

To Be or Not to Be Śiśupāla: Which Version of the Key Speech in Māgha's Great Poem Did He Really Write?

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1. INTRODUCTION

Imagine that the famous soliloquy in act 3 of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* existed in two completely different versions, in only one of which Hamlet is in doubt about the value of existence and action; in the hypothetical alternate version Hamlet would express his full confidence about the right mode of being and behaving. Had such a radical divergence existed in the text of Shakespeare's most famous play, this fact would certainly not have gone unnoticed. Careful scholarly attention and probably many monographs would have been devoted to the study of this textual problem: to examining the variants and their provenances, to determining, if possible, which of the two soliloquies is original or more authentic, and to explaining how the other version came to be included in the text. Scholars would not have limited their attention to text-critical studies of this one passage but would certainly have explored its connection to the larger work of which it forms a part. The question of which version best fits the style and structure of the play, its development, and the character of its protagonist would certainly have been considered and might well have been a key issue, if not the key issue, in *Hamlet* studies.¹

In fact, just such a divergence exists in one of the best-known and most celebrated works of the Sanskrit poetic canon, Māgha's *Śiśupālavadha* (The Killing of Śiśupāla), written probably in the late-seventh or early-eighth century. At the key moment in the story, when the titular antagonist Śiśupāla directly challenges Kṛṣṇa, the poem's divine hero, the work splits into two versions. In one version Śiśupāla's speech, one of the most scathingly blasphemous tirades in the history of Sanskrit literature, derides Kṛṣṇa in no uncertain terms. In the other version his speech contains two simultaneous registers of meaning: one denounces Kṛṣṇa in similar terms, but the other actually praises him resoundingly as the Supreme God. It is hard to believe, but this total divergence has received virtually no scholarly attention. Many

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1. In fact, the soliloquy does exist in significantly different printed versions (although all are basically similar in theme), and the divergences among these versions have indeed long been a serious focus of interest for researchers working on the play. For example, see Lewis F. Mott, "The Position of the Soliloquy 'To Be or Not to Be' in *Hamlet*"; Henry David Gray, "The First Quarto 'Hamlet'"; Bastiaan Adriaan Pieter van Dam, *The Text of Shakespeare's Hamlet*; Elmer Edgar Stoll, "'Hamlet' and the 'Spanish Tragedy' Quartos I and II: A Protest"; Levin Ludwig Schücking, *The Meaning of Hamlet*; Leo Kirschbaum, "The Sequence of Scenes in *Hamlet*"; Alex Newell, "The Dramatic Context and Meaning of Hamlet's 'To Be or Not to Be' Soliloquy"; and Vincent F. Petronella, "Hamlet's 'To Be or Not to Be' Soliloquy: Once More unto the Breach."

(although not all) editors of the poem, both premodern and modern, were aware of this textual split and often included both versions of the speech in their editions, but very rarely did they even bother to comment about it, let alone voice an opinion about the authenticity of either version and its significance.² As for secondary scholarship, the very existence of this divergence has, with only one exception, been completely overlooked.³

This neglect, stunning though it may seem, is symptomatic of the way in which studies of Sanskrit poetry, and in particular the flagship genre of *mahākāvya*, have been carried on since the dawn of modern Indology some two and a half centuries ago. This is a field where questions of the integrity of whole works, consistency of character, and the development of the plot have rarely been asked and in some cases have been explicitly dismissed as irrelevant. But as we intend to show here, a serious consideration of the textual problem at hand necessitates consideration of what should be major questions in the study of Sanskrit literature, if not, in fact, literature as such. Broadly, our queries can be divided into three categories. The first concerns the kind and degree of integrity we should look for in a whole narrative poem: How consistent should we expect characters to be in their psychology and their actions, and to what degree does the plot revolve around their meaningful development? To what extent should the individual verses and episodes be viewed as parts of a well-designed narrative structure? And can particular poems be recognized as bearing throughout a distinctive individual style? The second category of questions relates to the culture of the transmission of Sanskrit literature: How were Sanskrit poems received and reproduced by redactors, copyists, commentators, and literary connoisseurs? What capacities and liberties did editors and commentators have, and what were the discursive rules governing editorial decisions? More specifically, what role did censorship play in the transmission and consumption of *kāvya* poetry, for example, when speaking and ill-speaking about God? The third category concerns our own critical and editorial practices: How should we decide the authenticity of a contested passage, if this is indeed what we should be trying to do? And what role should our own literary and aesthetic judgments play in our reconstruction of the text? Obviously, we cannot fully explore all these questions in a single article devoted to one specific textual problem, significant though it may be. Still, we hope that by bringing this problem to light and trying to resolve it, we can at least begin to address these questions and, we hope, generate more discussion about them.

We will begin by situating the episode of Śiśupāla's verbal attack on Kṛṣṇa in the larger context of the poem. Then we will examine each of the two versions of the speech in detail, after which we will weigh them against one another and attempt to reach a judgment that tentatively accounts for the development of this textual split.

2. MĀGHA'S POEM

Māgha's *Śiśupālavadhā* is based on an episode from the second book of the *Mahābhārata* (2.33–42). During the royal consecration (*rājasūya*) of Yudhiṣṭhira, the oldest of the five brothers who are the main protagonists of the epic, the question arises as to who should be the ceremony's guest of honor. On the recommendation of Yudhiṣṭhira's great-uncle Bhīṣma, the family elder, the honor is given to Kṛṣṇa. This choice surprises and offends many of the

2. Eugen Hultsch, who translated the text into German in 1926, was also aware of this divergence but felt no need to address it. Hultsch did not publish an edition of the text but based his translation on his own combination of existing printed versions and a transcript of a manuscript from Kashmir, as we explain below.

3. The one exception is Wilhelm Rau, who dealt with this matter in his still-unpublished 1949 doctoral dissertation, as we discuss in section 7.

kings of the world who have gathered to attend the sacrifice, since Kṛṣṇa is not a king and, in fact, is of very humble social origins. One king in particular, Kṛṣṇa's cousin and bitter personal rival Śiśupāla, stands up to challenge Yudhiṣṭhira's choice. Angry speeches from both sides follow. Bhīṣma defends his recommendation, claiming that Kṛṣṇa is no ordinary mortal but, in fact, the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu incarnate, a claim that Śiśupāla ridicules. At this point Śiśupāla and a large group of kings threaten to walk out, which will effectively spoil the sacrifice, a ritual enactment of Yudhiṣṭhira's imperial authority. At this point Kṛṣṇa decapitates Śiśupāla in midsentence, using his discus. This settles the question, and the other kings allow the ceremony to continue unimpeded.

We should note that like Kṛṣṇa, Śiśupāla too is no ordinary man, as Bhīṣma explains during the exchange. Śiśupāla was born with four arms and three eyes, and a disembodied voice prophesied that whoever caused him to gain a normal human appearance would also one day kill him. Along with other members of the family, Kṛṣṇa comes to see the newborn, and when the baby is placed on Kṛṣṇa's lap, his additional arms and eye disappear. In view of the prophecy, Śiśupāla's mother begs Kṛṣṇa to forgive any offenses Śiśupāla may commit against him. Kṛṣṇa promises that he will tolerate up to one hundred death-worthy misdeeds (*Mbh* 2.40.22). When Kṛṣṇa decapitates Śiśupāla, presumably after his hundredth transgression, a great light arises from Śiśupāla's headless corpse and enters the body of Kṛṣṇa. Bhīṣma, who again seems particularly well informed about such matters, explains that this is actually a portion of divine energy that Kṛṣṇa had wished to recover (*Mbh* 2. 37.11, 2.42.3, 2.42.22–24).

Māgha's magisterial poem greatly expands on this episode. It begins with the fiery descent to earth of a divine messenger, Nārada, who comes to tell Kṛṣṇa that he must destroy a threat to the world: the demon Hiranyakaśipu, whom Viṣṇu first destroyed when he took on his man-lion incarnation, and who then was reborn as the demon Rāvaṇa (whom Viṣṇu killed during his incarnation as Rāma), has once again taken birth, this time as Śiśupāla. Kṛṣṇa, the current incarnation of Viṣṇu, must now destroy him for the good of the world. Kṛṣṇa promises to do so, and Nārada returns to heaven. Kṛṣṇa next confers with his closest advisers and kin: should he leave at once to kill Śiśupāla, or should he go to attend Yudhiṣṭhira's sacrifice, to which he has been invited and which is about to take place? Kṛṣṇa decides to attend the sacrifice instead of pursuing Śiśupāla.⁴ His leisurely journey to Yudhiṣṭhira's city is described at great length and takes up nearly half of Māgha's great poem. Then the poet recounts Yudhiṣṭhira's sacrifice, at which, fortuitously, Śiśupāla appears and openly challenges Kṛṣṇa's preferment, opening the way for a direct confrontation.

Śiśupāla stands up in the assembly and delivers a long speech attacking Kṛṣṇa. This is the key speech that exists in two completely different versions and forms the main subject of this article. Following it, Bhīṣma insultingly challenges any king who wishes to dispute the honoring of Kṛṣṇa, at which point Śiśupāla and the kings allied with him storm out in anger and both sides prepare for battle. Śiśupāla now sends an envoy to Kṛṣṇa with a dual message, pleading for peace while threatening war. These two messages are presented in a "bitextual" form (*śleṣa*)—a single text that can be interpreted to convey two different, in this case opposite, meanings.⁵ After some deliberation, Kṛṣṇa's advisers conclude that the real import of Śiśupāla's message is hostile and humiliating, and war is inevitable. A battle

4. On Kṛṣṇa's decision not to seek immediate confrontation, see Lawrence McCrea, "Conquest of Cool: Theology and Aesthetics in Māgha's Śiśupālavadhā."

5. For a discussion of the messenger's speech, see Yigal Bronner, *Extreme Poetry: The South Asian Movement of Simultaneous Narration*, 78–82, and also section 7 below.

ensues, and in the end Kṛṣṇa decapitates Śiśupāla with his discus, this time on the battlefield rather than in the assembly hall.⁶

3. THE EXISTING VERSIONS

As we have already pointed out, Māgha's *Śiśupālavadhā* is one of the most cherished and celebrated works ever written in Sanskrit. It circulated widely throughout the subcontinent and was commented on many times; a great number of manuscripts and more than thirty commentaries are preserved in libraries all over South Asia.⁷ These numerous testimonia of the poem are remarkably similar, showing for the most part only minor variations in wording. The one exception to this otherwise close agreement regarding the text of the poem is the key passage we have already identified, namely, Śiśupāla's public denunciation of Kṛṣṇa in chapter 15. Here the differences are dramatic and, in the case of the best-known versions of the poem, total. These versions are represented by the two best-known and only published commentaries on the poem. One is by Vallabhadeva, who worked in Kashmir around the beginning of the tenth century; the other is by Mallinātha, who worked in fourteenth-century Āndhra. The two completely different versions of Śiśupāla's speech that are embodied in their commentaries cannot be the result of scribal error or some other form of ordinary textual mutation. Rather, each of the two is a coherent and well-formed composition of roughly the same length (thirty-four verses in Vallabhadeva's version, twenty-six in Mallinātha's), written to serve a distinctive literary purpose.

Vallabhadeva's version of the poem as it is found in Kashmir has the speech that can be read to convey either blame or praise. By contrast, Mallinātha comments on the oration that is unequivocally accusatory. These two versions are completely exclusive of each other. Not only does each of the commentators explicate his version of the speech alone, but neither shows any overt awareness of the version accepted by the other. These two starkly opposed renditions, however, represent the poles of a rather messy continuum. This is reflected both in the transmission of the poem itself, many manuscripts of which contain both speeches, and sometimes in the transmission of the commentaries as well. In particular, manuscripts purporting to contain the commentary of Vallabhadeva actually exist in two radically distinct recensions, one of which, represented by the Śāradā manuscripts of Kashmir, contains only the text of and commentary on the bitextual speech, while the other, found commonly in Devanāgarī manuscripts outside Kashmir, contains the text and commentary for both speeches. Despite this divergence, it seems clear to us that the Kashmiri version truly represents the work of Vallabhadeva, that the Devanāgarī recension is the product of a larger trend to produce a maximally inclusive or agglutinative version of the poem, as we will explain below, and that therefore the commentary on the accusatory speech was not written by Vallabhadeva.⁸

6. In the southern recension of the *Mahābhārata*, the Śiśupāla episode is quite close to Māgha's. In several long passages that are not included in the critically edited text (*Mbh*, vol. 2, appendix 1, nos. 20–22, 24–26), it is said that Śiśupāla is an incarnation of Hiraṇyakaśipu and Rāvana; a divine message from Nārada is reported; and, as in Māgha's version, Śiśupāla is killed on the battlefield. It is possible that Māgha was familiar with this version of the epic and used it when composing his poem, but it seems more likely to us that the southern recension of the *Mahābhārata* was reworked to reflect the influence of Māgha's celebrated poem.

7. We are grateful to S. Dash for sharing with us the relevant page from the relevant forthcoming volume of the *New Catalogus Catalogorum* (S. Dash, personal communication, May 2011).

8. Note that Dominic Goodall and Harunaga Isaacson argue in general for the authenticity and greater reliability of the Kashmiri manuscripts of Vallabhadeva over those in Devanāgarī, and not simply on geographic grounds (*The Raghupāñcikā of Vallabhadeva*, vol. 1, xxii–xxv).

4. THE BITEXTUAL VERSION OF THE SPEECH

One of the aspects that single chapter 15 out as central to Māgha's poem is that it is the canto in which Śiśupāla, the titular antagonist of the work, first appears and takes center stage, and it is the only one in which he actually speaks. Indeed, the speech he delivers is the main event of the chapter, if not of the poem as a whole. Everything up to this point has centered on the greatness of Kṛṣṇa, who has just been selected as the guest of honor at Yudhiṣṭhira's imperial sacrifice, a ritual that all the world's kings have convened to witness. But from the very beginning of the chapter we are introduced to Śiśupāla's most distinctive trait, namely, his uncontrollable intolerance of any honor conferred on his nemesis, Kṛṣṇa:

atha tatra pāṇḍutanayena sadasi vihitaṃ madhudviṣaḥ |
mānam asahata na cedipatiḥ paravṛddhimatsari mano hi māninām || (ŚPV 15.1)⁹
 Now Śiśupāla, king of Cedi, could not tolerate
 the honor that Kṛṣṇa received,
 right there, in the assembly,
 from Yudhiṣṭhira, Pāṇḍu's son.
 The soul of a person who's full of himself
 resents the success of anyone else.

As this verse suggests and following verses make palpably clear, Śiśupāla's reaction to the honoring of Kṛṣṇa is not a calculated move but more of an involuntary, almost physical convulsion. Indeed, it is likened to an acute medical condition: he is seized by fever (*jvara*, ŚPV 15.2), is "vomiting" (*vaman*) tears, and is dripping sweat like a rutting elephant (15.4) or like the primordial boar rising from the ocean (15.5).

The description of Śiśupāla's involuntary rage culminates in verse 15.12, where the following speech is projected as its inevitable outgrowth:

prathamam śarīrajavikāraḥ tamukulabandham avyathī |
bhāvikalahaphalayogam asau vacanena kopakusumam vyacīkasat || (ŚPV 15.12)
 The bud was first born in his body's distortion.
 The fruit would be the battle in store.
 Now, with his unflinching oration,
 he brought the flower of his anger
 to bloom.

"His body's distortion" refers most immediately to the physical manifestations of Śiśupāla's anger described above, although it can be taken more broadly to suggest his congenital propensity toward anger, if not his actual physical deformity at birth. Māgha's carefully constructed floral metaphor again emphasizes the involuntary character of Śiśupāla's actions. The progression of his anger from its origin to its flowering in verbal form and then to the fatal impending battle is presented as a spontaneous natural process. But the verse also highlights the pending speech as the central moment in the unfolding of Śiśupāla's character: it is the outward manifestation of the seeds that were present in him from the beginning, and in fact from his prior births.

The speech is now introduced (15.13) with an emphasis on its harsh (*atiniṣṭhura*) and loud (*sphuṭatarākṣara*) sound resembling that of a thundering cloud (*sanīraghanaravagabhīravāg*).

9. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes from the *Śiśupālavadhā* (ŚPV) refer to the 1888 edition of Durgāprasād and Śivadatta, although variant readings from other editions of our main commentators will be noted. For this verse, Mallinātha reads *muradvīṣaḥ*. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are ours. The meter of this verse and of all verses we quote from chapter 15 (in both versions) is *udgatā*, an asymmetrical (*viśama*) meter in which the number and pattern of syllables is different in each of the four quarters.

This is where the textual split begins, and we will start by presenting the speech as it is found in the Kashmiri recension of Vallabhadeva's commentary. In this version Śiśupāla addresses Yudhiṣṭhira regarding his choice of Kṛṣṇa as the guest of honor:

nanu sarva eva samavekṣya kamapi guṇam eti pūjyatām |
*sarvagūṇavirahitasya hareḥ paripūjayā kurunarendra ko guṇaḥ || (ŚPV *1 = Kak 15.14)¹⁰*
 Surely every man deserves honor
 only if seen to have some good quality.
 What good, Kuru King, is there in honoring Hari,
 bereft of every single quality?

Honor should go to the most eminent person in the audience, but Kṛṣṇa does not meet even the most minimal standard. Yudhiṣṭhira should clearly reconsider his choice.

But despite the fact that Śiśupāla's pointed criticism makes perfect sense in this context, there is something quite striking about this verse. Particularly notable is the triple repetition of the word "quality" (*guṇa*), a pregnant term in Sanskrit. In addition to a person's virtues or good qualities, *guṇa* has a more abstract sense of "quality" in general, and in certain philosophical and religious traditions the absence of qualities is the very mark of the highest form of being. In the Sāṃkhya tradition, a prominent branch of Indian philosophical thought in the first millennium, the supreme person who is in effect the soul of the world is precisely described as lacking all qualities (*nirguṇa*). So in certain contexts the fact that Kṛṣṇa, who has just been praised by Bhīṣma as the lord of the universe, is described as "bereft of every single quality" could actually be read as a form of praise and even as a confirmation of his divinity. This sort of duality can, in fact, be found in every verse of this version of Śiśupāla's speech, where the praise for Kṛṣṇa is often far more obvious than the ostensible abuse.

Consider, for example, Śiśupāla's statement just a few verses later:

atibhūyasāpi sukṛtena durupacara eṣa śakyate |
*bhaktiśucibhir upacāraparair api na grahītum abhyogibhir nṛbhiḥ || (ŚPV *4 = Kak 15.17)*
 Even the greatest good deeds do not reach him.
 Even men who are pure in devotion, dedicated servants
 whose thoughts are all focused on him,
 cannot really touch him.

Ostensibly, Śiśupāla is complaining about Kṛṣṇa's ingratitude to his own servants. This critique appears to be a non sequitur and makes little sense given Śiśupāla's general social attitudes, the political character of his rivalry with Kṛṣṇa, and the choice of Kṛṣṇa as the guest of honor in a royal sacrifice. Far more plausible, however, is the praise reading of the verse, which carries strong overtones of the *Bhagavadgītā*'s description of Kṛṣṇa. As Kṛṣṇa himself says in the *Bhagavadgītā*, it is impossible to see him as he really is through any sort of virtuous action.¹¹ Indeed, as in the previous verse we translated, the terminology here is highly suggestive of a praise reading. The "dedicated servants" are described as "pure in devotion" (*bhaktiśuci*) and those "whose thoughts are all focused on him" (*abhyogin*). The terms *bhakti* and *yogin* necessarily bring to mind religious devotion to and spiritual medita-

10. As we explain below, Durgāprasād and Śivādatta's edition of the poem prints the text with Mallinātha's commentary, which does not include the bitextual speech, but it also prints a supplement containing the bitextual speech with Vallabhadeva's commentary. When referring to the bitextual speech, we will cite the supplement's verse numbers prefixed with an asterisk and the verse numbers, preceded by "Kak," from the 1935 edition of Ram Chandra Kak and Harabhata Shastri, which, following the Kashmiri version of Vallabhadeva's commentary, includes only the bitextual speech.

11. *Mbh* 6.33.53 = *Bhagavadgītā* 11.53.

tion on God. That Kṛṣṇa cannot be touched even by those who possess *bhakti* and practice *yoga* is a mark not of his ingratitude but of his supreme divinity, which is beyond all human comprehension.

We should note that this is not just our interpretation. All the commentators on this version of the speech provide two glosses for each verse: one containing the derogatory meaning and the other consisting of the praise. Vallabhadeva even provides a technical term for this kind of praise in the guise of blame (*vakraśleṣa*).¹² Moreover, in commenting on this last verse and on several others, Vallabhadeva actually quotes the aforementioned verse from the *Bhagavadgītā* in support of the idea that Kṛṣṇa cannot be grasped by means of good karma.¹³

Motifs and ideas that are drawn from Sāṃkhya texts and from the *Bhagavadgītā* recur throughout the early part of this version of the speech and are often combined, as can be seen in the following example:

svayam akriyaḥ kuṭīlam eṣa tṛṇam api vidhātum akṣamaḥ |
*bhoktum aviratam alajjatayā phalam īhate parakṛtasya karmaṇaḥ || (ŚPV *8 = Kak 15.21)*
 He does nothing for himself.
 He cannot even bend a blade of grass.
 And yet, shamelessly, he always seeks to enjoy
 the fruit of other people's actions.

Here the overt blame meaning of the verse attacks Kṛṣṇa as a parasite who accomplishes nothing himself but lives off the work of others. But again, the reference to enjoying the fruits of karma clearly suggests a Sāṃkhya philosophical worldview. In Sāṃkhya the supreme person (*puruṣa*) is completely inactive and only experiences the results of karma. And a major theme of the *Bhagavadgītā* is that Kṛṣṇa as God takes to himself the karmic fruit of his devotees' actions.

This philosophical and specifically Sāṃkhya-oriented set of themes on the praise level is maintained throughout the first half of this version of the speech, even when it results in a strained and contextually inappropriate blame reading. But midway through the speech the emphasis suddenly shifts, as has been noted by both ancient and modern commentators. As Vallabhadeva points out, the text switches from praise based in a Sāṃkhya worldview (*sāṃkhyadarśanena*) to praise that is rooted in the purāṇas (*purāṇadarśanena*), that is, from the philosophical to the mythological.¹⁴

In the mythologically oriented part of his speech Śiśupāla goes through the celebrated deeds of Kṛṣṇa's supposed former incarnations, calling into doubt not the deeds themselves but the identity of Kṛṣṇa as their performer. Correspondingly, the technique for creating double meaning shifts from one based primarily on the polysemy of certain key words such as *guṇa* to one based mainly on irony:

kṣitipīṭham ambhasi nimagnam udaharata yaḥ paraḥ pumān |
*eṣa kīla sa iti kair abudhair abhidhīyamānam api tat pratīyate || (ŚPV *17 = Kak 15.30)*

12. It is possible that *vakraśleṣa*, found in all the printed editions, is a misreading for *vyāśleṣa*, which is Rudraṭa's term for *vyājastuti* (Rudraṭa, *Kāvyaśāstrakāra*, 10.11–12, p. 134). Indeed, this is the term Vallabhadeva uses at the conclusion of the bitextual speech in chapter 16 (16.15; Kak, p. 173), which, as we will discuss below, also includes a bitextual speech (16.15; Kak, p. 173). Vallabhadeva wrote a commentary on Rudraṭa's treatise, which is his usual point of reference for figurative theory. For the figure of *vyājastuti*, see Yigal Bronner, "Change in Disguise: The Early Discourse on *Vyājastuti*."

13. Kak, p. 139. Vallabhadeva quotes the *Bhagavadgītā* several times in his comments on the praise register of this portion of the bitextual speech. In addition to *Mbh* 6.33.53/ *Bhagavadgītā* 11.53, he cites *Mbh* 6.24.23/ *Bhagavadgītā* 2.23 (on verse *3 = Kak 15.16) and *Mbh* 6.24.19/ *Bhagavadgītā* 2.19 (on verse *14 = Kak 15.27).

14. See Vallabhadeva on verse *17 (Kak 15.30, p. 144).

This is that Supreme Person who raised
the earthly bedrock when it sank beneath the waves?
Sure. I've heard this said.
But will even a fool believe it?

The reference is, of course, to Viṣṇu's incarnation as the primeval boar, who lifts the earth with its tusk and pulls it back to the surface at the time of a deluge. Śiśupāla expresses no doubt about the occurrence of this event. What he sarcastically ridicules is the notion that Kṛṣṇa, apparently an ordinary and even lowly mortal, could have been the one who did it. For him, this claim is just talk. Even if Kṛṣṇa or his advocates say that he did this, why should anyone believe it? Here the second, praise meaning is extracted not by reinterpreting or resegmenting any part of the blame statement but simply by changing its valence or tone. Śiśupāla's rhetorical question is simply answered in a different, positive manner: anyone, no matter how foolish, would certainly believe this.

The irony reaches a peak a few verses later:

kila rāvaṇārīr ayam eva kim idam iyad eva kathyate |
*sattvam atibalam adhidhyuti yat tad aśeṣam eṣa iti dhr̥ṣṭam ucyatām || (ŚPV *21 = Kak 15.34)*
Of course. He is the very one who killed Rāvaṇa.
But why stop there? Why not say it out loud:
He is that supremely powerful Light.
He's Everything.

Here Śiśupāla, ridiculing the belief that Kṛṣṇa is a reincarnation of Rāma, actually goes on to praise him as the supreme lord of the universe. Of course, he means this hyperbolic praise of Kṛṣṇa as a satire on the credulity of Kṛṣṇa's idolaters. But for the poet and the intended readers, the praise is not hyperbolic at all. Rather, it accurately conveys Kṛṣṇa's divine nature. Thus we find here a kind of double irony: Śiśupāla's ironic praise can and should be taken as genuine praise.

Not all the verses in the mythological section of this speech work in the same way. In the following example Śiśupāla employs no deliberate irony and makes no conscious reference to any of Kṛṣṇa's alleged incarnations:

apahāya tuṅgam api mānam ucitam avalambya nīcatām |
*svārthakaraṇapaṭur eṣa purā balinā pareṇa saha samprayujyate || (ŚPV *19 = Kak 15.32)*
He was always averse to decent, upright stature.
He knows how to get his own way.
He lowers himself when he faces off
with a powerful foe.

Here Kṛṣṇa is described in a way that accords with his overall portrayal by Śiśupāla as a self-serving and underhanded cheat. But the verse appears to have no thematic connection to the surrounding verses, which directly refer to the mythological stories of Kṛṣṇa's past births. It is only on a second, bitextually derived level of meaning, presumably unintended by Śiśupāla, that this connection becomes apparent:

He gave up his own great height
and made himself a midget
when fighting his enemy Balin, long ago.
He is clever in getting his way.

The reference here is to Viṣṇu's defeat of the demon Balin, whose name means "powerful." Viṣṇu overcame Balin the king of demons by transforming himself into a dwarf and

begging from him as much land as he could cover with three steps; he then grew to enormous size and crossed the entire universe in three strides. Here, as elsewhere (see, for example, verse *4, translated above), Śiśupāla's intended abuse of Kṛṣṇa, while it makes sense on its own terms, seems inappropriate to its immediate context. The organizational logic of the speech works only on the presumably unintended level of praise, in which this verse, like the ones preceding and following it, refers to one of Kṛṣṇa's prior incarnations.

Remember that everything up to the beginning of Śiśupāla's speech has led us to expect nothing but abuse of Kṛṣṇa from him. But as we have seen, every verse of this version of his address can be read as either blame or praise. In fact, it often seems that the praise meaning is more prominent than the blame and supplies the organizing logic of the speech. It is worth noting, however, that there is nothing in the speech itself or anything that precedes it that comments on the surprising appearance of praise in his words. It is only in the two stanzas that follow Śiśupāla's oration that the poem directly addresses the dual nature of the preceding verses:

iti ninditum kṛtadhiyāpi vacanam amunā yad ādade |
stotum anīṣam ucitasya paraiḥ stutir eva sā madhunighātino 'bhavat ||
yad uvāca duṣṭamatir eṣa parivivadiṣur muradviṣam |
dvyartham api sadasi cedipates tad ato 'parādhagaṇanām aḡād vacaḥ ||
 (ŚPV *33–34 = Kak 15.46–47)

He said this wishing to abuse him.
 But it turned out to be just praise
 of the Killer of Madhu,
 who deserves ceaseless praise from us all.
 Since he said this in public with a mean intention,
 hoping merely to discredit Kṛṣṇa,
 the speech counted only as one more offense
 for the king of Cedi,
 two meanings or not.

Both of these verses make it perfectly clear that Śiśupāla's intention is purely negative: he wishes only to attack Kṛṣṇa and has no notion of praising him. Any praise is completely inadvertent. This seems to be a comment on the supreme nature of Kṛṣṇa, who deserves to be, or perhaps can only be (*ucita*), praised ceaselessly.¹⁵ But does Śiśupāla's unintentional eulogizing of Kṛṣṇa mean that he committed no offense? This would be a problem for the plot, which requires that Śiśupāla's verbal attack on Kṛṣṇa be counted toward his quota of one hundred death-worthy misdeeds. The second verse supplies a solution to this problem. It is the intention, not the act, that counts.

After this verse, that is to say in the remainder of the poem that is, by and large, shared by both versions, there is no mention of or allusion to a praise register in Śiśupāla's speech. Indeed, there is nothing whatsoever to suggest that any of the characters, including Kṛṣṇa, is even aware of this layer of meaning, however obvious it seems to the reader, and despite the fact that the poet himself says that "it turned out to be just praise." The device of putting emphasis solely on Śiśupāla's intention to criticize Kṛṣṇa thus integrates this version of the

15. The comment of the fourteenth-century commentator Dinakara on this verse would seem to support the latter interpretation. He says that "for the enemy of Madhu, who is to be praised even by his enemies, this [speech] became just praise" (*śatrubhir api stutyasya madhuripoḥ sā stutir evābhūt*; Baroda ms. 5458, folio 4v, lines 3–4). "To be praised" (*stutya*) retains the ambiguity of "deserves" in the verse, but the specific mention of praise by enemies suggests, especially in the context of the preceding speech, that what is spoken of here is not an obligation to praise, but an inability to do otherwise, try as one might.

speech into the larger context of the poem, but only at the expense of rendering the whole tour de force of the bitextual speech with its undeniable praise meaning basically irrelevant.

5. THE NONBITEXTUAL SPEECH

Before we turn to consider in detail the other, nonbitextual version of Śiśupāla's speech, it is useful to recall its immediate context. The chapter begins, as we have seen, with thirteen verses describing Śiśupāla's visceral seizure: his involuntary vomiting forth of rage at Yudhiṣṭhira's choice of Kṛṣṇa as the guest of honor. In this version of the speech, like the other, Śiśupāla first addresses Yudhiṣṭhira directly and attacks his choice as ridiculous. On the overt level, the content of the two opening verses is similar: in both the emphasis is on Kṛṣṇa's total lack of worthy qualities (*guṇas*). The key difference, of course, is that in this version of the speech there is only the overt level—there is nothing to suggest that a lack of qualities is in fact something that the speaker is praising.¹⁶

In the first verse, Śiśupāla attributes Yudhiṣṭhira's irrational selection of Kṛṣṇa to simple affection (*preman*, 15.14); in the second, he observes that for the nonroyal Kṛṣṇa to receive a regal honor is like allowing a dog to lick the sacrificial offering (15.15). At this point Śiśupāla shifts to attacking Yudhiṣṭhira's own integrity:

anṛtām giram na gadasīti jagati paṭahair vighuṣyase |
nindyam atha ca harim arcayatas tava karmaṇaiva vikasaty asatyatā || (ŚPV 15.16)
 You never speak an untrue word—
 The whole world beats this drum till we're deaf.
 But now that you honor contemptible Hari,
 your falsity blossoms forth in your deeds.

Reverting to the floral metaphor seen in the buildup to Śiśupāla's tirade, this verse highlights the stark disparity between reputation and reality, a major theme in this version of the speech, as it is in Śiśupāla's speech in the *Mahābhārata*. Yudhiṣṭhira, famed for his truthfulness, shows himself to be false by choosing as a guest of honor Kṛṣṇa, who, despite the widespread belief in his greatness, is not worthy of any honor. In the next verse, Yudhiṣṭhira's reputation as king of dharma is likewise inverted (15.17).

After a brief but basically similar diatribe against the Pāṇḍava brothers collectively (15.18), Śiśupāla turns his ire on the revered elder of the Kuru family, Bhīṣma, who guided Yudhiṣṭhira's choice. Even if the Pāṇḍavas are foolish enough to honor Kṛṣṇa, Bhīṣma should be old enough to know better:

avanibhṛtām tvam apahāya gaṇam atijaḍaḥ samunattam |
nīci niyatam iha yac capalo nirataḥ sphuṭam bhavasi nimmagāsutaḥ || (ŚPV 15.21)
 Your mind is diluted: You leave behind
 this lofty summit of kings and run,
 wildly, to the lowest possible spot.
 I guess you really are the son of a river.

Here again Śiśupāla's critique asserts a gap between image and actuality. In contrast to Bhīṣma's reputation as a sober and responsible elder statesman, Śiśupāla portrays him as a wildly irresponsible counselor. To this end, Śiśupāla mocks Bhīṣma's alleged elevated

16. ŚPV 1.14: *yad apīpujas tvam iha pārtha murajitam apūjitaṃ satām | prema vilasati mahat tad aho dayitam janaḥ khalu guṇīti manyate ||* (When you honor this Kṛṣṇa, / whom all good men dishonor, / it just goes to show your great friendship for him. / I guess it's right what they always say: / if you like someone, you're liable to think / he must be a person of quality).

parentage as the son of the river Ganges. The word used for river here is *nimnagā*, literally, that which seeks out low places. And as with this word for river, every element in the verse applies both to a waterway and to Bhīṣma. The river flows down from the peaks of mountains, and Bhīṣma turns away from the elevated group of kings, both of which are expressed by the Sanskrit compound *avanībhṛt*, literally, upholders of the earth. The river is full of water (*atijala*), while Bhīṣma's choice reveals him to be utterly stupid (*atijaḍa*). The topographical and social valances of "high" and "low" complete the punning, allowing Śiśupāla to revert to his favorite theme: the social lowliness of Kṛṣṇa. The verse culminates in an insult to Bhīṣma's mother, the holy Ganges, implying that she is a slut who lusts after men of the lowest sort.

Śiśupāla now turns to address his main target, Kṛṣṇa himself:

asuras tvayā nyavadhi ko 'pi madhur iti kathaṃ pratiyate |
daṇḍadalītasaraghaḥ prathase madhusūdanas tvam iti sūdayan madhu || (ŚPV 15.23)
 You killed some demon named "Honey."
 How could anyone believe this?
 You're famed as the Crusher of Honey because
 with one blow of your stick you squashed a small bee
 and squeezed out some sweet stuff.

Here, paralleling what we have already seen in the overt register of the other version of the speech, Śiśupāla uses irony to subvert the official Kṛṣṇa mythology, in this case his fame as Madhusūdana, or the Crusher of Madhu, whose name means "honey." He undercuts Kṛṣṇa's claim to fame by deconstructing the epithet itself: what Kṛṣṇa crushed was not any demon called Honey, but honey pure and simple. This inversion of Kṛṣṇa's reputation is further highlighted by the use of a chiasmic structure at the end of the verse: He is Madhusūdana, literally, "Honey's Squeezer," because he was *sūdayan madhu*, or "squeezing honey."¹⁷

In the following verses Śiśupāla continues his campaign of subverting Kṛṣṇa's reputation by systematically deconstructing his names or titles. But in these verses the irony is reversed: Śiśupāla accepts Kṛṣṇa's epithets in their literal sense while insultingly denying their deeper implications. For example:

jaḡati śriyā virahito 'pi yad udadhisutām upāyathāḥ |
jñātījanājanitanāmapadāṃ tvam ataḥ śriyaḥ patir iti prathām aḡāḥ || (ŚPV 15.27)
 In the real world, you have not an atom of glory.
 It's only because you're sleeping with
 that girl from the ocean that they call you Glory's Lord.
 It's your family connections that made you a *name*.

Viṣṇu, of whom Kṛṣṇa is reputed to be an incarnation, is married to Śrī (Glory), who rose from the primordial milky ocean when the gods churned it to gain the elixir of immortality. But Śrī also personifies royalty, or royal glory, and hence every king is said to be "Glory's Lord." Returning to a favorite theme, Śiśupāla again notes that Kṛṣṇa is no king and therefore has no claim to be lord of glory in the deep sense of this title. It is only on the strength of his

17. In fact, there is a verse to the same effect in the other speech: *viharan vane vijana eva mahati dadhad eṣa gopatām | nāma jaḡati madhusūdana ity aḡamad dhatena madhunā mahīyasā || (ŚPV *25 = Kak 15.38)* (Roaming in a great forest when no one was around, / playing the part of a cowherd, / he earned the name "Crusher of Madhu" / by killing a really big bee). In this verse, as with many of the verses from the bitextual speech, the second, praise meaning depends on a pure ironic reversal, meant for the ears of the faithful: he earned the name "Crusher of Madhu" by killing the powerful demon Madhu. It seems virtually certain that one of these verses is modeled on the other.

supposed wife's name—it is not entirely clear whether it is seriously or only mockingly that Śiśupāla concedes Kṛṣṇa's marriage to Śrī—that Kṛṣṇa can misleadingly claim this title. It is interesting to note that here the poet alludes, perhaps parodically, to the opening verse of the entire poem, whose first words describe Kṛṣṇa as “Glory's Lord” (*śriyaḥ patih*).

After four more verses that similarly deconstruct Kṛṣṇa's sobriquets, the focus of the speech shifts again in what are the last two verses that Śiśupāla addresses directly to Kṛṣṇa. The first of these two verses bears a striking resemblance to the opening of the other, bitextual version of the speech:

sakalair vapuḥ sakaladoṣasamudītam idaṃ guṇais tava |
tyaktam apaguna guṇatritayatyajanaprayāsam upayāsi kiṃ mudhā || (ŚPV 15.32)
 Devoid of a single good quality,
 your body begins and ends with defects.
 When you're good for nothing you don't need to work out
 to sweat the three qualities out of your self.

Here too, as in the verse we translated above (“Surely every man deserves honor”), the term “quality” (*guṇa*) is repeated three times, and again, both the positive and negative valences of “quality” are in play. But whereas in that verse the two separate and incompatible levels of meaning are distributed between the explicit and implied registers, here a single statement overtly addresses the wide gap between them. While many people strive through yoga or other meditative practices to attain the highest spiritual goal by purging themselves of the triple qualities (*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*), Śiśupāla says mockingly, Kṛṣṇa need not bother even to try, because he is so obviously lacking in qualities to begin with.

Kṛṣṇa's complete lack of honor-worthy qualities continues as the theme of the next verse:

tvayi pūjanam jagati jālma kṛtam idam apākṛte guṇaiḥ |
hāsakaram aghaṭate nitarāṃ śirasīva kaṅkaṭam apetamūrdhaje || (ŚPV 15.33)
 Good qualities all have given you up,
 and still the world bows at your feet, you big jerk!
 Ridiculous! Makes about as much sense
 as a comb on a head whose hair is all gone.

There is nothing new about Śiśupāla's argument in this verse, although the simile of a comb applied to a bald head surely drives the point home forcefully. Also noteworthy is the anomalous grammatical form *aghaṭate*, which, by adding the negative *a* to a finite verb, conveys scorn with respect to the relevant action (“makes about as much sense”) and thus perfectly fits Śiśupāla's scornful agenda. This grammatical form is defined in a supplementary *vārttika* of Kātyāyana on Pāṇini 6.3.73, and it is no coincidence that the derisive form of address *jālma* (“big jerk”) found in this verse is used in all the standard examples of this verbal construction in the grammatical literature, beginning with Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*.¹⁸ This version of Śiśupāla's speech, it would seem, is a textbook example of the performative context envisioned by the grammarians who coined this rule, and it seems virtually certain that the poet is making a deliberate allusion to the grammatical literature here.

Bringing his speech to a close, Śiśupāla turns to address the assembled kings. They are the real audience for his tirade, in the sense that he hopes to win them to his side and spoil the Pāṇḍavas' ritual:

mṛgavidviṣām iva yad ittham ajani miṣatām prthāsutaiḥ |
asya vanaśuna ivāpacitih paribhāva eṣa bhavatām bhuvo 'dhipāḥ || (ŚPV 15.34)

18. Kielhorn, *The Vyākaraṇa Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali*, vol. 3, 169.

While you lions look on, the sons of Prthā
roll out the red carpet for this jackal here.
For big men like you, this is out-and-out
humiliation. And you call yourself kings?

This richly alliterative verse comes back to Śiśupāla's favorite theme of inverted social hierarchy. That a non-king should be honored is an insult to every king present, and by rubbing their faces in this insult he rallies them to his cause. This point is forcefully brought home in the final verse of this speech, when Śiśupāla denounces Kṛṣṇa, in front of the assembled kings, as a regicide:

ayam ugrasenanayanasya nṛpaśur aparah paśūn avan |
svāmivadhama asukaram puruṣaiḥ kurute sma yat paramam etad adbhutam || (ŚPV 15.38)
His job was herding Kaṁsa's beasts,
that other beast in human form;
he murdered his master, a thing real men
could never do. Beyond belief!

This verse, like many others in this version of Śiśupāla's speech, revisits a famous episode from Kṛṣṇa's mythology, this time his killing of his maternal uncle Kaṁsa. In the official version, Kaṁsa usurps the throne of his father Ugrasena and puts to death six of Kṛṣṇa's infant siblings in an attempt to escape a prophecy that one of his sister's sons will kill him. But Śiśupāla emphasizes one simple fact about this episode: that Kṛṣṇa is responsible for the murder of his king and master, an act that all the assembled kings should regard as completely intolerable and, in fact, threatening. This concluding verse neatly sums up many of the central themes of Śiśupāla's bitter attack on the choice of Kṛṣṇa as the guest of honor: there is the repeated complaint about disregard for proper social status, here accentuated by reference to Kṛṣṇa's lowly rank as a hireling and further debasement to the level of an animal; there is a comment about his treacherous nature; and there is ridicule of his over-inflated reputation. All this is underscored by Śiśupāla's signature irony in the conclusion of the verse. However, unlike the bulk of this version of the speech, this verse can be read as carrying a hidden praise register of the kind we have seen to be the principal organizing device of the other version. Kṛṣṇa has done (*kurute sma*) an act that is all but impossible (*asukaram*) for ordinary men. So the ironic "Beyond belief!" (*paramam adbhutam*) may contain further irony, unrecognized by the speaker, if it is taken to praise Kṛṣṇa's extraordinary achievement.¹⁹

This version of Śiśupāla's speech ends with a single framing verse:

iti vācam uddhatam udīrya sapadi saha veṇudāriṇā |
soḍharipubalabharo 'sahanah sa jahāsa dattakarātālam uccakaiḥ || (ŚPV 15.39)
As soon as he spat out his hostile speech,
he suddenly laughed out loud and high-fived
his friend Veṇudārin. He took on the burden
for the enemy camp, but he couldn't take this.

Unlike the framing verses of the other version, this highly alliterative and syntactically complex stanza presents Śiśupāla's speech as unequivocally hostile and is entirely consistent with the almost medical presentation of his condition in the verses leading up to it. There is,

19. Note also that the term used to refer to Kaṁsa in this verse, *ugrasenanayana*, or the son of Ugrasena, may augment the unintended irony because it reminds the audience that Kaṁsa himself deposed and imprisoned his father Ugrasena, his own king and master.

therefore, no question of the intended meaning. Rather, we get a powerful reminder of the real intended audience: the kings attending the ceremony. Thus the focus is not on assessing Śiśupāla's intent but on exploring the reactions of the kings, who have so far been silent and avoided taking sides. Here it is clearly suggested that their reaction to Śiśupāla is quite positive. This is made explicit in the case of Venudārin, who is publicly encouraging him in the face of the Pāṇḍavas, but it is also implied that the kings as a whole are now mainly united behind him: the phrase "he took on the burden for the enemy camp" (*soḍharipubalabharah*) shows that by virtue of his rallying speech, he has effectively become the leader of the opposition party.

It is at this point that the two dramatically different versions of the text merge once again. Once Śiśupāla is finished talking, in whatever manner, the reaction is the same in all recensions. It should be stated again that all the characters respond to what they perceive to have been a purely hostile speech; nobody shows a hint of awareness of a possible inadvertent praise of Kṛṣṇa. In fact, the words of Śiśupāla are simply labeled "harsh" (*kaṭu*) even by the narrator. But despite Śiśupāla's provocation, Kṛṣṇa's response is characteristically restrained: in pointed contrast to Śiśupāla's earlier transformation, we are told that Kṛṣṇa does not undergo any change (*vikṛtim agaman na*, *ŚPV* 15.40 = *Kak* 15.48).²⁰ All that Kṛṣṇa does is to silently tally up the number of Śiśupāla's death-worthy offenses, a task that even God apparently finds complicated (*ŚPV* 15.42–43 = *Kak* 15.50–51). The kings belonging to Kṛṣṇa's family follow him in his restraint (*ŚPV* 15.41 = *Kak* 15.49). It is only Bhīṣma, the elder statesman, who angrily reacts to Śiśupāla's words. When Bhīṣma's voice is heard in the assembly, it shakes the earth like the roar of the ocean when it is stirred up by a hurricane, to which Śiśupāla is compared (*ŚPV* 15.44 = *Kak* 15.52). He challenges any king who rejects his choice of Kṛṣṇa to fight and threatens to place his foot on their heads unless they submit (*ŚPV* 15.46 = *Kak* 15.53).

Hearing Bhīṣma's angry words, the kings on Śiśupāla's side react furiously. The poet describes their fury at some length, after which Śiśupāla himself briefly speaks again. This time his speech is unambiguously hostile in all versions of the texts (15.63–66 = *Kak* 15.70–72).²¹ He urges the assembled kings to kill Kṛṣṇa, the five Pāṇḍavas, and Bhīṣma, that "old virgin queen" (*sthavirarājakanyā*, *ŚPV* 15.63 = *Kak* 15.70). Ignoring the Pāṇḍavas' pleas to remain, Śiśupāla storms out of the assembly (*ŚPV* 15.67 = *Kak* 15.73). The other kings in the hall follow him out. The poet pointedly compares them to the princes following the sacrificial horse. In the horse sacrifice, one of the most important imperial rituals, a king consecrates a horse and allows it to roam freely for a year. The king's army protects the horse wherever it wanders and thereby asserts control over the territory it covers. Here the poet compares Śiśupāla to the horse: he leaves freely now, but in fact he is instrumental to the king's imperial project and eventually will come back to face his death.²²

6. THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE TWO SPEECHES

As we have already stated, these two versions of Śiśupāla's speech are the two outermost poles of a complex continuum. Many manuscripts of the poem and a significant subset of

20. See McCrea, "Conquest of Cool."

21. *ŚPV* 15.64, the second verse in Śiśupāla's short speech, is absent from the manuscripts that contain Valabhadeva's commentary.

22. *ŚPV* 15.69 = *Kak* 15.75: *calitaṃ tato 'nabhīhateccham avanipatiyajñābhūmitaḥ | tūrṇam atha yayum ivānuyayur damaghoṣasūnum avaniśasūnavaḥ ||* (Then the son of Damaghoṣa stalked out, / leaving the king's sacrificial ground. / He went just as he wished, like the horse let loose, / while the sons of the kings ran rapidly after).

the commentators include some admixture of the two speeches, as we shall now describe. It is interesting that the distribution of these two versions of Śiśupāla's speech breaks down roughly on regional lines. As we have already noted, the earliest known commentator, the tenth-century Vallabhadeva, worked in the northern valley of Kashmir, and the Śāradā manuscripts that seem to faithfully record his work contain only the bitextual version.²³ The only other commentary we know of that contains only this version is by Cāritravardhana, who seems to follow Vallabhadeva very closely in all his commentaries, and who lived in western India sometime in the middle of the fifteenth century.²⁴ By contrast, the southern commentators we have been able to examine all comment only on the nonbitextual speech and make no mention of the other version. These include Vidyāmādhava, who worked in the Cālukya realm, possibly around 1200, and was an accomplished author in his own right;²⁵ Raṅgarāja, probably a southerner, whose commentary on the *Śiśupālavadhā* was known to Mallinātha and hence predates him;²⁶ and of course Mallinātha himself, the celebrated late fourteenth-century commentator from Āndhra.

Then there are several commentators who include some mixture of the two versions. The most notable is Dinakara, who was roughly contemporary with Mallinātha, and whose commentary on Kālidāsa's *Raghuvamśa* is dated Samvat 1441 (= AD 1385).²⁷ In his commentary on Māgha, after commenting on the nonbitextual speech, Dinakara glosses the bitextual version as well, at the end of which he notes that some people reject this bitextual speech as spurious (we come back to this comment below).²⁸ This means that Dinakara is the first person we know of actually to acknowledge the strange fact that two very different versions of the speech exist. Several post-Mallinātha commentaries that circulated in Bengal follow Mallinātha's version of the speech, except that they nonetheless insert the first of the bitextual verses and place it, oddly, after the concluding, framing verses of the nonbitextual

23. It is noteworthy that the only known citation from the bitextual version of Śiśupāla's speech is found in the *Vyaktiviveka* of the eleventh-century Kashmiri theoretician Mahimabhaṭṭa (*Vyaktiviveka*, 37), which further suggests that this was the version known in Kashmir.

24. Sushil Kumar De, "Some Commentators on the Meghadūta," 23–23. See also P. K. Gode, "Notes on Indian Chronology," 126–27.

25. M. Krishnamachariar (*History of Classical Sanskrit Poetry*, 190) puts him in 1126–38, under Someśvara IV, but the problem is that he knew the work of Kavirāja, who was patronized by Kāmadeva, whose dates Krishnamachariar himself gives as beginning in 1181. His familiarity with Kavirāja is made clear beyond doubt by verse 1.15 in his *Pārvatīrūkmīṇīya* (Madras Oriental Library, MS 11606, folio 3); see Bronner, *Extreme Poetry*, 126, 294 n. 10. He would appear to be identical with the Vidyāmādhava who wrote the astronomical text *Muhūrtadarśana* (or *Muhūrtadarpana*), popularly known as the *Vidyāmādhaviya* (see David Pingree, *Census of the Exact Sciences in Sanskrit*, 649ff.). This would place him in the mid-fourteenth century, making his knowledge of Kavirāja explicable.

26. Gopal M. Reddy, "Nāmūlaṃ Likhyate Kiṃcin Nānapekṣitaṃ Ucyate," 111. The quotation index in Durgāprasād and Śivadatta's edition of the *Śiśupālavadhā* lists three name references to Raṅgarāja in Mallinātha's commentary apropos of verses 1.49, 2.8, and 6.49.

27. Krishnamachariar, *History of Classical Sanskrit Poetry*, 117 n. 8. The geographic region of Dinakara seems to be uncertain. De ("Some Commentators on the Meghadūta," 23) labels him an easterner but gives no clear grounds for this. Dinakara's commentary is unpublished, and we have not been able to access a complete manuscript of it. But Narayana Prasada Rama's edition of the *Śiśupālavadhā* includes variant readings taken from his commentary up to and including the nonbitextual speech in *sarga* 15. It is curious that the editor indicates that he is taking these readings from manuscript BORI 541 of 1891–95, but that the descriptive catalog of the BORI collection insists that this manuscript begins only in the middle of the sixteenth chapter (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, *Descriptive Catalogue*, 451–52). This suggests that the editor had access to a portion of this manuscript that is now missing. This is deeply unfortunate as this appears to have been the only complete manuscript of Dinakara's commentary.

28. Baroda manuscript 5458, which contains an excerpt from Dinakara's commentary covering the bitextual speech, as we explain below in this section (see also n. 36 below).

version.²⁹ The reason for the inclusion of just this verse may be that it was famously cited by the Kashmiri theoretician Mahimabhaṭṭa in the mid-eleventh century,³⁰ which may have served to authenticate just this verse for these commentators.

Another noteworthy case of the practice of combining the two speeches in full is the second, Devanāgarī version of Vallabhadeva's commentary mentioned earlier. Manuscripts of Vallabhadeva's commentary found outside Kashmir typically contain a gloss on the bitextual speech and its framing verses following the full version of the nonbitextual version with its own concluding stanzas.³¹ As we have already said, there is good reason to believe that the Kashmiri Śāradā manuscripts of Vallabhadeva's commentary more likely reflect his actual work. We believe that the existence of a second recension incorporating both speeches is part of a broader trend among manuscript copyists, commentators, and, eventually, editors of printed editions to produce a maximally inclusive or agglutinative version of the poem. For example, many manuscripts that contain only Māgha's poem without any commentary include both speeches.³² This tendency is further evinced by the fragmentary manuscript of Dinakara's commentary we have just mentioned. This manuscript contains an excerpt from Dinakara's commentary that consists entirely of his gloss on the bitextual speech. The copyist, Bhaṭṭapitāmbara [*sic*], indicates that he is excerpting Dinakara's comments on these verses because they are left out of Mallinātha's commentary, so it appears that this manuscript was meant to be a supplement to a copy of Mallinātha's commentary on the *Śiśupālavadha*. The copyist says, "From the fifteenth chapter of the glorious Māgha, this is Dinakara's commentary on the 35 interpolated verses that are devoted to both praise and blame [simultaneously], [added here] because they are not found in [Mallinātha's commentary] *Sarvaṅkaṣā*."³³ We see from this that there are two ways in which agglutinative editions of the poem can be generated: one may note, as both Dinakara and his copyist Bhaṭṭapitāmbara are doing, that one is incorporating verses from more than one recension, or one may simply stitch together the versions silently, as many copyists and, apparently, the creators of the hybrid version of Vallabhadeva's commentary chose to do.

In fact, this tradition with its two variants continued more or less unabated into the print era, so that we find here a strong methodological continuity between preprint and print editorial practices. For example, the first printed edition of the *Śiśupālavadha*, the 1815 Calcutta edition edited by Vidyā Cara Misra and Śyāma Lāla, incorporates both speeches without making any note of this fact.³⁴ By contrast, the editors of the influential 1888 Nirnaya Sagara

29. India Office manuscript 3223, folio 560r. Of the six commentaries contained in this manuscript, four include this verse: *Sandarbhacintāmaṇi* of Candrasekhara, *Subodhā* of Bharatasena, *Māghatattvasamuccaya* of Maheśvara Pañcānana, and *Sukhabodhini* of Lakṣmīnātha Śarman (but not *Śiśubodhani* of Kavivallabha Cakravartin, or, of course, Mallinātha).

30. Mahimabhaṭṭa, *Vyaktiviveka*, 37.

31. See, for example, BORI manuscripts 497 of 1899–1915 and 499 of 1899–1915, as well as Mysore C 1952\2b. BORI 52 of 1873–1874, however, does not contain the nonbitextual speech and appears to follow the Kashmiri recension of Vallabhadeva as printed in Kak.

32. See, for example, manuscripts BORI 389 of 1892–95 and BORI 31 of 1870–71, both of which include the full bitextual speech with its framing verses, followed by the full nonbitextual speech with its framing verses. These manuscripts date from Samvat 1488 (= A.D. 1431) and Samvat 1545 (= A.D. 1488), respectively.

33. *iti śrīmāghapañcadaśasarge kṣepakapaṅcatrīṃśatslokānāṃ dinakari ṭikā stutiṇīḍāparokṭā sarvaṅkaṣā-bhāvāt*; Baroda ms. 5458, folio 4v, lines 7–8.

34. Interestingly, the editors, who printed the text with Mallinātha's commentary, included a gloss of an unknown source on the first (*nanu sarva*) verse of the bitextual speech without indicating that this is not taken from Mallinātha. They then proceeded to include the rest of the bitextual speech with no commentary at all, without any reference to the gap in the commentary (pp. 528–31 in the 1815 edition). The 1847 edition of Tārānātha Tarkavācaspati Bhaṭṭācārya follows the very same practice.

edition, Durgāprasād and Śivadatta, who printed the poem with Mallinātha's commentary, included the bitextual speech along with Vallabhadeva's commentary (apparently drawing on a manuscript of the Kashmiri Śāradā recension), but noted that they were doing so: "These 34 verses in the fifteenth chapter have not been commented on by Mallinātha who considered them to be interpolated; therefore they are printed here along with Vallabhadeva's commentary."³⁵ Thus the practice of these modern editors conforms closely to that of the copyist Bhaṭṭapitāmbara: they recognize that Mallinātha has failed to comment on these verses and therefore include them with another commentary they had available to them. But unlike Bhaṭṭapitāmbara, they clearly indicate that they view Mallinātha's omission as a deliberate editorial decision, a point to which we will return below.³⁶ Of the other editions we have consulted, most conform to one or another of these inclusive patterns.³⁷ This agglutinative approach in manuscripts, printed editions, and translations of Māgha's poem may partly explain the fact that many Indologists we have talked to seem unaware of the fact that the poem exists in two very different versions. However, we do not want to overstate our case here about the pervasiveness of this traditional editorial practice, because some modern editors and translators followed commentators like Mallinātha by silently choosing one speech or the other.³⁸

This brings us back to Mallinātha himself. While Mallinātha does not acknowledge the existence of the bitextual speech, we can show that he had it in front of him. This is because he refers to Vallabhadeva's commentary on the *Śiśupālavadhā* on several occasions, and at least two of these references are unmistakably to the Kashmiri, Śāradā version rather than to the hybrid Devanāgarī version.³⁹ Therefore, Mallinātha's omission of the bitextual speech is a deliberate editorial choice, albeit a silent one, and as such, it is consistent with his editorial

35. *pañcadaśe sarge ete catuśtriṃśac chlokāḥ prakṣiptā iti mallināthena na vyākhyātāḥ atas te vallabhadeva-kr̥tavayākhyāsametā likhyante*; p. 441 in the edition of Durgāprasād and Śivadatta.

36. Dinakara himself, by the way, noted that "some people consider these verses to be interpolated, because they become redundant when juxtaposed with some of the preceding verses" (*kṣepakā iti kecit. agrimaślokaiḥ katipayaiḥ saha punaruktiṣu patānatvāḥ*; Baroda MS 5458, folio 4v, lines 6–7). He does not actually name Mallinātha in this connection, but Bhaṭṭapitāmbara specifically mentions that the verses are absent from Mallinātha's commentary and does himself label them as interpolated (*kṣepaka*), although he does not explicitly address Mallinātha's knowledge or the motives for his editorial practices (Baroda MS 5458, folio 1r, line 1).

37. The edition of Anantarāma Śāstrī Vetāl brings the agglutinative tendency to its maximum. This edition aims to present Māgha's poem with the commentaries of both Vallabhadeva and Mallinātha. The sole manuscript of Vallabhadeva's commentary from which Vetāl was working was of the Devanāgarī recension, which therefore included both speeches. He also included the commentary of Mallinātha on the nonbitextual speech and noted, following Durgāprasād and Śivadatta, that Mallinātha dismissed the bitextual speech as interpolated (p. 527 of Vetāl's edition). Vetāl noticed that his version of Vallabhadeva's commentary on the bitextual speech diverged significantly from Vallabhadeva's commentary as printed in Durgāprasād and Śivadatta's edition and so included both versions of Vallabhadeva's commentary on the bitextual speech. The result is that virtually every verse in this edition comes with two commentaries, despite the fact that Mallinātha and Vallabhadeva each commented on only one version of the speech in chapter 15. Eugen Hultzsich, in his 1926 German translation of the *Śiśupālavadhā*, noticed that Vallabhadeva and Mallinātha commented on two exclusive versions of the speech and added his translation of the Mallinātha version as an appendix to chapter 15 in a translation that otherwise follows the Kashmiri version of Vallabhadeva, which he had access to in manuscript (pp. 154–58 [the bitextual speech], 166–68 [the nonbitextual one]).

38. The French translator Hippolyte Fauche, the first to render the poem into a European language, translated only the nonbitextual speech found in Mallinātha, without any further comment. Likewise, Ram Chandra Kak and Harabhatta Shastri, in their edition of the poem with the Śāradā version of Vallabhadeva's commentary (first published in 1935), make no mention of the existence of a nonbitextual speech. These editors show not a trace of awareness of the existing printed editions that included the nonbitextual speech or, for that matter, of the other recension of Vallabhadeva, already available in print from 1929 in Vetāl's edition.

39. Mallinātha refers by name to Vallabhadeva five times, on verses 2.44, 6.28, 7.41, 18.27, and 20.46. Two of these, the comments on 6.28 and 7.41, refer to and criticize remarks that are found only in the Kashmiri recension of

practices elsewhere in his poetic commentaries. In general, Mallinātha's policy is decidedly nonagglutinative. In some of his poetic commentaries he notes the existence of certain verses that he thinks are interpolated (*prakṣipta*), although he nonetheless proceeds to comment on them. In other cases, however, we must assume that he was aware of variations in the texts that he silently chose not to include in his editions and not to comment on.⁴⁰ In addition, Mallinātha is often silent about his conscious decisions to deliberately emend the text on the basis of criticisms directed at it.⁴¹ Although we know of no other example of a comparably large passage that is silently omitted in this way, it is clear that this is the policy Mallinātha chose in opting to exclude the speech found in Vallabhadeva's version.⁴²

There is every reason to believe, then, that Durgāprasād and Śivadatta, Vetāl, and Bhaṭṭapitāmbara were correct in their interpretation of Mallinātha's editorial practices: that he (and perhaps other commentators as well) knew of the bitextual speech and intentionally left it out as spurious. It is significant that these editors of the text, both premodern and modern, while commenting in passing on Mallinātha's editorial decision, then proceeded to undo it by including the verses he had omitted, in effect producing an all-inclusive, anticritical edition that incorporates, in most cases, all purported verses of Māgha's poem from all available sources. None of them takes any independent stand on the question of the authenticity of the bitextual verses. Moreover, none of them seems to have shown any interest in the literary-critical implications of the existence of radically different versions of the text. How should our reading of the poem be affected by accepting one or the other of these two versions of the speech as genuine, and what is at stake in such a decision? It would seem that the idea that this might matter is almost completely off the table.

7. RECONSTRUCTING THE HISTORY OF CHAPTER 15

In confronting the question of which version of the speech Māgha's poem actually contained, we must begin by laying out possible historical scenarios for how the different versions of the poem came into being. There are three basic possibilities. One is that the bitextual version reflected in Vallabhadeva's commentary was the original, and that it was rejected at some point by a later author who composed the nonbitextual speech and inserted it in its place. The second is the reverse of the first: that the version found in Mallinātha's commentary was composed by Māgha and was later replaced by somebody else who wrote the bitextual speech. A third possibility is that Māgha himself, at different stages in his life, composed different versions of his poem, each of which was preserved in a different tradition and region.⁴³

Vallabhadeva's commentary, not in the Devanāgarī recension. See also Wilhelm Rau, "Vallabhadeva's Kommentar zu Māgha's *Śiṣupālavadhā*," 14–15 [= *Kleine Schriften*, 21–22].

40. For example, Mallinātha unmistakably had access to Vallabhadeva's commentary on Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava* when he was composing his own commentary on the same work; he refers to him by name and paraphrases (and criticizes) his comments on several occasions (e.g., *Kumārasambhava* 1.35 and 3.61). Nevertheless, he remains silent about the absence of several whole verses from Vallabhadeva's version of the poem that are present in his own (e.g., 1.19, 5.3, and 6.86), as well as many variant readings accepted by Vallabhadeva.

41. Lawrence McCrea, "Poetry in Chains: Commentary and Control in Sanskrit Commentarial Tradition," 240–42.

42. See, however, in contrast, Mallinātha's approach to *Kiratārjunīya* 2.26–27. At issue here is another commentator's attempt at a *śleṣa* reading of the text as containing a covert blame register, which Mallinātha explicitly rejects. When the question is one of interpretation rather than the actual wording of the text, then, the discussion and disagreement can be explicit; see Reddy, "Nāmūlaṃ Likhyate Kiṃcin Nānapekṣitaṃ Ucyate," 109–10.

43. It should be noted in this context that Ludwik Sternbach has suggested that certain verses ascribed to Māgha in later anthologies but not found in the *Śiṣupālavadhā* may have been taken from alternative versions of the text

The first and most obvious argument in favor of the first scenario is that the bitextual speech is found in the earliest attested version of the poem, preceding any attestation of the rival version by several centuries. The bitextual speech is fully described by Vallabhadeva (early tenth century), who shows no awareness of an alternate text. As far as we can tell, the earliest attestation of either speech in the Sanskrit literary-critical tradition is the already-mentioned quotation by the eleventh-century Kashmiri theoretician Mahimabhaṭṭa of the opening verse of the bitextual speech.⁴⁴ But if, on the basis of the relative chronology of these external attestations, we accept that the bitextual speech was original to the poem, we have to ask ourselves how it makes sense in the larger context of the poem. One possible way of dealing with this speech as original is to admit that its praise register does not emerge naturally from the plot or the character of Śiśupāla but rather embodies the poet's own devotion to Kṛṣṇa. This, in fact, is the explanation offered by Vallabhadeva himself when he comments on the bitextual speech's opening verse:

atra ca kavir atibhaktatvād bhagavatkāthākramāgatām api nindām asahamānaḥ pratiyamānām stutiṃ vyaracat (Kak ad 15.14, p. 137)

Here the poet being unable, because of his extreme devotion, to tolerate the abuse [of Kṛṣṇa], even though it is appropriate at this very juncture of the story about Him, has therefore constructed [the register of] implicit praise.

As Vallabhadeva explicitly tells us, the praise is not Śiśupāla's and has nothing whatsoever to do with him. Rather, it is the poet who is speaking above the head of his titular character for reasons that are rooted in his own personal religious convictions.⁴⁵

Vallabhadeva seems to imply that the praise register has no real connection to the poem and is only implied (*pratiyamānaḥ*) in some superficial way. But recall that the framing verses of the bitextual speech itself state that "He said this wishing to abuse him. / But it turned out to be just praise" (*stutir eva sāmādhunighātino 'bhavat*, Kak 15.46). This suggests that the praise, although unintentional, perhaps does enter into the narrative situation of the poem. A more integrative way of making sense of the praise register is suggested by the same framing verse. As we have noted, the irony reflected in the fact that Śiśupāla ends up inadvertently praising Kṛṣṇa is a comment on this god's supremacy: so great is he that all statements about him, regardless of their intention, turn out to celebrate him. In fact, there is a Balaam-like quality to all versions of the Śiśupāla story from the *Mahābhārata* onward, in the sense that precisely because of Śiśupāla's excessive reviling of Kṛṣṇa and utter lack of self-control, he makes his nemesis look good. The praise register of his speech may be seen, in this light, as accentuating this Balaamic aspect of his actions.⁴⁶

composed by Māgha himself; Sternbach, "On Some Quotations of Māgha's Verses," 138–39. Anna Trynkowska ("On Some Quotations of Magha's Verses" by Ludwik Sternbach—A Critical Review," 147–56) questions this conclusion.

44. The only other attestation we are aware of is a quotation of one of the framing verses concluding the other version of the speech in *Siṃhabhūpāla's Rasārṇavasudhākara* (p. 283). The *Rasārṇavasudhākara* is a mid-fourteenth-century text from Andhra and thus was compiled in the same region as Mallinātha's commentary, a generation or two earlier. So again, the regional distribution of the speeches is upheld.

45. For an almost identical apology in *Cāritravardhana's* commentary, see BORI MS 53 of 1873–74, folio 228r: *atibhaktatvāt kathāprasāṅgāgatām api nindām asahamānaḥ kavi[h] stutiṃ api viracitavān tadartho 'pi sāmpratam vyākhyāyate* (Because of extreme devotion the poet, unable to bear censure even though it arises naturally in connection with the story, has composed praise as well; this meaning as well is now explained).

46. For a recent historical overview of the inherently ambivalent nature of Balaam's character, see the essays in George H. van Kooten and Jacques van Ruiten, eds., *The Prestige of the Pagan Prophet Balaam in Judaism, Early Christianity and Islam*. A particularly striking example of this ambivalence is found in the description of Balaam by the sixth-century bishop of Ravenna, Peter Chrysologus: "Balaam blesses with a mouth bent on cursing, and

The inclusion of an extended bitextual passage here would also seem to be consistent with Māgha's practice in the very next chapter of his poem, which dwells on the mission of a messenger sent by Śiśupāla to Kṛṣṇa. In this well-known episode, invented by Māgha, the messenger delivers a speech that can be construed as either conciliatory, in its praise of Kṛṣṇa's conduct, or hostile, in its sarcastic attack on his official mythology. There is no question that this passage, which appears in all versions of the poem, is authentic. The uncontested existence of one bitextual speech that consists of a mixture of blame and praise may corroborate the authenticity of the other.

A comparison of the two bitextual speeches, however, reveals their stark differences. To begin with, the techniques employed to create double meaning differ considerably in the two speeches. The bitextual speech in chapter 15 is based, for the most part, on irony and on the simple polysemy of a few key terms. By contrast, the speech of the messenger in chapter 16 relies far more heavily on sophisticated *śleṣa* techniques, including a variety of specialized lexical items (e.g., *vardhita* in the sense of "cut" in 16.11 and *viśvastā* for "widow" in 16.14) and resegmentation, or *sabhaṅgaśleṣa* (e.g., *an-āstikaḥ* "an unbeliever" versus *a-nāstika* "not an unbeliever" in 16.7; *saha sāraṇena* "with your brother Sāraṇa" versus *sahasā raṇena* "rashly in battle" in 16.13; *tvā mahitaṃ mahibhṛtām* "you who are honored by kings" versus *tvām ahitaṃ mahibhṛtām* "you who are an enemy of kings" in 16.15). Perhaps more importantly, the doubled speech of Śiśupāla's messenger in chapter 16 is discussed at great length by the characters themselves, and at the heart of this discussion are the bitextual nature of the messenger's words and the question of which of the two registers is really meant: the accusatory or the conciliatory. Kṛṣṇa's aide Sātyaki and the messenger himself strongly differ on this point and offer elaborate justifications for their contrasting interpretation of the messenger's *śleṣa*.⁴⁷ In stark contrast to this, as we have already noted, in chapter 15 the bitextuality of Śiśupāla's speech is nowhere alluded to in the later parts of the chapter, where everyone, including Kṛṣṇa, seems to assume that he expressed blame plain and simple.⁴⁸ Unlike the messenger's speech in chapter 16, the praise register of this speech is an intrusion into the poem and bears no relevance to what comes before or after. Thus the comparison of the two bitextual speeches from the consecutive chapters actually suggests the possibility that the bitextual speech in chapter 15 may be an insertion by a later hand.

In fact, there are several features of the nonbitextual speech in this chapter that strongly suggest that it is the authentic one. This version of the speech displays certain stylistic features that are typical of Māgha in the remainder of this poem and are not shared by the alternative, bitextual version. For example, structured repetitions and chiasmic structures of the kind we have already noted in 15.23 (*madhusūdanas tvam iti sūdayan madhu*) are characteristic of Māgha's style elsewhere and are prominently displayed, for example, in the poem's opening verse (*śriyaḥ patiḥ śrīmati śāsituṃ jagaj jagannivāso vasudevasadmani | vasan . . .*). Another signature feature of Māgha's poetry, noticed already by Jacobi, is his emulation of and rivalry with his close predecessor Bhāravi. Interestingly, we have in the nonbitextual speech just such an instance of a clear and deliberate echo of Bhāravi's *Kiratārjunīya*. In 15.22 Śiśupāla demands that Kṛṣṇa recognize his proper, lowly place, noting that "clearly, not knowing yourself damns you to disaster" (*sphuṭam āpadāṃ padam anātmaveditā*). This

although hired for wickedness he speaks all the mysteries of truth" (Johan Leemans, "To Bless with a Mouth Bent on Cursing," *ibid.*, 297).

47. *ŚPV* 16.16–85. See Bronner, *Extreme Poetry*, 80–82, for a discussion of this debate.

48. In fact, in *ŚPV* 16.2 the messenger himself says only that Śiśupāla has spoken offensively (*apriyam*). In his comments on this verse, even Vallabhadeva refers back to the text of *1 (= Kak 15.14) without at all noting the presence of the praise register.

characteristically alliterative utterance is a direct allusion to Yudhiṣṭhira's speech to Bhīma in the *Kiratārjunīya*, where he says, "Lack of judgment absolutely damns you to disaster" (*avivekaḥ param āpadāṃ padam, Kiratārjunīya* 2.30). As is typical in such cases, Māgha's words both allude to and outdo Bhāravi's original.⁴⁹ Another feature of Māgha's style is his penchant for rare and seemingly deviant verbal forms. Again, it is the nonbitextual speech that includes one such striking instance. In 15.33, translated earlier ("Good qualities all have given you up"), the use of the verb *aghaṭate* (literally, "makes no sense") negates a verb with the prefix *a*, normally used only to negate nominal forms, rather than the standard *na*. This seeming "error" is authorized, as we have noted, in a supplementary *vārttika* of Kātyāyana on Pāṇini 6.3.73 that singles this form out as a particularly scornful negation. And as we have also said, it is no coincidence that the verse includes the derisive vocative *jālma* ("you big jerk"), echoing the examples of this rule given in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*.⁵⁰ All these typical features of Māgha's style are absent from the bitextual version of the speech in chapter 15.

Now it could be argued that the absence of these features from the bitextual version of the speech is accounted for precisely by its bitextuality. Arguably, the difficulties involved in the crafting of a consistent double meaning impose unusual demands on the poet and leave little room for any other effects. But again, a comparison with the bitextual speech in chapter 16 is instructive. To begin with, the bitextual speech in chapter 16 retains Māgha's penchant for dense alliteration (e.g., 16.14: . . . *sametya samprati | suciraṃ saha sarvasātvatair bhava viśvastavilāsinījanah* ||, 16.15: . . . *mahatāṃ tvāmahitaṃ mahibhṛtām | . . . muditaḥ sapramadam mahīpatiḥ* ||). Then there is the matter of playful intertextuality. In the bitextual speech in chapter 16 we find, for example, that Śiśupāla's messenger compares Kṛṣṇa to a moth throwing itself into a flame. This strikingly echoes and playfully inverts Māgha's own verse from the second chapter of the *Śiśupālavadha*, where Kṛṣṇa's adviser Uddhava uses exactly the same comparison in describing Śiśupāla (2.117). As we have already noted, the nonbitextual speech in chapter 15 makes a similarly specific allusion to the opening verse of the poem (see our earlier discussion of 15.27: "In the real world, you have not an atom of glory . . ."). Again, nothing like this is found in the bitextual version of this chapter. Finally, it should be noted that the bitextual speech in chapter 16 is not only integrated into the plot of the surrounding chapters but also consistently reflects themes found throughout the entire poem. In particular we can mention the fact that the speech of the messenger in chapter 16 contains, at least in the conciliatory register, an apology for Śiśupāla's outburst in the assembly in the previous chapter (16.2).⁵¹ By contrast, the philosophical and Sāṃkhya-derived themes in the bitextual speech of chapter 15 echo nothing to be found elsewhere in the poem, which makes the possibility that this version was written by Māgha less likely.

A further reason to distrust the authenticity of the bitextual speech in chapter 15 is a particularly striking lexical choice it contains. The compound *ḥṣitīpīṭha* "the seat of the earth" found in *15.17 (= Kak 15.30, p. 144) of the bitextual speech appears to occur nowhere in the history of Sanskrit before the ninth century, but it suddenly becomes quite common in the *Haravijaya* of the early ninth-century Kashmiri poet Ratnākara (*Haravijaya* 1.46, 11.18, 16.55, 19.33, 34.28, 35.51, 50.72). The occurrence of this unprecedented term in the bitextual speech of chapter 15 strongly suggests that this version of the speech was written later

49. Hermann Jacobi, "On Bhāravi and Māgha," 123–33. Jacobi lists many verses where parallels between the two poets are found, but he seems unaware of this specific echo.

50. Compare *ŚPV* 1.68, where Māgha, in accordance with Pāṇini 3.2.112, uses a future form in a past-tense meaning, and *ŚPV* 1.51, where, in accordance with Pāṇini 3.4.2, he uses a series of imperative forms in the sense of repeated occurrence over time.

51. Of course, as elsewhere in the poem, there is no reference to possible praise of Kṛṣṇa by Śiśupāla.

than Māgha's time, quite possibly in Kashmir around the ninth century, where the term is first found. It seems significant that the first testimony to the existence of this speech likewise comes from Kashmir in the form of Vallabhadeva's commentary, as does the only citation of this version in the critical *ālamkārika* literature, in the work of Mahimabhaṭṭa, both of whom lived after the ninth century.

One of the best arguments in favor of the authenticity of the nonbitextual speech is found later in the chapter. Although, as we have noted, the remainder of the chapter following Śiśupāla's speech is virtually identical in all versions of the poem, there is one crucial difference among them. One of the verses introducing Bhīṣma's brief and angry reply to Śiśupāla later in the chapter is missing from all the versions of the poem that include only the bitextual speech:

atha gauraveṇa parivādam aparigaṇayams tam ātmanah |
prāha murariputiraskaraṇakṣubhitaḥ sma vācam iti jāhanvīsutaḥ || (ŚPV 15.45)
 Noble as he was, he took no notice
 of the slander directed at himself.
 But whipped up into fury by the cursing of Kṛṣṇa
 the Son of the River roared out his reply.

It is significant that while Kṛṣṇa and the members of his family characteristically refrain from responding to Śiśupāla's insult, it is Bhīṣma who, again not uncharacteristically, shows his anger. But as the poet tells us, he is not motivated by Śiśupāla's insult to him, but only by the offence to Kṛṣṇa, whom he regards as the supreme god. The crucial point, though, is that the slander against Bhīṣma himself that is referred to here appears only in the nonbitextual version of the speech. As we have shown above, in this version of the speech Śiśupāla dedicates three verses to a harsh mocking of Bhīṣma's stature as a respected elder of the Kuru clan and as a descendant of the river Ganges. In the bitextual speech, on the other hand, Bhīṣma is neither addressed nor mentioned. There is thus a very clear explanation for the removal of this verse if we assume that the bitextual speech is not the authentic one and was inserted by a later hand: this verse explicitly refers to something that was no longer part of the poem. However, if we assume the opposite scenario, according to which the nonbitextual speech with its insult of Bhīṣma was a later interpolation, there is no particular reason for concocting this one additional verse referring to the interpolated insult to Bhīṣma, especially since Bhīṣma himself, once he speaks, makes no mention of it. It seems clear, then, that this verse was part of the original work and was sliced out when the bitextual speech was inserted into the poem in place of the original, nonbitextual speech to which it refers.

Thus, on the basis of a variety of factors that have to do primarily with the integrity and style of Māgha's poem, we have come to the conclusion that the bitextual speech in chapter 15 is a later interpolation and not the work of Māgha himself. It would seem most likely that some later poet composed and inserted into the poem the speech with the praise register while at the same time removing the original, purely abusive oration of Śiśupāla (along with verse 15.45 that refers back to it). It is not difficult to see a motive for this substitution, namely, reluctance to accept an extended passage devoted to disparaging Kṛṣṇa in a poem intended to celebrate his greatness. In what we take to be the original version of the poem, moreover, Śiśupāla's blasphemous and substantive critique of Kṛṣṇa goes basically unanswered, other than by Bhīṣma's brief threat to the opposition party of kings. In this sense, Vallabhadeva's comment aptly describes the motivation of the poet who composed the bitextual speech, whom we believe not to be Māgha himself but a later interpolator. It is far more difficult to explain the opposite scenario, namely that the unequivocally derisive speech was invented and inserted into the poem in place of the bitextual one.

The substitution must have happened before Vallabhadeva's time, and, given the geographic provenance of the bitextual version (and the lexical prevalence of the term *ḥṣitipīṭha* only in ninth-century Kashmir), one may reasonably suspect that it took place somewhere in the north, possibly in Kashmir itself, where it was accepted as the authentic reading and may have been the only version known.⁵² We do not know whether the early southern commentators, such as Vidyāmādhava and Raṅganātha, were familiar with the Kashmiri recension, but at least by the fourteenth century, the time of Mallinātha and Dinakara, it appears that both versions were known in the south. As we have seen, Mallinātha knowingly, albeit silently, rejects the bitextual speech as interpolated, as was rightly concluded by many, from the copyist Bhaṭṭapitāmbara to the editors Durgāprasād and Śivadatta. Commentators such as Dinakara were aware of the suspect authenticity of the Kashmiri version of the speech but chose to include it alongside the nonsuspect version as part of their maximally inclusive editorial strategies, and many manuscript copyists and editors of printed editions have followed suit.⁵³ The occurrence of such agglutinative versions of the poem, coupled with the absence of a gloss by Vallabhadeva on the nonbitextual speech, presumably led some copyist to fill in the gap by either composing a gloss or plagiarizing one from elsewhere, thereby creating a supposed commentary by Vallabhadeva on this version.

We now see that the late German Indologist Wilhelm Rau came to a similar conclusion regarding the originality of the nonbitextual speech. In his 1949 dissertation, a study of Vallabhadeva's commentary on *Śiśupālavadhā* that is now about to be published for the first time by Konrad Klaus and Joachim Friedrich Sprockhoff, Rau discusses the problem of the two versions at some length.⁵⁴ He notes that Hultsch was of the opinion that the bitextual version of the speech was the authentic one, since it was attested earlier, in Vallabhadeva's commentary (p. 33; 35 in the forthcoming edition). But he himself opines that the nonbitextual speech is probably more authentic, primarily on two grounds: that it has more variants, which indicates to him that it was in circulation for a longer time (p. 52; 49 in the forthcoming edition), and that it fits better with the overall plot of the poem. Rau points out that the nonbitextual speech fits better in the dramatic context, whereas the bitextual version, especially the early philosophical portion, seems out of place. He considers the bitextual speech to be long-winded, undramatic, and more artificial and mannered (*künstlich*), which he takes to be characteristic of later Indian poetic taste (p. 51; 48 in the forthcoming edition; we do not share this opinion of later Indian poetry). Rau also notes the absence of verse 15.45 from the Kashmiri version of Vallabhadeva's commentary and observes that the verse makes sense only in connection with the nonbitextual version of the speech, but he does not appear to assign this absence any probative value in judging between the two.⁵⁵ We share Rau's basic

52. Although the nameless poet of this version suppressed the original, he must also have been inspired by it in the sense that some of his verses clearly rework what we consider to be Māgha's own version. This fact was recognized by the commentator Dinakara, who noted that the bitextual speech mimics several of the verses in the preceding section and is hence suspect on the grounds of redundancy (see n. 36 above). The idea of producing a bitextual, praise-blame speech also has its roots in Māgha's own poem, as we have noted in our discussion of the messenger's speech in chapter 16.

53. Note that, as shown in n. 36 above, Dinakara noted the questionable authenticity of the bitextual speech but took for granted the authenticity of the nonbitextual one.

54. Rau, "Vallabhadeva's Kommentar," 33–54 [= *Kleine Schriften*, 35–50]. We wish to thank Harunaga Isaacson, Jürgen Hanneder, and Konrad Klaus for their help in making available to us Rau's original dissertation and its forthcoming edition.

55. Rau, "Vallabhadeva's Kommentar," 31 [= *Kleine Schriften*, 34]. Rau even suggests that in this instance, the Devanāgarī version of Vallabhadeva, which includes this verse, may therefore be the older and more authentic of the two versions of his commentary. This seems to us completely unconvincing and, in fact, to fly in the face of both our and Rau's own understanding of the history of the poem.

conclusion, even if not always on similar grounds. It is impressive, moreover, that he was able to make his careful analysis on the basis of very limited textual materials.⁵⁶

8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

We began this article by referring to a play by Shakespeare. We suggested that had an analogous textual divergence existed in *Hamlet*—two completely different soliloquies in act 3, only one of which included the famous question of existential doubt—such a divergence certainly would not have gone unnoticed, and the discussion of it would have formed a major, if not the major, issue in the field of *Hamlet* studies. Moreover, discussion would not simply have focused on the authenticity of one soliloquy or the other, considered in isolation, but on the way accepting one or the other version would transform our understanding of the entire play. We can say this with confidence because so much literature on Shakespeare's plays is dedicated to viewing them as meaningful wholes. The consistency and meaningful development of characters, the structuring of plot and action, the recurrent treatment of key themes and tensions, and the isomorphism between these and the distinctive Shakespearian language are the bread and butter of Shakespeare studies, as they should be.

It is hard to overstate the stark contrast between this and the modern academic study of Sanskrit literature. The prevailing tendency of the vast majority of studies has been to downplay, if not to completely ignore, even the most basic questions of plot and narrative construction, character development, and thematic cohesion and instead to concentrate on analysis at the level of the single verse. In fact, it is often presented as a charge against the tradition's greatest poets that they cared only about polishing individual stanzas to perfection while neglecting the unity of the works as wholes.⁵⁷ In our view, this supposed deficiency is in the eye of the beholder: it says more about the reading and interpretive practices of modern and, to a certain extent, premodern scholars than it does about the aesthetic motivations of poets and the reading protocols of their sensitive readers. The prevailing tendency of the few people who have seriously studied the *mahākāvya* has been to assume that the complicated array of verbal and figurative effects that is so pronounced in these works absorbs the full attention of readers and writers and precludes the serious treatment of plot and character in a holistic manner.

56. Rau had no access to any manuscripts and relied entirely on the printed editions of Durgāprasād and Śivadatta and of Veṭāl and on a transcript made from a Śāradā manuscript that Hultsch had prepared. He was apparently unaware that the Kashmiri version of Vallabhadeva's commentary had been published by Kak and Shastri in 1935.

57. "No doubt, early poets like Aśvaghōṣa and Kālidāsa do not entirely neglect effective narration, but the later Kāvya attaches hardly any importance to the theme or story and depends almost exclusively on the appeal of art finically displayed in individual stanzas. The Kāvya becomes a series of miniature poems or methodical verso-paragraphs, loosely strung on the thread of the narrative. Each clear-cut stanza is a separate unit in itself, both grammatically and in sense, and presents a perfect little picture. Even though spread out over several cantos, the Kāvya really takes the form, not of a systematic and well knit poem, but of single stanzas, standing by themselves, in which the poet delights to depict a single idea, a single phase of emotion, or a single situation in a complete and daintily finished form" (S. N. Dasgupta and S. K. De, *History of Sanskrit Literature*, 35). "Numerous works which, if judged by their length, belong to Indian classical poetry, are classified in technical literature under the somewhat misleading heading 'Kunstepos.' It is only by courtesy that they can be termed long poems, as in fact they consist of a conglomeration (*bandha*) of short series of stanzas (*sarga*); i.e. exactly what the older poetic theory called, not *mahākāvya* but, more appropriately, *sargabandha*, 'the joining together of cantos (or sections, or verse chapters).' Very often the only connecting link between the stanzas that form each canto is the theme, for instance the description of a military expedition, a mountain or a sunset. They are in fact only a loosely connected series of single-stanza poems (*muktaka*) interspersed here and there with a two-stanza poem (*yugalaka*) or, rarely, a poem of several stanzas (*kulaka*)" (S. Lienhard, *A History of Classical Poetry*, 63).

We hope that even the brief survey of Māgha's literary practices we have offered here reveals the inadequacy of this tendency. We have tried to show that Māgha, for one thing, never loses sight of the interrelations between different parts of his poem and therefore creates a thick web of what we may think of as intratextual allusions and cross-references, some of which work in the service of the plot, while others also have humorous and other effects. We have also argued that Māgha has a signature style that is evident throughout his work in a broad array of lexical choices, alliterative and syntactic patterns, and, indeed, the crafting of *śleṣas*. Then there is the equally consistent intertextual relationship with Bhāravi, already noticed by Jacobi and others. Perhaps more important in connection with the prevailing view mentioned above is Māgha's persistent attention to both character consistency and character development in the poem. As we have pointed out, and as McCrea argues more elaborately elsewhere, the crisis of the poem turns on the repeated contrast between the steady and "cool" inactivity of Kṛṣṇa and the increasingly hotheaded impulsivity of Śiśupāla that inevitably leads to his doom. In fact, even our brief examination of a small portion of the poem reveals several instances in which the poet himself explicitly characterizes the development of Śiśupāla's character and its role in bringing the poem to its culmination. Consider, for example, the floral metaphor for Śiśupāla's developing anger in the opening verses of chapter 15. This metaphor pointedly emphasizes both continuity and evolution: it reveals Śiśupāla's tirade as an outgrowth of latent tendencies in his character, shows that these are now brought out in the open in a new manifestation, and points to the consequences that will necessarily result from this dramatic outburst. Equally instructive about the poem's unique contrast of characters and the use of characters as the engine for the advancement of the plot are two striking zoological images to which we have briefly referred: the comparison of Śiśupāla to a moth destroying himself in the flame that is Kṛṣṇa and to the sacrificial horse, whose apparent free rein is a necessary prelude to its eventual slaughter in the service of the imperial project of another. These are beautifully crafted and artfully expressed poetic images, contained in individual verses, but each overtly and emphatically reflects on the entire narrative arc of the poem. Whatever current critics might argue, it is clear that Māgha himself had a profound vision of the thematic and dramatic unity of his poem.

In fact, it may well be that the tide is turning in the modern study of *kāvya*, where we can see a new trend of moving away from a particularistic approach into a more integrated and holistic examination of works as organic unities. These newer approaches are exemplified in the forthcoming *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a New History of Sanskrit Literature* (ed. Bronner, Shulman, and Tubb). This volume will include some two dozen studies that explore the works of major authors from the fourth to the twentieth centuries, including Kālidāsa, Subandhu, Bāṇa, Bhavabhūti, Rājaśekhara, Murāri, Bilhaṇa, and Śrīharṣa, as well as, of course, Māgha himself. A principal feature of many of these studies is their insistence on viewing each element in these authors' works as part of a well-thought-out and often explicitly highlighted overall literary agenda, which is, in each case, unique. Indeed, the book argues that the uniqueness of these holistic, aesthetic agendas is what constitutes a series of innovations and turning points in the long history of the tradition; its introductory essay maintains that readers, theoreticians, and fellow poets recognized and responded precisely to them. More specifically, questions of plot and character receive heightened attention in this volume, as well as in several of our own prior works. In particular, we would like to mention our work on *śleṣa* and other bitextual devices, precisely the sort of poetry that is most commonly said to lack any concern for larger issues of plot and character, and in which we have shown that such considerations are very much in play.⁵⁸

58. Bronner, *Extreme Poetry*, 57–90; Yigal Bronner and Lawrence McCrea, "The Poetics of Distortive Talk: Plot and Character in Ratnākara's *Fifty Verbal Perversions (Vakroktipāncāśikā)*."

Of course, the tendency to deal with poetry on a stanza-by-stanza basis has its own history that predates modern academic work. Commentators, anthology compilers, and literary scholars in the tradition of Sanskrit *kāvya* have often treated the single verse as the basic unit of reference and analysis and have offered little in the form of a discursive characterization of the integrity of any single poem. Modern scholarship on these poems, which has heavily depended on the traditional commentaries for their comprehension, has perhaps not surprisingly tended to adopt the same approach. We see here a continuity between premodern and modern interpretive strategies akin to the one we have discussed in the realm of editorial practices. But just as there were voices of readers and fellow poets who did recognize newness and integrity in a work, so, our article shows, there were editors and redactors who saw such integrity and resisted what they perceived to be incursions upon it, for example, most notably, Mallinātha, perhaps the most revered and widely read commentator in the history of the tradition.

But whatever role authorial or poetic integrity played in the editing and transmission of Sanskrit poetry, there were other principles of selection that affected the shape that these texts assumed over time. One of these, certainly, was willed suppression or censorship of material deemed unsuitable, seemingly without regard to its authenticity. This appears to have had a decisive impact in the case we have been discussing, where the perceived limits of what could legitimately be said about God even by an antagonist in a literary work appear to have driven some nameless poet to suppress Māgha's original verses for Śiśupāla and forge a theologically acceptable replacement.⁵⁹

The fact that a textual divergence of the magnitude, centrality, and significance of the one that we have been describing has gone almost totally unremarked for so long should serve as a reminder of how much we still have to learn about even the most basic features of the most central works of *kāvya*; it should also alert us to the possibility that there may be more such cases still undiscovered. It is easy to be misled by the seeming facticity of printed books or, for that matter, individual manuscripts including a text and its commentary, all of which are mere snapshots of moments in a highly dynamic historical process, wherein agents with a variety of agendas constantly engage with and transform a text. The appreciation of this dynamism obviously calls for a critical approach to the study of textual evolution, one that is based on as many manuscripts as possible and the soundest philological methods. But even in deciding the authenticity of particular readings or passages, attention to the big questions of how works are structured and the individual style of authors is absolutely essential.

59. The presence and role of censorship in the Sanskrit poetic tradition are important issues that have yet to be seriously studied, aside from brief notes about the motivations of commentators in emending the text (e.g., De, in his edition of the *Meghadūta*, 26–27, and M. S. Narayana Murli, ed., *Vallabhadeva's Kommentar (Sarada-version) zum "Kumārasambhava" des Kālidāsa*, xix–xxi). For preliminary discussions of the question of aesthetic emendations, see Dominic Goodall, "Retracer la transmission des textes littéraires à l'aide des textes 'théoriques' de l'Alaṅkāraśāstra ancien"; McCrea, "Poetry in Chains"; and Sheldon Pollock, "Review Article: Indian Philology and India's Philology." On the question of obscenity, see Bronner, *Extreme Poetry*, 159–69; and on the desexualization through reinterpretation of the *Amaruśataka*, Bronner, *Extreme Poetry*, 183–92.

ABBREVIATIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Manuscripts of the Śiśupālavadha and Its Commentaries

Śiśupālavadha of Māgha, Poona, BORI Ms 31 of 1870–71, Devanāgarī, paper.

Śiśupālavadha of Māgha, Poona, BORI Ms 389 of 1892–95, Devanāgarī, paper.

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