Z implied)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>viparyasa (inverted)</td>
<td>Y is like X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anyonya (mutual)</td>
<td>X is like Y, Y is like X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>samuccaya (aggregate)</td>
<td>X is like Y in that both are Z1+Z2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bahu (plural)</td>
<td>X is like Y1, Y2, Y3, etc., in that all are Z</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The six abstracted formulas in the right column of Table 1 should suffice to underscore Dandin's charting of structural factors, such as the order of the proposition (standard, reversed, or both, repeated in rotation, as in anyonya simile) or the possible value of its variables (singular, plural, or nil, as in the case of Z in vastus simile). Here is a formal linguistic analysis of the poetic language of similitude, indeed a grammar. It is a descriptive grammar, for it is based, at least partly, on observation of the poetic practice, as the author himself elsewhere testifies. Yet it is also prescriptive, for as already mentioned, it lists and hence recommends only those formulations believed to carry a unique aesthetic flavor. Dandin rarely specifies the distinct charm of each subtype, but occasionally he does hint at it. Thus we are told that the "mutual" simile (X is like Y, Y is like X) highlights an outstanding mutuality of the entities, a reciprocal relationship which is particularly strong; later writers understood this to imply the exclusion of any additional entity. Similarly the
plurality of standards in the “plural” simile (X is like Y1, Y2, Y3, etc.) highlights the outstanding quality of the tenor, the softness of the lover’s touch in Daṇḍin’s example.29

So here is one way of understanding Daṇḍin’s poetics as grammar. Within the confines of literary convention, the author maps and formally analyzes the various propositional varieties of expressing similitude, for which, as we have seen, he later charts the necessary vocabulary (what we identified as the first layer of his appended list). All subtypes exemplified above are variations and permutations on the basic formula “your palm is red-hued like the lotus,” or X is like Y in both are Z, and it is this variation that is being meticulously demonstrated.

Daṇḍin’s meditation on the simile is, however, by no means limited to purely structural factors. Many of his thirty-two subtypes convey similitude quite differently. Take, for instance, the following three illustrations:29

Is this a lotus inhabited by a pair of restless bees?
Or is it your face, containing a pair of playful eyes?
My mind constantly wavers.

The luster of the lotus simply cannot shame the moon,
For, after all, the moon has it defeated every evening.29
This therefore must be nothing but your face.

This is no lotus; it is a face indeed.
These two are not bees but eyes.

These expressions bear no formal similarity to those we have seen in Table 1 above. They do not contain any direct reference to similarity. X is not said to be like Y. As their names imply, these statements follow not the propositional structure of a simile but rather those of doubt (samśaya), conclusion (or resolution of doubt, nirṇaya), and factual communication (tattvākhyaṇa). It is only through conjecture mediated by cultural and literary expectations that we realize that the speaker intends to express the familiar and basic formula of similitude. We recognize that it is the particularly conspicuous resemblance (vispaṣṭa-sādṛṣya) of face and lotus, or eyes and bees, that leads the poet to experience doubt about the identity of the entity he is facing, reach a correct conclusion regarding its identity, or, in the final example, feel a need to spell it out.

What allows for the charm here is not merely the structure of the proposition. There is nothing inherently pretty in an expression of an epistemological doubt, or in a plain syllogism, which is what the second example really consists of. Otherwise, the entire literature on logic too would be considered poetry, something nobody wishes to claim. Likewise, there is no particular aesthetic pleasure in describing reality as it is (tattvākhyaṇa). In fact, we have seen Daṇḍin argue that this kind of expressivity is quite incidental to the main project of poetry, which is the description of things not the way they are. The effect lies rather in the fact that these statements serve as various masks for the simile, each with its distinct camouflage and unique charm. What readers cherish in such statements is poetic language in disguise.

It may be more useful, then, to think of Daṇḍin’s vision of poetic language as richly intertextual, and of his linguistic analysis as a grammar of intertextual relationships.30 There is the basic, generic formula, for instance “your palm is red-hued like the lotus.” This statement forms the deep structure of the entire gamut of similitude. It is considered pretty in and of itself, but at the same time generic, worn out and, hence, perhaps, preferably relegated to an intertext from whence it could be activated. The vast majority of the possible expressions of similitude are not identical to it but refer to it. This is done either through structural permutations of the proposition itself, as we have seen above, or through a whole set of different propositions which resort to vocabulary of rivalry (X has Y defeated), relative evaluation (X is prettier than Y), doubt (is this X or is this Y?), certainty (this must be X), and so forth. Each of these colors the relationship of similitude in a slightly distinctive manner, but all activate the same basic formula: X is like Y.

Indeed, it is typical of Daṇḍin that the intertextual relations are intricate, and build one upon the other in growing orders. For instance, the assertion “This is no lotus; it is a face indeed” possibly refers first to some logical reasoning in the intertext, such as the syllogism supplied by the nirṇaya example (“The luster of the lotus simply cannot shame the

29 Ibid., 2.40: atisayam prathayatit.
29 Ibid., 2. 26-7, 36: kām padmaṁ antar-bhrāntāṁ kīṁ te lokeṣāṁ mukhāṁ
mama dolayate cittum itiṣyam samśayopāna || na padmasyādu-nigrāhasyādu-lajaśa-kari aśvayaḥ ||
atas ivvan-mukhāṁ evādāṁ ity asau nirṇayopāna ||
na padmaṁ mukhāṁ evādāṁ na bhrīgaṁ ca kacṣuṣi ime ||
iti vispaṣṭa-sādṛṣyaḥ tattvākhyaṇopānaṁ sa ||

29 The lotus closes as the moon rises.

30 In my use of the term intertextuality I follow Culler 1981.
moon...). This conclusion, in turn, clearly necessitates an intertextual doubt, supplied by the previous samśaya example (“My mind constantly wavers”). It is only the doubt that directly activates a deeper intertextual layer, namely “your face is like a lotus.”

Take another set of three examples:32

The hundred-petaled lotus, the annual moon, and your face—
are a triumvirate of mutual enemies.

Never ever will the moon, dotted and frigid,
be able to overcome your face.

Your face is marked by the eyes of a doe;
the moon has the whole deer as its mark.
Even so, it only equals your face;
by no means can it surpass it.

The first illustration asserts a relationship or rivalry between three entities: the lotus with its hundred petals, the moon in the autumn, when the sky is clear and the lunar view most glorious, and the face of one’s beloved. The example does not follow the proposition of similitude. Nonetheless, the assertion of competition clearly implies and hence activates the intertextual notion that the face is comparable to the moon and the lotus, at their best.35 The second example, which states the superiority of the face over the moon, already necessitates the previous statement of their being rivals, and through it, implies their similarity. Finally, the last example comes a full way around. Within the framework of rivalry, the outstanding flaw of the moon-competitor, a deer-shaped mark which spoils its otherwise splendid shape, is now disguised, tongue-in-cheek, as an ‘advantage.’ The face, for its part, is in a seeming state of disadvantage, as it possesses a much smaller mark of the deer—its eyes. In essence, possessing eyes like that of a doe highly enhances the face’s beauty, while the big spot dotting the surface of the

moon is clearly a liability. So while the lover concludes that the face and the moon are on par, he implies that the face is prettier. The statement is thus clever (cātu) flattery, and also a complex act of poetic disguise. Similitude is concealed as a rivalry, in which the face clearly has the upper hand, which in turn is concealed as similitude, wherein the two entities are said to be level with one another. It is Danḍin’s wording and ordering of his examples which allow us to appreciate the full richness and intertextual density of this last poetic expression.34

The principle object of Danḍin’s analysis thus seems to be the process of masking and revealing the basic notion of similitude, which in its barest form rarely appears “on stage.” Each mask has its relationship with the basic form, be it propositional or notional, direct or indirect, and there seems to be a special favoring of complex series of disguises of the sort we have exemplified above. It is, perhaps, this very vision of poetic analysis that Appayya Dikṣīta, almost a thousand years later, extended to the role of simile in the entire “theater of poetic language,” as we saw in the beginning of this paper.

VI. Concluding Remarks

Above we sampled from the discussion on just one alaṃkāra, albeit a particularly important one, which is analyzed at unusual length in what appears to be a formative moment for the discourse of poetics. Obviously, there are limits to what we can generalize from this study, yet it may throw some light on the project of the alaṃkāra tradition, at least at this early stage.

We have seen that alaṃkāraśāstra is, in many ways, continuous with the grammatical tradition. First, it requires a mastery of Pāṇinian grammar as a prerequisite for the study of both poetics and poetry, and builds upon a great sensitivity to grammatical forms such as case, number, and gender endings, various compounding techniques, syntactic structures, and even different phonemes and their distinct qualities. More specifically, this is a sensitivity to possible harmony or disharmony among and between these various parts of speech. In short, alaṃkāraśāstra necessitates not only a grammarian’s knowledge but also a grammarian’s ear.

32 Kāvyādarśa of Danḍin 2. 33–35: 
śata-patram śara-candrass tavānānam iti trayam 
paraspara-virodhītā śa vrohīḥpāmā matā ||
nu jāti sakir indos te mukhena pratīyāyitum ||
kalankino ādhyāvyāt pratisdhepamākāva śa ||
mrgaśaṇānām te vaktam mrgeṇvānākiṁtyā śaśi ||
thāhāpi sama evāsā nōtārśiti caṭāppamā ||

35 In fact, it possibly activates this basic intertext indirectly, through the “plural” simile mentioned in Table 1.

34 This rich intertextual structure of figuration is seen elsewhere in Danḍin’s work. See, for example, his set of illustrations for vyātrikā (Kāvyādarśa 2.178–183); cf. Bronner 1999, 280–1.
trained to discern the elements of the human tongue and appreciate their combinations.

Furthermore, there is some overlap between the concerns and practices of the two traditions. Like its older sibling, *alaṃkāraśāstra*’s main focus is linguistic. It charts poetic language and studies the way it works. This analysis, of course, involves various evaluative judgments, such as the idea that comparing a face to the moon or to a lotus is pleasing. Yet the tradition, at least at this stage, rarely sets out to explore its own aesthetic assumptions. These are mostly taken for granted. The theorists tend rather to survey, in a manner closely reminiscent of Paninian grammar, the poetic vocabulary of *alaṃkāra* such as the simile, or the possible mismatch of genders, numbers, etc., between the compared entities. In doing so, the poets follow the dual trajectories of the grammarians, namely describing and prescribing the use of language.35

Yet *alaṃkāraśāstra* developed an independent analysis of poetic expressivity, its own grammar. Within cultural values and rules of proper use of language, writers like Daṇḍin charted the varieties of “crooked speech.” In our little sample of similitude we have seen this exploration operating on two seemingly separate levels. One is a highly formal analysis of the proposition of the simile (X is like Y) and its possible permutations; the other a survey of various propositions which may serve to suggest the same underlying formula. We saw that each has its own vocabulary in Daṇḍin’s appendix-like section. So it is possible to see a tension between these two analytical levels. One could say, for instance, that the first is more directly influenced by grammar, while the latter is linked more closely to the tradition of logic (think, for instance, of the labels of some the figures in this category: *samśaya*, *nirnaya*, *hetu*, etc.). Alternatively, one could maintain that within a linguistic approach, the former represents an orientation toward semantics and syntax, whereas the latter is more concerned with pragmatics. One clear indication of this tension in later tradition is the growing attention to the place of suggestion in the *alaṃkāra* system and the distinction, insisted on by many later thinkers, between expressed figures and those which are suggested.

But it may well be that in its earlier stages the theory was more holistic. What some may view as a tension between formal and notional varieties of the simile, or between explicit and suggestive subtypes, may have emanated from a unified analysis of poetic speech. Note that Daṇḍin by no means distinguishes between “layers” of analysis, he presents them mixed together. Moreover, each sub-variety may necessitate both levels of analysis. For instance, we have seen that the “mutual” (*an-yonya*) simile, clearly defined as a propositional variation on the basic formula of similitude (rotation in revised order: X is like Y, Y is like X) also involves a suggestion of a uniquely close relationship between the two entities. At the same time, while a statement of “rivalry” (*virodha*) between the lotus, moon, and face clearly suggests a semblance, it too is fully susceptible to the formal analysis of the type we have seen in Table 1. X can be said to be the rival of Y, or of Y1 and Y2 (as in the case of Daṇḍin’s example), while Z may or may not be mentioned.

So what we are perhaps looking at is a unified vision of poetic language as involving various formal and suggestive operations, as well as others operations such as the bitextual (*iḷaṃga*), which work hand in hand to mask and reveal a single basic notion such as the similarity of face and moon. For what is at the heart of this intertextual grammar of poetry is the idea that poetic charm lies in language’s repertoire of disguises, wherein each has its own specific charm though there is, perhaps, a special delight in complex disguises of growing orders (e.g.: A disguised as B disguised as C, or A disguised as B disguised as A). The role of a thinker like Daṇḍin is to chart the various disguises (occasionally pointing to what is charming about them, and warning against slowness in their crafting), and in doing so to suggest the intertextual relations they imply.

Note that the larger object of Daṇḍin’s study is the richly interconnected field of *vakrokti*, for which we can now suggest an unusual interpretation. This speech is “crooked” not only in the sense of its truth value but also in its mode of reference. It is not of direct referentiality, as in the more scientific-oriented *svabhāva*. Rather it refers indirectly (*vakra*), or reflexively, to another speech found in an intertext, or even to a series of utterances. And it is this mode of expressivity, a whole web of indirectness, that early *alaṃkārika* sisters like Daṇḍin set out to chart.

A lot changed in the study of the simile in the centuries following Daṇḍin. Many of his simile subtypes were later seen as independent *alaṃkāra*.36 And, as already noted, there developed a clear distinction

35 On this dual trajectory in grammar see, for example, Houwen 1997 and Pollock 1985.
36 On the potential of *iḷaṃga* in poetic disguise see Bronner 1999, 475–6.
37 For instance *samśaya*, or anyonya, later known as upamecyopana.
in later literature between explicit similes and suggested ones. But these may be viewed as relatively minor changes. It is possible to argue that the basic analysis of crooked referentiality of the simile has not only remained intact, but has also been extended to chart larger webs of intertextuality, among the various alamkāras. Indeed, this may be one way to characterize the theoretical thrust of thinkers like Ruyyaka, Appayya Dikṣīta, and others, though this remains to be proved by further research.

References

Primary Texts


Secondary Texts


The Performance of Writing in Western China

Martin Kern

I. The Imperial Vision of Chinese Writing

It is not difficult to find any number of utterances pointing to the superior cultural, social, and political status of writing in Chinese civilization. Toward the end of the first century BCE, two centuries after the establishment of the Chinese imperial state, writing began to assume a supreme status of cultural expression on various levels: it was seen as the most reliable form to transmit and interpret the traditional canon; it became the medium to proclaim a normative version of the canon by carving it into large stone stelae that were then erected outside of the imperial academy or in other prominent locations; it served the needs of the imperial bureaucracy and its class of court-appointed scholars who formed and guarded the textual heritage in the newly established imperial library; and it became interpreted as a manifestation of patterns of cosmic order.

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1. Apparently, the first to have claimed the superiority of the "ancient script" (guwen 古文) classics over their more recent "modern script" (jinwen 今文) counterparts was Liu Xin 刘熙 (d. 23). He considered the guwen texts more reliable than their jinwen counterparts because they had been received in writing and were not just recently transcribed from oral tradition; see Hanshu 1987, 36.1968–1971.

2. The traditional ("Confucian") canon was first carved into stone (and erected outside the imperial academy) in the late second century ce and then repeatedly through later imperial dynasties; for a partial list of these occasions, see Nylan 2001, 48–49.


4. In Eastern Han times (25–220), the key document expressing this idea is Xu Shen's 謝灌的 postface to his dictionary Shuowen jiezi 読文解字; see Shuowen jiezi 1988, chapter 15. For the development of the early mythology of the script as it culminated in Xu Shen's text, see Boltz 1994, 129–155; Lewis 1999, 241–287. While building especially on the "Appended Changes" (Yijing 《易經》), a late Warring States text associated with the Classic of Changes (Yijing 易經) that derives the formation of the divinatory trigrams and hexagrams from cosmic patterns, the Shuowen postface adds decidedly to this mythology by extending it to the writing system.