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**An Appreciation of, and Tribute to, Will Johnson on the Occasion of his Retirement**

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## An Appreciation of, and Tribute to, Will Johnson on the Occasion of his Retirement

James M. Hegarty and Simon Brodbeck

There are some well-known, anonymous, lines of appreciation about Sanskrit poetry. These state that drama is the best type of poetry, and that Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* is the finest of dramas. The text continues to opine that, of this play's seven acts, the best act is the fourth and that, in that act, there are four verses even more sublime than the rest. Finally, it is concluded that one verse amongst these is the most captivating of all.<sup>1</sup> This celebrated verse, as translated by the subject of this tribute and reflection, Will Johnson, is as follows:

Śakuntalā must leave today –  
My sight grows dark with what may come,  
My throat is choked, my heart contracts,  
A hard ascetic cracked by love.  
Then what must worldly fathers feel,  
A child departing in this way?  
Śakuntalā must leave today.<sup>2</sup>

The verse takes up the subject of parting and loss. Kaṇva's adopted daughter, Śakuntalā, is leaving to be married. Here we are marking a different sort of change: the retirement of a cherished colleague. As scholars and Englishmen, we

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<sup>1</sup> Edwin Gerow quotes this passage as follows: *kāvyeṣu nāṭakaramyam | tatra ramyā śakuntalā | tatrāpi ca caturtho 'nkaḥ | tatra ślokacatuṣṭayam | yāsyaty adyeti tatrāpi | padyaṃ ramyatamaṃ matam*. See his 'Plot Structure and the Development of Rasa in the Śakuntalā. Pt. I', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 99.4 (1979), p. 564. <https://doi.org/10.2307/601446>

<sup>2</sup> W. J. Johnson, trans., *Kālidāsa: the Recognition of Śakuntalā* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 49. See further W. J. Johnson, 'Playing Around with Śakuntalā: Translating Sanskrit Drama for Performance', *Asian Literature and Translation* 1.2 (2013), pp. 6–8.

will not express ourselves by means of tears and lamentations, as Kaṇva does; or at least not here. Nevertheless, 'he leaves today', and we wish to take some note of this. We will do it in the time-honoured academic fashion: over the course of this paper we will present the facts of Dr Johnson's scholarly career and, having done this, we will present work that reflects his profound influence upon us.

### Will Johnson: Indologist and Translator

Will Johnson was born on 4 November 1951 and grew up in Warwickshire. After a period of working in the theatre he entered the School of African and Asian Studies at the University of Sussex as a mature student, and he received his BA in Religious Studies with first-class honours in 1984. From there he moved to the University of Oxford, receiving his MPhil in Classical Indian Religion in 1987, and his DPhil in 1990 with a thesis entitled 'The Problem of Bondage in Selected Early Jaina Texts', completed under the supervision of Richard Gombrich. From 1991 to 1992 he was the Michael Coulson Research Fellow at Wolfson College, Oxford, and in 1992 he was appointed as Lecturer in Religious Studies at what was then the University of Wales College, Cardiff. He was promoted to the rank of Senior Lecturer in 1997, and to the rank of Reader in 2009.

During his academic career he was active as an external examiner for several different universities, as well as being a member of numerous panels, editorial boards, working groups, and professional bodies, and a consultant for several publishers. Within Cardiff University he was an impeccably amiable colleague who served as a member of the Senate for four years, and as acting Head of School (later Department) on four different occasions. A member of the Centre for the History of Religion in Asia since its launch in 2009, he was particularly active as editor of the centre's online open-access journal, *Asian Literature and Translation*. He taught across the spectrum of South Asian religions and *belles lettres*, including language teaching in Sanskrit and Prakrit, and supervised two MPhils and three PhDs.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Clark, 'Invisible Walls, Hidden Faces. Zoroastrianism: Priesthood, Ritual and Purity' (MPhil, 1996); Tara Bascombe, 'A Universal Method for Seekers of Liberation: an Analysis of the Construction of a Yogic Path to Mokṣa, as Advocated within the *Jñaneswari*

His research publications include substantial contributions on aspects of Jain religion and philosophy, translations of several Sanskrit classics (with meditations on translation), and reference works (including reviews). These publications influence and facilitate various groups of scholars, and guide students, and entertain and enrich the wider reading public; and they will continue to for many years.

### Will Johnson: a Bibliography

The list presented here is not definitive with regard to published work, and omits a good deal of unpublished work. The reviews mentioned in the footnotes are merely indicative.

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<sup>4</sup> Reviews: *Daily Telegraph* (October 1994); *Good Book Guide* (January 1995).

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## Towards a Blank-Verse *Mahābhārata*

James M. Hegarty

In what follows, I will offer two examples of translations I have undertaken of the *Mahābhārata* into – not strictly iambic – blank verse. These emerged directly out of wide-ranging discussions with Will about that text, which both of us find irresistible.

Will and I shared, first of all, a sense of the musicality and rhythm of the Sanskrit source text. In particular, we admired the way in which the dominant metre of the text, the four-footed *śloka*, combined a steady pulse with a capacity for rhythmic variation. This is not unlike the relationship between the rhythm a kit drummer may lay down and the fills that punctuate this basic beat, while still having to conform to it. Will, in moving from syllable-timed Sanskrit to stress-timed English, sometimes chose to imbue his prose with rhythm, as illustrated by his 2005 Clay Sanskrit Library volume. More often, however, he saw the appeal of a more formal – metrical – approach, as illustrated by our introductory quotation from his *The Recognition of Śakuntalā*, and by his *Sauptikaparvan*. It was in the spirit of this more formal approach that I approached the *Mahābhārata*.

As well as metre, Will and I discussed the danger of exoticism in translation; this is to balance oneself on a razor's edge. The *Mahābhārata* is an ancient text. Much of its content is opaque to contemporary Indian readers. Much more of it is inscrutable to non-Indian readers. Yet statements like these, sensible as they may sound, move us into dangerous theoretical territory; we might very well ask, 'Inscrutable in whose terms, and why?' It is perfectly possible to read the *Mahābhārata* as a 'modern', of any type, and to experience it as a unified and compelling text. This is the case even if the reasons for so doing would be incomprehensible to the original authors or early audiences of the text. Shashi Tharoor's *Great Indian Novel* is a 'transcreation' of the *Mahābhārata* that makes it into an account of twentieth-century Indian politics.<sup>9</sup> Such a reading is as brilliant as it is anachronistic. It might be described, with little

<sup>9</sup> Shashi Tharoor, *The Great Indian Novel* (Delhi: Viking Press, 1989).

controversy, as interventionist. Artistic translations can also do this; if I wished, I might translate every mention of the in my view somewhat pompous Vidura in the *Mahābhārata* as Polonius; I could, if I was so minded, replace the one name with the other completely. This would be intertextually exciting, but would push beyond the bounds of what we refer to as scholarly translation. This is because scholarly translations tend to be reconstructive rather than interventionist. Quentin Skinner's rule of thumb for the intellectual historian serves just as well for the scholarly translator:

For if a given statement or other action has been performed by an agent at will, and has a meaning for him, it follows that any plausible account of what the agent meant must necessarily fall under, and make use of, the range of descriptions which the agent himself could at least in principle have applied to describe and classify what he was doing.<sup>10</sup>

Amongst other activities, then, scholarly translators reconstruct the text as it might have worked in the minds, and social realities, of readers no longer present to us. They are not limited to a 'range of descriptions', as they have a fragment of the original experience before them: the text itself, albeit separated from all contexts of reception bar the present one. This leaves translators with two options. They can *tell* people what they believe to have been the case by means of explanation based on analysis. The only way they can *show* them, however, is by means of the translation itself. Translation, more than any other activity, dramatises our engagement not just with the text, but with the hypothetical history of authorship and reception that we advocate (for scientific reasons, hopefully).

Such reconstructive translations are based, however, not just on exploration of the conditions of origin and transmission of our source texts, but also on *aesthetic decisions*; and this brings us squarely back to interventionism and exoticism. For example, scholarly translations that preserve a wide variety

<sup>10</sup> Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory* 8.1 (1969), p. 29. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2504188>

of terms in the source language stop readers in their tracks and ask, 'Do you know what this word means?' They also shout, 'This is a foreign word and a foreign text!' This is a defensible strategy, but a prose translation in hybrid English wears its alterity rather brashly. It might also be seen to cut *against* the reconstructive endeavour (at least for the reader). Reconstruction need not be experiential in its focus; one can reconstruct something without offering a sense of what it was like to use the thing in question. We can, for example, make stone tools that are perfect replicas of their ancient prototypes, but we cannot, as a consequence, skin an animal with them very efficiently. To approach the experience of using something requires an intervention. Obviously the use of a text is, in some sense, more complicated than the use of a stone tool. My discussions with Will convinced me that intervention was not to be mitigated, but instead enjoyed, as *part of* a scholarly reconstruction.

I approached my desk, then, with some trepidation. Having reconstructed – to the best of my abilities and the state of our knowledge – the early operating context of the text in question, I wanted to use my translation to communicate, in part, my findings. If this was theoretically inevitable, why not luxuriate in it? If the talismans of hybridism and literalism would not protect me, then my decision was to try to translate the *Mahābhārata* as it might have been experienced by its early users: as a robustly rhythmic poem without exaggerated diction, undue exoticism or archaisms.

What follows are selections from two different projects, both of which share the same metrical, reconstructive, yet highly interventionist approach to the translation of the *Mahābhārata*. The first is part of a translation of the *Mahābhārata*'s fourth book, the *Virāṭaparvan*. It is a composite reconstruction of the Malayālam-script Sanskrit manuscripts used in compiling the critical edition of the text.<sup>11</sup> These manuscripts represent the most conservative branch of the southern recension, which expands the *Mahābhārata* at every turn. The goal of

this endeavour is to create a readable English version of perhaps the most popular book of the southern recension at a fairly early stage in its development. More broadly, the goal was to begin to use the critical edition to explore the way in which the *Mahābhārata* changed over time, as it moved around the Indian subcontinent. After all, a *stemma codicum*, or family tree of manuscripts, once established, can be read both backwards and forwards. The second project is to translate all the passages in the *Mahābhārata* that relate to the life of Vidura (using, initially, only the critically reconstituted text, but, in time, expanding to include all significant variants).

I will present the opening canto of the *Virāṭaparvan* as it is found in the Malayālam manuscripts, followed by translations of the birth and death of Vidura in the critically reconstituted *Mahābhārata*. In both cases, parallel Sanskrit text is provided. These projects would not exist without Will's influence, but their many faults and infelicities have, of course, nothing to do with him.

<sup>11</sup> Vishnu S. Sukthankar et al., eds, *The Mahābhārata for the First Time Critically Edited* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933–71). More specifically, see vol. 5 of the same: Raghu Vira, ed., *The Virāṭaparvan, being the Fourth Book of the Mahābhārata, the Great Epic of India, for the First Time Critically Edited* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1936).

### In the Court of King Virāṭa, Canto 1

The Pāṇḍava princes, having lost everything due to the connivances of their cousin Duryodhana, have spent twelve years banished from their homes and families. In order to satisfy the conditions of their exile, they must spend a further year incognito or find themselves banished once more. This is quite a challenge for five, somewhat conspicuous, demigods and the wife that they share. The *Virāṭaparvan* opens with King Janamejaya, a descendant of the Pāṇḍavas who is hearing their story from the sage Vaiśampāyaṇa, in an inquisitive mood. He asks of the fate of his ancestors on the eve of the thirteenth, and pivotal, year of their exile.

#### DEDICATION

hariḥ |  
śrīgaṇapataye namaḥ ||<sup>12</sup>

S All hail Hari, *the lord of all that is!*<sup>13</sup>  
S Honour Gaṇapati, *who clears the way!*

<sup>12</sup> M<sub>1</sub> and M<sub>2</sub> omit the introductory mantra. Verses 1-4 are lost in M<sub>3</sub>. M<sub>4</sub> reads: *hariḥ svasti* | *śrīvedavyāsāya namaḥ* || The above is the dedication of M<sub>5</sub>.

<sup>13</sup> Italicised text indicates phrases added – in part for the sake of the English metre – *that are not in the Sanskrit text*. I have taken the decision to integrate in the translation those speech markers that, in the Sanskrit, are not metrically constrained and generally consist simply of the name of the character and the word ‘said’ (or sometimes just the name). I have used these few extra syllables to introduce a little extra information – useful to the English reader – about the speakers (or about the deity to which the text as a whole is being dedicated), which is well known to Indian users of the text. More broadly, italicisation is intended to allow the reader to be in no doubt as to when the translator has added material to the original text, although unfortunately there is no way other than by means of notes to indicate where I have left detail out. This has inevitably occurred in the movement from the 32-syllable Sanskrit couplet to the 20-syllable – mixed and sometimes hypermetric – iambic form I have selected for the English translation. This is an example of an intervention, as I have styled it above.

janamejaya uvāca |  
 kathaṃ virāṭanagare mama pūrvapitāmahāḥ |  
 ajñātavāsam uṣitā duryodhanabhayārditāḥ || 1 ||  
 pativratā mahābhāgā satataṃ satyavādinī |  
 draupadī sā kathaṃ brahmann ajñātā duḥkhitāvasat || S ||  
 te ca brāhmaṇamukhyāś ca sūtāḥ paurogaviḥ saha |  
 ajñātavāsam avasan kathaṃ ca paricārakāḥ || S ||

vaiśampāyana uvāca |  
 dharmeṇa te 'bhyanujñātāḥ pāṇḍavāḥ satyavādināḥ |  
 ajñātavāsam vatsyantaś channā varṣaṃ trayodaśam || S ||  
 upopaviśya vidvāṃsaḥ sahitāḥ saṃśitavratāḥ |  
 ye tadbhaktā vasanti sma vanavāse tapasvinaḥ || S ||  
 tān abruvan mahātmānaḥ śiṣṭāḥ prāñjalayas tadā |  
 abhyanujñāpayiṣyantas taṃ vivāsam dhṛtavratāḥ || S ||  
 viditaṃ bhavatāṃ sarvaṃ dhārtarāṣṭrair yathā vayam |  
 chadmanā hr̥tarāḥ ca niḥsvāś ca bahuśaḥ kṛtāḥ || S ||  
 uṣitāś ca vane vāsaṃ yathā dvādaśa vatsarān |  
 bhavadbhir eva sahitā vanyāhārā dvijottamāḥ || S ||

CANTO ONE<sup>14</sup>

King Janamejaya, *born to rule*, said:

- 1 'How then, in fear, did my forefathers live,  
 Forced to dwell, disguised, in another's court?  
 S And could Draupadī, devoted, sharp of tongue,  
 Live alone, in grief, unremarked upon?  
 S Amidst housekeepers and servants, chattels all,  
 Could such as these remain undiscovered?'

Vaiśampāyana, *the savant*, replied:<sup>15</sup>

- S 'Commanded by Dharma, lord of the law,  
 To spend the thirteenth year hidden from view,  
 S The noble brothers sat with brahmins pure,  
 Tempered by exile, upon the forest floor. 5  
 S Resolved as to their course, cultured and wise,  
 The king spoke, his hands cupped in supplication:  
 S "Good sirs, you know the way in which we were  
 Robbed of all comforts, beggared, left to starve.  
 S Twelve long years in the presence of the blessed,  
 Our fasts broken only by leaves and fruit.

<sup>14</sup> The numbers on the left indicate a verse in the critical edition (CE) of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. An S indicates that the verse occurs in the southern recension only. For the wording of both the numbered verses and those marked S, I have followed the wording of the Malayālam-script manuscripts (M). Five such manuscripts were used in the preparation of the CE's *Virāṭaparvan*. The M-group manuscripts are southern in character, but contain a large number of unique readings. The numbers on the right-hand side of the page give the verse numbers of the reconstituted M-group text. These give simply a running total, and are designed to facilitate movement between the translation and the Sanskrit text. The verse numbers do not indicate the lines which introduce a character's speech and which end in *uvāca* ('he or she said') followed by a *daṇḍa*. I would like to thank Simon Brodbeck for his comments on and corrections of the present text and translation.

<sup>15</sup> The M manuscripts omit this line, but I have included it for the sake of clarity.



<p>ajñātavāsamayaṃ śeṣaṃ varṣaṃ trayodaśam    tad vatsyāmo vayaṃ channās tad anujñātum arhatha    S     suyodhanaś ca duṣṭātmā karṇaś ca sahasaubalaḥ    jānanto viṣamaṃ kuryur asmāsv atyantavairiṇaḥ    yuktācārāś ca yuktāś ca kṣaye svasya janasya ca    S     durātmanāṃ hi kaś teṣāṃ viśvāsaṃ gantum arhati    api naś tad bhaved bhūyo yad vayaṃ brāhmaṇaiḥ saha    samastāḥ sveṣu rāṣṭreṣu svarājyaṃ sthāpayemahi    S     ity uktvā duḥkhaśokārtaḥ śucir dharmasutas tadā    saṃmūrchito 'bhavad rājā sāśrukaṅṅho yudhiṣṭhiraḥ    S     tam athāśvāsayan sarve brāhmaṇā bhrātr̥bhiḥ saha    atha dhaumyo 'bravīd vākyam mahārthaṃ nṛpatiṃ tadā    S     rājan vidvān bhavān dāntaḥ satyasaṃdho jitendriyaḥ    naivaṃvidhāḥ pramuhyanti narāḥ kasyāṃ cid āpadi    S     devair apy āpadaḥ prāptāś channaiś ca bahubhis tadā    tatra tatra sapatnānāṃ nigrāhārthaṃ mahātmabhiḥ    S     indreṇa niśadhaṃ prāpya giriprasthāśrame tadā    channenośya kṛtaṃ karma dviśatāṃ balanigrahe    S     viṣṇunāśmagiriṃ prāpya tadādityāṃ nivatsyatā    garbhe vadhārthaṃ daityānāṃ ajñātenoṣitaṃ ciraṃ    S     prośya vāmanarūpeṇa pracchannaṃ brahmacāriṇā    baler purā hṛtaṃ rājyaṃ vikramaiś tac ca te śrutam    S     aurveṇa vasatā channam ūrau brahmaṛṣiṇā tadā    yat kṛtaṃ tāta lokeṣu tac ca sarvaṃ śrutam tvayā    S     pracchannaṃ cāpi dharmajña hariṇā vṛtranigrahe    vajraṃ praviśya śakrasya yat kṛtaṃ tac ca te śrutam    S     hutāśanena yac cāpaḥ praviśya channam āsatā    vibudhānāṃ hitaṃ karma kṛtaṃ tac cāpi te śrutam    S   <sup>16</sup>  tathā vivasvatā tāta channenottamatejaśā    nirdagdāḥ śatravaḥ sarve vasatā gavi varṣaśaḥ    S   </p>	<p>10</p> <p>15</p> <p>20</p>	<p>S Now only the thirteenth year remains, wherein,  Bound by our word, we shall hide. So let us go!  S King Duryodhana with all his allies,  Who are our sworn and bitter foes, upon  Finding us, plan to slaughter one and all.  S For who will trust in those in whom malice  Resides? So we ask you: can that which was ours  Be ours again? Claims now lost be reconfirmed?"  S His voice breaking, consumed by grief, noble  Yudhiṣṭhira collapsed, insensible.  S All rushed to his side, making him sit,  And Dhaumya – <i>their priest</i> – spoke words of comfort:  S "My king, wise lord, ever faithful and firm,  In adversity, men like you do not fail.  S The very gods have used disguise in order  To defeat their foes in times of trouble.  S Indra, <i>king of the gods</i>, lived unknown in  A hermitage to confound his enemies.  S Viṣṇu, <i>lord of all</i>, hid on a mountain  Biding his time before even his birth!  S You know very well how he descended,  Disguised as a dwarf, to free heaven and earth.  S And you have often heard what that great sage  Aurva did, hidden in his mother's thigh.  S Even Kṛṣṇa, unbeknownst to all, entered  Indra's thunderbolt to kill the serpent king.  S Moreover, Fire itself sank in the waters,  Lying hidden to aid the gods. This you know!  S The refulgent sun, dwelling for a time  on earth, consumed all who stood against him.</p>	<p>10</p> <p>15</p> <p>20</p>
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<sup>16</sup> M<sub>4</sub> has *praviśya chadanāsatā* (*chadana* + *āsatā* – *chadana* meaning 'covering' etc.), with little impact on the meaning of the verse.

viṣṇunā vasatā cāpi gr̥he daśarathasya ca	S	And Viṣṇu, of mighty deeds, incarnate	
daśagrīvo hataś channaṃ saṃyuge bhīmakarmaṇā    S	S	As Rāma, cut the ten throats of Rāvaṇa.	
evam ete mahātmānaḥ pracchannās tatra tatra ha	S	Indeed, just as these great beings conquered	
ajayañ chātravān mukhyāms tathā tvam api jeṣyasi    S	S	Their foes by means of subterfuge, so shall you!”	
iti dhaumyena dharmajño vākyaiḥ saṃpariharṣitaḥ	S	Yudhiṣṭhira, much heartened by the words	
śāstrabuddhiḥ punar bhūtvā vyaṣṭambhata yudhiṣṭhiraḥ    S	25	Of Dhaumya, once again became resolute.	25
athābravīn mahābāhur bhīmaseno mahābalaḥ	S	Then statuesque Bhīma gave a short speech	
rājānaṃ balināṃ śreṣṭho girā saṃpariharṣayan    S	S	Designed to delight his mighty brother:	
avekṣaya mahārāja tava gāṇḍīvadhanvanā	S	“O king, with his dread bow, mighty Arjuna	
dharmānugatayā buddhyā na kiṃ cit sāhasaṃ kṛtam    S	S	Has not acted in haste, by your command.	
sahadevo mayā nityaṃ nakulaś ca nivāritaḥ	S	Sahadeva and Nakula, held back	
śaktau vidhvamsane teṣāṃ śatrughnau bhīmavikramau    S	S	By me, though greatly skilled, destroy no one.	
na vayaṃ vartma hāsyāmo yasmin yokṣyati no bhavān	S	What you ordain, my lord, we always do!	
tad vidhattāṃ bhavān sarvaṃ kṣipraṃ jeṣyāmahe parān    S	S	So say the word and we will conquer all!”	
ity ukte bhīmasenena brāhmaṇāḥ paramāśiṣaḥ	S	The mighty one fell silent; and the brahmins,	
prayujyāpṛcchya bharatān yathā svān prayayur gr̥hān    S	30	Uttering benedictions, departed.	30
sarve vedavido mukhyā yatayo munayas tadā	S	Then the renunciants took their leave; each	
āśīr uktvā yathānyāyaṃ punardarśanakāṅkṣiṇaḥ    S	S	Offered blessings, promising to return.	
te tu bhr̥tyās ca dūtās ca śilpinaḥ paricārakāḥ	S	The brothers set off with their retinue.	
anujñāpya yathānyāyaṃ punardarśanakāṅkṣiṇaḥ    S	S	Full of regret, they made heartfelt obeisance.	
saha dhaumyena vidvāmsas tathā te pañca pāṇḍavāḥ	S	Their wife and priest beside them, the five sons of	
utthāya prayayur vīrāḥ kṛṣṇām ādāya bhārata    S	S	Pāṇḍu stood tall, perfect in all respects.	
krośamātram atikramya tasmād vāsān nimittataḥ	S	A league distant, those tigers amongst men,	
śvobhūte manujavyāghrās channavāsārtham udyatāḥ    S	S	Intent upon the challenge before them,	
pṛthak śāstravidaḥ sarve sarve mantraviśāradaḥ	S	Settled down to talk; each had the measure	
saṃdhivigrahakālajñā mantrāya samupāviśan    S	35	Of conflict; each their science and their magic.	35
nivṛttavanavāsās te satyasam̐dhā yaśasvinaḥ	S	Surrounded by resplendent forest dwellers,	
akurvata punar mantraṃ saha dhaumyena pāṇḍavāḥ    S	S	The brothers, with Dhaumya, started to speak.	
athābravīd dharmarājaḥ kuntīputro yudhiṣṭhiraḥ	S	Yudhiṣṭhira, having pondered matters,	
bhrātṛn kṛṣṇām ca saṃprekṣya dhaumyaṃ ca kurunandana    S	S	Had something to say to his family.’	

vaiśampāyana uvāca |  
tathā tu sa varāṇi labdhvā dharmād dharmabhṛtām varaḥ |  
gatvāśramaṃ brāhmaṇebhyo hy ācakhyau sarvam eva tat || 2 ||

kathayitvā tu tat sarvaṃ brāhmaṇebhyo yudhiṣṭhiraḥ |  
araṇīśahitaṃ tasmai brāhmaṇāya nyavedayat || 3 ||  
tato yudhiṣṭhiro rājā dharmaputro mahāmanāḥ |  
saṃnivartyānujān sarvān iti hovāca bhārata || 4 ||  
dvādaśemāni varṣāni rāṣṭrād viproṣitā vayam |  
trayodaśam imaṃ prāptaṃ kva nu vatsyāmahe 'rjuna || 5 ||  
sa sādhu kaunteya ito vāsam arjuna rocaya |  
saṃvatsaram idaṃ yatra vicarāma yathāsukham |  
abuddhā dhārtarāṣṭraīś ca samagrāḥ saha kṛṣṇayā || 6 ||

arjuna uvāca |  
tasyaiva varadānena dharmasya manujādhipa |  
ajñātā vicariṣyāmo narāṇaṃ bharatarṣabha || 7 ||  
kiṃ tu vāsāya rāṣṭrāṇi kīrtayiṣyāmi tāni ca |  
ramaṇīyāni guptāni teṣāṃ kiṃ cit tu rocaya || 8 ||  
santi ramyā janapadā bahavaḥ tv abhitaḥ kurūn |  
pāñcālās cedimatsyās ca sālva vaidehabālikāḥ |  
sūrasenās ca navarāṣṭraṃ kaliṅgā māgadā api || 9 ||

Vaiśampāyaṇa, *quick of wit*, went on:

2 'Well, safe in his forest retreat, that king,  
Pious Yudhiṣṭhira, emboldened now  
By boons given by lord Dharma himself,  
3 Having told all to the gathered brahmins,  
Gave them ample fuel for their sacred fires.<sup>17</sup>  
4 Magnanimous yet proud, Dharma's own son,  
His brothers before him, addressed them all:<sup>18</sup>  
5 "A dozen years away from home, and now  
the thirteenth; arduous and difficult.  
6 Upright Arjuna, son of Kuntī, shine  
A light for us; let us live in comfort,  
S our foes fooled, content with our lady wife."<sup>19</sup>

Arjuna, *that hero amongst men*, said:

7 "My lord, with the protection of lord Dharma,  
We shall surely go forth unrecognised.  
8 But I will list those kingdoms fit for purpose,  
Fine and secure, so that you might choose one.  
9 All around us are tribes peaceful and pleasant:  
Cedis, Matsyas, Sālvās, and Videhans,  
Bālikas, Sūrasenas, Kaliṅgans,  
*Not to mention the mighty Magadhans.*<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> The fuel referred to in this verse is actually given to an individual brahmin, which may refer back to an earlier narrative. For the purpose of the present, stand-alone, text, I have minimised such inter-references.

<sup>18</sup> This verse is omitted by M. It occurs in the critically reconstituted text, however (it is well attested elsewhere). As it does not significantly alter the meaning of the foregoing passage and is of some literary merit (as well as emphasising the presence of the other Pāṇḍava brothers), I have included it.

<sup>19</sup> The critically reconstituted text and the southern recension diverge quite markedly in verses 5 and 6. I have followed the most ornate version, which, in this instance, is M<sub>5</sub>. The southern recension is unanimous in its mention of Draupadī at the close of verse 6.

virāṭanagaraṃ cāpi śrūyate śatrukarśana |  
ramaṇīyaṃ janākīrṇaṃ subhikṣaṃ sphītaṃ eva ca |  
nānārāṣṭrāṇi cānyāni śrūyante subahūny api || S ||  
yatra te rocate rājyaṃ tatra gacchāmahe vayam |  
katamasmiñ janapade mahārāja nivatsyasi || 10 ||<sup>21</sup>

yudhiṣṭhira uvāca |  
evam etan mahābāho yathā sa bhagavān prabhuḥ |  
abravīt sarvabhūteśas tat tathā na tad anyathā || 11 ||  
avaśyaṃ caiva vāsārthaṃ ramaṇīyaṃ śivaṃ sukham |  
saṃmantrya sahitaiḥ sarvair draṣṭavyam akutobhayam || 12 ||  
mātsyo virāṭo balavān mahābhaumaś ca naḥ śrutaḥ |  
rājaśīlo vadānyaś ca vṛddhaḥ satsu ca saṃmataḥ || 13 ||  
guṇavāṃl lokavikhyāto dṛḍhabhaktir viśāradaḥ |  
tatra me rocate pārtha matsyarājāntike 'nagha || S ||  
virāṭanagare tāta māsān dvādaśa saṃśritān |  
kurvantas tasya karmāṇi vasāmetīha rocaye || 14 ||  
yāni yāniha karmāṇi tāni śakṣyāmahe vayam |  
kartuṃ yo yat sa tat karma bravītu kurunandana || 15 ||

arjuna uvāca |  
naradeva kathaṃ karma matsyarāṣṭre kariṣyasi |  
mānuṣeṃdra virāṭasya raṃsyase kena karmaṇā || 16 ||  
akliṣṭaveśadhārī ca dhārmiko hy anasūyakaḥ |  
na tavābhyucitaṃ karma nṛśaṃsaṃ nāpi kaitavam |  
satyavāg asi yājñīko lobhakrodhavarjitaḥ || S ||

<sup>20</sup> Normally two lines of the translation are equivalent to a single *śloka* of the Sanskrit text (unless the verse in the Sanskrit has three lines, in which case one will find three lines in the English). An exception to this rule is for lists. In these instances, I simply make the list metrical. I mark any additions to the Sanskrit in English (for lists almost wholly *metri causa*) with italics (following the practice explained in n. 13 above).

<sup>21</sup> This verse differs markedly from verse 10 of the CE and marks a point of departure between the two recensions.

S And what of King Virāṭa, whose city is,  
I have heard, fecund, cosmopolitan,  
And full of great wealth, O scourge of your foes?  
10 Where our king leads, there, indeed, we shall follow!  
In which place, therefore, do you wish to dwell?"

Yudhiṣṭhira, *that noble lord*, replied:  
11 "As the blessed lord of dharma decreed,  
So shall it be, O you of mighty arms.  
12 Having debated the matter, I shall  
Select a place well-suited to our needs.  
13 The esteemed King Virāṭa will know of us.  
Ever welcoming, he keeps the law of kings. 50  
S Renowned as a perfect chief, abiding  
In old age; him I choose, my sinless lord.  
14 My decree: twelve months in Virāṭa's service.  
In his city we will find employment,  
15 Passing time according to our talents.  
State therefore what you wish to do, Kuru's son!"<sup>22</sup>

Arjuna, *that best of bowmen*, replied:  
16 "Divine lord, what work will you undertake  
For the Matsyan king? What delights await you?<sup>23</sup>  
S Upright in thought and deed, ever truthful,  
You are neither covetous nor bitter.  
Yet service will suit you ill, as will disguise. 55

<sup>22</sup> Kuru is a noted ancestor of the Pāṇḍava brothers. Verses 13, 14 and 15 differ markedly in S as compared to the CE. I follow S (which includes M).

<sup>23</sup> Matsya is the name of the kingdom over which Virāṭa rules.

mṛdur vadānyo hrīmāṃś ca dhārmikaḥ satyavikramaḥ |  
sa rājams tapasā kliṣṭaḥ kathaṃ tasya cariṣyasi || 17 ||<sup>24</sup>  
na duḥkham ucitaṃ kiṃ cid rājan pāpajano yathā |  
sa cemām āpadaṃ prāpya kathaṃ vāsaṃ tariṣyasi || 18 ||  
arjunenaivam uktas tu pratyuvāca yudhiṣṭhiraḥ || S ||

yudhiṣṭhira uvāca |  
ahaṃ tu yat kariṣyāmi tan me karma nibodhata |  
virāṭam samanuprāpya rājānaṃ matsyanandana || 19 ||  
sabhāstāro bhaviṣyāmi virāṭasyeti me matiḥ |  
kaṅko nāma bruvāṇo 'haṃ matākṣaḥ sādhu devitā || 20 ||  
vaiḍūryān kāñcanān dāntān sphāṭikāṃś ca maṇīṃś tathā |  
kṛṣṇākṣāṃl lohitākṣāṃś ca nivapsyāmi manoramān || 21 ||<sup>25</sup>  
ariṣṭān rājagoliṅgān darśanīyān suvarcasah |  
lohitāṃś cāsmagarbhāṃś ca santi tāta dhanāni me || S ||  
darśanīyān sabhānandān kuśalaiḥ sādhu niṣṭhitān |  
apy etān pāṇinā sprṣṭvā saṃprahrṣyanti mānavāḥ || S ||  
tān prakīryān same deśe ramanīyān vipāṃsule |  
deviṣyāmi yathākāmaṃ sa vihāro bhaviṣyati || S ||

17 My king, the abode of all virtues, suffers  
A penance, the wrong of which is all too clear.<sup>26</sup>  
18 Lord, you know nothing of the common man;  
How will you endure his ceaseless labours?"  
S Arjuna spoke thus and the king responded.

Yudhiṣṭhira, *first amongst men*, replied:  
19 "Learn now of the work I shall undertake  
Upon reaching the halls of King Virāṭa:  
20 I am minded to become court-gambler,  
Skilled at play and known to all as Kaṅka;  
21 Throwing down gems and gold and ivory  
With those bewitching dice of red and black.<sup>27</sup>  
S Luck-filled, mysterious and beautiful,  
They are, my dear, the sweetest prize of all!<sup>28</sup>  
S The delight of the court, yet mastered by few,  
Does not the pulse quicken at a single touch?  
S Scattering those beauties on level ground,  
I will play. Such sport suits me well, good sir.<sup>29</sup>

60

60

<sup>26</sup> S uses the word *tapas* to describe the activities of Yudhiṣṭhira. This seems a knowing usage, evoking images of self-abnegation (perhaps ironically, but equally, perhaps not).

<sup>27</sup> I take the references to jewels and gold and ivory to be metonyms referring to game pieces (or to items staked). This is implicit in my translation, but is made explicit in Garbutt's rendering of the parallel verse of the Nīlakaṇṭha text (the Sanskrit of which differs slightly). See Kathleen Garbutt, trans., *Mahābhārata Book Four: Virāṭa* (New York: New York University Press / JJC Foundation, 2006), p. 29.

<sup>28</sup> I took the decision to retain a focus on the tokens of play (as a category that includes both the jewels and the dice – strictly speaking 'nuts' – mentioned in the previous *śloka*). This seems a defensible strategy for a translator faced with an elusive and ill-understood game that is being evoked by an ancient – or at least medieval – society in respect of an even more ancient society (i.e. the one imagined in the poem). It is also possible that *vaiḍūryān kāñcanān dāntān* refers to the dice rather than the stake, as Paul Thieme suggests; see 'Chess and Backgammon (Tric-Trac) in Sanskrit Literature', in his *Kleine Schriften* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1984), p. 214.

<sup>24</sup> The second half of this *śloka* is different to that of the CE text.

<sup>25</sup> I have followed M<sub>5</sub> in reading the verb here as *nivapsyāmi*.

kañko nāmnā parivrājaḥ bhaviṣyāmi sabhāsadaḥ |  
 jyotiṣe śakunijñāne nimitte cākṣakauśale || S ||  
 brāhmaṇ vedam adhīyānaḥ vedāṅgāni ca sarvaśaḥ |  
 dharmakāmārthamokṣeṣu nītiśāstreṣu pāragaḥ |  
 prṣṭo 'haṃ kathayisyāmi rājñaḥ priyahitaṃ vacaḥ || S ||  
 āsaṃ yudhiṣṭhirasyāhaṃ purā prāṇasamaḥ sakhā |  
 iti vakṣyāmi rājānaṃ yadi mām anuyokṣyate || 22 ||  
 virāṭanagare channa evaṃyuktaḥ sadā vase || S ||

65

S

The sage Kañka will be welcome at court;

Astrologer, augur, a player of games;

S

Master of the Vedas; a brahmin who  
Also knows of the goals of life and rule.<sup>31</sup>

He will provide advice fit for a king.

22

If he is asked, he will tell them he was

Yudhiṣṭhira's great friend, dear to him as life.<sup>32</sup>

S

In thrall to another, thus will I hide.”

65

iti śrīmahābhārata virāṭaparvaṇi prathamo 'dhyāyaḥ || 1 ||<sup>30</sup>

THUS ENDS THE FIRST CANTO OF THE BOOK OF VIRĀṬA

<sup>29</sup> I have transposed a vocative from the previous *śloka* here.

<sup>30</sup> I use the colophon of the CE. I have omitted a line that is present in M, but not universally attested amongst these manuscripts.

<sup>31</sup> I abbreviate here the standard enumeration of the goals of life (*dharma, kāma, artha* and *mokṣa*) as well as the political treatises (*nīti-śāstra*) and the materials ancillary to the Vedas (*vedāṅga*)!

<sup>32</sup> I have adjust the pronominal usage in this sequence of verses for poetic effect and to underline what I take to be the despondency of the final line here, in which I return to the first person.

### The Birth and Death of Vidura

śūle protaḥ purāṅarṣir acoraś coraśaṅkayā |  
 aṅīmāṅḍavya iti vai vikhyātaḥ sumahāyaśāḥ || 77 ||  
 sa dharmam āhūya purā maharṣir idam uktavān |  
 iṣṭikayā mayā bālyād ekā viddhā śakuntikā || 78 ||  
 tat kilbiṣaṃ smare dharmā nānyat pāpam ahaṃ smare |  
 tan me sahasrasamitaṃ kasmān nehājayat tapaḥ || 79 ||  
 garīyān brāhmaṇavadhaḥ sarvabhūtavadhād yataḥ |  
 tasmāt tvam kilbiṣād asmāc chūdrayonau janīyasi || 80 ||  
 tena śāpena dharmo 'pi śūdrayonāv ajāyata |  
 vidvān vidurarūpeṇa dhārmī tanur akilbiṣī || 81 ||

In the book of the descent of the primary lineages (*ādi-vaṃśa-avataraṇa-parvan*) of the *Ādiparvan* ('The Book of Beginnings') of the *Mahābhārata*, which tells of the divine origins of many of the characters, we find the following brief account of the birth of Vidura (chapter 57).

Accused of being a thief, Aṅīmāṅḍavya  
 The sage, old, though potent still, was impaled.  
 Outraged, he spoke thus to the god of Law:  
 'From callow youth, long ago, I stabbed a bird.  
 This wrong I know, but none other comes to mind.  
 Why then was my abstinent life ignored?  
 There is no higher sin than slaying a  
 Brahmin; you shall be born in a śūdra's womb!  
 Cursed by that sage, subtle Dharma, righteous,  
 faultless and true, took birth as Vidura.

The death of Vidura occurs towards the end of the *Mahābhārata*, in chapter 33 of the *Āśramavāsikaparvan* ('The Book of the Residence in the Hermitage'). At this point in the story, the Pāṅḍavas have already defeated the Kauravas in a horrific war. In the aftermath of the war, the remnants of the Kauravas (chiefly the elderly generation, who were not combatants in the aforementioned war) have to make peace with the Pāṅḍavas. They co-habit, in an uneasy relationship, in the royal capital. Their king is the Pāṅḍava monarch, Yudhiṣṭhira. Vidura has been a trusted adviser of both sides. Dhṛtarāṣṭra in his old age, and ever-mindful of the losses he has sustained, retires to the forest with his wife, Gāndhārī, as well as Kuntī (the mother of the Pāṅḍavas) and Vidura. They plan to lead an ascetic life in a forest hermitage. Unbeknownst to the characters, Vidura is the incarnation of the god of religious law, Dharma, on earth. Dharma was cursed to an earthly birth when he was overly severe in his judgement of the life of an ascetic called Māṅḍavya (as we heard above). Complicating matters is the fact that Yudhiṣṭhira is the son of Dharma, though he is also the son of one King Pāṅḍu.

ity uktaḥ pratyuvācedaṃ dhṛtarāṣṭro janādhipam |  
kuśalī viduraḥ putra tapo ghoram samāsthitaḥ || 15 ||  
vāyubhakṣo nirāhāraḥ kṛṣo dhamanisaṃtataḥ |  
kadā cid dr̥ṣyate vipraiḥ sūnye 'smin kānane kva cit || 16 ||  
ity evaṃ vadatas tasya jaṭī vīṭāmukhaḥ kṛśaḥ |  
digvāsā maladigdhāṅgo vanareṇusamukṣitaḥ || 17 ||  
dūrād ālakṣitaḥ kṣattā tatrākhyāto mahīpateḥ |  
nivartamānaḥ sahasā janaṃ dr̥ṣṭvāśramaṃ prati || 18 ||  
tam anvadhāvan nṛpatir eka eva yudhiṣṭhiraḥ |  
praviśantaṃ vanaṃ ghoram lakṣyālakṣyaṃ kva cit kva cit || 19 ||  
bho bho vidura rājāhaṃ dayitas te yudhiṣṭhiraḥ |  
iti bruvaṇ narapatis taṃ yatnād abhyadhāvata || 20 ||  
tato vivikta ekānte tathau buddhimatāṃ varaḥ |  
viduro vṛkṣam āśritya kaṃ cit tatra vanāntare || 21 ||  
taṃ rājā kṣīṇabhūyiṣṭham ākṛtīmātrasūcitam |  
abhijajñe mahābuddhiṃ mahābuddhir yudhiṣṭhiraḥ || 22 ||  
yudhiṣṭhiro 'ham asmīti vākyaṃ uktvāgrataḥ sthitaḥ |  
vidurasyāśrave rājā sa ca pratyāha saṃjñayā || 23 ||  
tataḥ so 'nimiṣo bhūtvā rājānaṃ samudaikṣata |  
saṃyojya viduras tasmin dr̥ṣṭiṃ dr̥ṣṭyā samāhitaḥ || 24 ||  
viveśa viduro dhīmān gātrair gātrāṇi caiva ha |  
prāṇān prāṇeṣu ca dadhad indriyāṇīndriyeṣu ca || 25 ||  
sa yogabalam āsthāya viveśa nṛpates tanum |  
viduro dharmarājasya tejasā prajvalann iva || 26 ||  
vidurasya śarīraṃ tat tathaiva stabdhalocanam |  
vṛkṣāśritaṃ tadā rājā dadarśa gatacetanam || 27 ||  
balavantaṃ tathātmānaṃ mene bahuguṇaṃ tadā |  
dharmarājō mahātejās tac ca sasmāra pāṇḍavaḥ || 28 ||  
paurāṇam ātmanaḥ sarvaṃ vidyāvān sa viśaṃ pate |  
yogadharmam mahātejā vyāsenā kathitaṃ yathā || 29 ||  
dharmarājas tu tatrainaṃ saṃcaskārayiṣus tadā |  
dagdhukāmo 'bhavad vidvān atha vai vāg abhāṣata || 30 ||

Dhṛtarāṣṭra said: 'Vidura is well,  
My dear. He performs strict austerities.  
Seen here and there, he lives on air, his bones  
And veins in stark relief. He eats nothing.'  
Just then, with matted locks and smeared with filth,  
Naked but for the pollen of wild flowers,  
Slave-born Vidura was seen from afar.  
Turning to look at them, he stopped in his tracks.  
Yudhiṣṭhira gave chase; alone, he ran  
Into the woods. Here and there, seen and unseen,  
He vigorously pursued him, shouting  
'O Vidura! It is I your cherished king!'  
Deep in the lonely woods, noble Vidura  
Ceased to run. He took refuge by a tree;  
A mere shadow of a man, wasting away,  
Yet known in an instant by the king.  
And then, coming into his presence, that king,  
Within earshot, said, 'I am Yudhiṣṭhira.'  
Vidura, unblinking, fixed his gaze upon  
His lord, and by it was united with him.  
Limb on limb and breath on breath, Vidura  
Merged their senses and their beings entire.  
Wise Vidura, as if afire, entered  
The king's body, with his yogic power.  
Leaning against a tree, eyes fixed ahead,  
The king saw that life had now fled his frame.  
Full of vigour, suffused with new powers  
The Dharma King, Pāṇḍu's son, remembered all.  
Full of knowledge, he recalled lives gone by;  
Just as had been described to him before.  
Yudhiṣṭhira thought to cremate his friend,  
But a heavenly voice began to speak:



bho bho rājan na dagdhavyam etad vidurasamjñakam |  
kalevaram ihaitat te dharma eṣa sanātanaḥ || 31 ||  
lokāḥ saṃtānakā nāma bhaviṣyanty asya pāṛthiva |  
yatidharmam avāpto 'sau naiva śocyāḥ paraṃtapa || 32 ||

'O king, burn not this man; you are him  
And he is you; he is the god Dharma!  
My prince, heaven awaits him. He goes now to  
An ascetic's rest, well-earned. Do not grieve!'

## Libretto for *Viśvāmitra and Nandinī*

Simon Brodbeck

The inspiration for this piece is threefold. Firstly, a script that Will let me read, for a dramatisation of the story of Nala, which has not yet been produced, but which I hope will be in due course. That script showed me that translation may be from one medium to another as well as from one language to another. Secondly, Gustav Holst's choral works from the Sanskrit, particularly his one-act opera *Sāvitrī* (sic; opus 25, 1908) and his various *Hymns from the Rig Veda* (opus 24, 1907–08; opus 26, 1908–12).<sup>33</sup> Thirdly, Louis-Ferdinand Céline's book of *Ballets Without Music, Without Dancers, Without Anything*,<sup>34</sup> which shows the validity of presenting, in one medium, an account of an artwork putatively intended for, but as yet unrealised in, another. Adopting and adapting Céline's approach allows me to write the libretto for a balletic opera without composing music or choreographing dances. The music and dancing are as supplied by the reader. The reader should also feel free – as any composer surely would – to elongate specific moments by repeating lyrics where desired.

### The Story

The heart of this opera is a dramatisation of a story narrated to the Pāṇḍavas and their mother Kuntī by the *gandharva* Citraratha at *Mahābhārata* 1.165.<sup>35</sup> In a nutshell: King Viśvāmitra, out hunting, visits Vasiṣṭha's ashram, takes a fancy to

<sup>33</sup> Hear for example the 1965 recordings of *Sāvitrī* and the third group of *Choral Hymns* (with the Purcell Singers and the English Chamber Orchestra conducted by the composer's daughter Imogen Holst; Decca reissue, 2011).

<sup>34</sup> Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Ballets Without Music, Without Dancers, Without Anything*, trans. Thomas and Carol Christensen (Copenhagen and Los Angeles: Green Integer, 1999; first French edn Paris: Gallimard, 1959).

<sup>35</sup> For the chapter with full critical apparatus, see Vishnu S. Sukthankar, ed., *The Ādiparvan, being the First Book of the Mahābhārata, the Great Epic of India, for the First Time Critically Edited* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933), pp. 684–90.

his cow Nandinī, and attempts to appropriate her; she resists by producing a jungly army which overpowers his troops; and as a result he abandons his royal role and, through fearsome austerities, becomes a brahmin.

Several of the story's themes – the forest, and conflict between its inhabitants and its visitors – are already alive in the context of Citraratha's narration: Citraratha has attempted to prohibit the Pāṇḍavas' access to the River Gaṅgā, but has been overpowered by Arjuna Pāṇḍava. In this story told by Citraratha, in contrast, the visitor fails to get what he wants from the forest.

This is one of several stories in early Sanskrit literature that feature conflict between Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra.<sup>36</sup> It narrates the first meeting of the two men. At *Mahābhārata* 1.165 it is prompted by Arjuna in light of what Citraratha has said about sage Vasiṣṭha in the immediately preceding chapters.

A longer version of this story is found at *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.50–55; there it is followed by a string of other stories about what happened to Viśvāmitra while he was attempting to become a brahmin, which he finally manages at *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.64.10–19.<sup>37</sup> A shorter version is also found, at *Mahābhārata* 9.39.12–29, in connection with Balarāma's visit to Ruṣaṅgu's ashram, where Viśvāmitra's transformation into a brahmin is said to have occurred.<sup>38</sup>

Adheesh Sathaye's discussion of this story in his book on Viśvāmitra focuses upon Viśvāmitra's rare feat of becoming a brahmin even though he was not born in a brahmin family.<sup>39</sup> This focus is also evident in Sathaye's two articles on the *Mahābhārata*'s Viśvāmitra legends,<sup>40</sup> and picks up on a primary

<sup>36</sup> Sathaye's 'Catalogue of Viśvāmitra Legends' gives details of four such episodes. See Adheesh A. Sathaye, *Crossing the Lines of Caste: Viśvāmitra and the Construction of Brahmin Power in Hindu Mythology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 253–57.

<sup>37</sup> See G. H. Bhatt et al., eds, *The Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa Critically Edited for the First Time* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1958–75).

<sup>38</sup> That short version does not include the episode of Viśvāmitra coveting and attempting to appropriate Vasiṣṭha's cow; rather, the cow emits the jungly army at Vasiṣṭha's behest after the misbehaviour of Viśvāmitra's soldiers.

<sup>39</sup> See Sathaye, *Crossing the Lines*, pp. 72–76 (on the *Rāmāyaṇa* version), and pp. 87–88 (comparing the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* versions).

<sup>40</sup> Adheesh Sathaye, 'How to Become a Brahman: the Construction of *Varṇa* as Social Place in the *Mahābhārata*'s Legends of Viśvāmitra', *Acta Orientalia Vilnensia* 8.1 (2007); and 'Magic

concern of this story and of the *Mahābhārata* as a whole, which encourages sticking to the class – and thus the class tasks – one was born into.

Before discussing the libretto and the translation strategies used in its production, I would like to mention that the story of Nandinī is tailored not just to its most immediate narrative context, but also to the wider context of the *Mahābhārata*'s plot. When they encounter Citraratha, the Pāṇḍavas and Kuntī are travelling towards Kāmpilya, where Arjuna will win the hand of Draupadī, who will then marry all five Pāṇḍava brothers. Arguably the *Mahābhārata*'s most crucial scene is the later dicing scene of *Mahābhārata* 2.53–65, in which Duryodhana Kaurava and his brothers, having apparently won Draupadī from their Pāṇḍava cousins in a throw of dice, proceed to manhandle her, abuse her, and then attempt to strip her naked, while her husbands look on helplessly, for they have already been staked and lost in previous throws and thus they are slaves who cannot initiate their own actions.<sup>41</sup> The indignities visited upon Draupadī in this scene are the major factor driving the *Mahābhārata* narrative towards the war between the two sets of cousins; and the abuse of Nandinī in *Mahābhārata* 1.165 seems in some ways to mirror the scene, with Vasiṣṭha in the same position as the Pāṇḍavas – since he is prevented, by the nature of his role (brahmin role in his case, slave role in theirs), from intervening to protect the suffering female. In both stories the female character, thrown back upon her own resources, is effective in resisting her appropriation and ill-treatment. Draupadī does this by the power of argument, and also by the apparent power of her own integrity, whereby when Duḥśāsana Kaurava attempts to strip her, her clothes are miraculously replenished and her modesty preserved;<sup>42</sup> and Nandinī

does it by producing obedient armies from her orifices. It is as if Citraratha is giving the Pāṇḍavas a disguised account of the crucial crisis in the marriage they are soon to begin; or it is as if Vaiśampāyana, the narrator of the story of the Pāṇḍavas, is giving Janamejaya, its primary listener, a disguised analogue of a crucial scene yet to come.

### The Libretto

Although the direct speech in the source text transfers easily to an opera libretto, the descriptions of the action often do not. Lorna Hardwick describes this basic narratological problem:

Epic poetry has a narrator through whom other voices are articulated and by whom the listeners' experience is shaped ... In drama that explicit narrative frame is hidden behind the characters in the play and the action on the stage. A different kind of 'reality' is created, that of the immediate world of the stage in which people move and gesture and interact as well as speak and in which they rarely address the audience directly. The audience are spectators, and the range of imaginative responses and ranges of meaning can be directed and limited by what is represented on the stage and how it is represented ... [I]n general a staged performance which operates as visual spectacle rather than aural

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Cows and Cannibal Kings: the Textual Performance of the Viśvāmitra Legends in the *Mahābhārata*, in John Brockington, ed., *Battle, Bards and Brāhmins* (Papers of the 13th World Sanskrit Conference, vol. 2; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2012).

<sup>41</sup> For a study of Yudhiṣṭhira Pāṇḍava's behaviour at this juncture stressing his status as a slave, see Mary Brockington, 'Husband or Slave? Interpreting the Hero of the *Mahābhārata*', in Robert P. Goldman and Muneo Tokunaga, eds, *Epic Undertakings* (Papers of the 12th World Sanskrit Conference, vol. 2; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2009).

<sup>42</sup> *Mahābhārata* 2.61.41. In the next verse this is called *tad adbhatatamaṃ loke*, 'the greatest miracle in the world'. On the details of the manuscript evidence here, see Alf Hildebeitel,

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*Rethinking the Mahābhārata: a Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 250–57. Many interpolations attribute the miracle to Kṛṣṇa's intervention; but Hildebeitel's concern about 'the eagerness of the Critical Edition's editors to excise bhakti by stripping the text' (p. 251) is misplaced here, since all the normal editorial protocols are followed. As things stand in the critically reconstituted version, the reader may or may not read Kṛṣṇa's intervention into the text here (on the grounds that it is mentioned when, later in the story, characters refer back to this scene); but the option of *not* doing so might have gender-political implications, just as it might have gender-political implications that 'in the *Mahābhārata* [version of this story about Viśvāmitra], the *kāmadhenu* [i.e., Nandinī] acts on her own' (Sathaye, 'How to Become a Brahman', p. 50 n. 38).

experience has to develop narrative techniques which can be integrated into the staging.<sup>43</sup>

I have sometimes translated the text's descriptions of action as stage directions, sometimes as additional sung lines, and sometimes not at all. Sometimes I have used additional characters – the boy, the chorus – to make details of the action explicit in cases where the description in the source text is inconveniently general or summative.

The following presentation of *Mahābhārata* 1.165 gives the Sanskrit text in the first column, van Buitenen's English translation in the second,<sup>44</sup> and the libretto in the third; and so even readers who do not know Sanskrit will easily see what I have done in terms of compression and expansion of the source text.

The most obvious expansion is the framing of the story with two additional songs performed by the chorus. These are translations of hymns from the *Ṛgveda*: 10.146 credited to Devamuni Airaṃmada and dedicated to the (female) forest, and 10.127 credited to Rātri Bhāradvājī or Kuśika Saubhara and dedicated to the (female) night. These hymns have been chosen because their subjects fit well with that of the story they here frame. The three female figures are intended to function as one. The new context given to these hymns by the story of Nandinī allows them to resonate in new ways; consider 10.146.5, for example, and the she-wolf and he-wolf in 10.127.6, and the cows and conqueror

in 10.127.8.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, the frame allows the central story to resonate in new ways; for example, *Ṛgveda* 10.146 may encourage an ecological interpretation of Viśvāmitra's treatment of Nandinī. More generally, I hope that such resonances will allow the character of Nandinī to be understood in other ways too, as diversely as her identity as 'cow' might immediately suggest in the Sanskrit text (where it evokes the earth, and any other bountiful thing)<sup>46</sup> more easily than it does in English. My previous work on this story has suggested that Nandinī could represent Vasiṣṭha's *putrikā* – that is, his lineal daughter, whose son will sustain Vasiṣṭha's patriline.<sup>47</sup> But that specific angle is not stressed here.

Since the translation of the Vedic hymns does not involve any switch of genre, I have presented them using just two columns.<sup>48</sup> The libretto occupies the right-hand column throughout.

<sup>43</sup> Lorna Hardwick, *Translating Words, Translating Cultures* (London: Duckworth, 2000), p. 114.

<sup>44</sup> J. A. B. van Buitenen, trans., *Mahābhārata Volume 2: Book 2. The Book of the Assembly Hall; Book 3. The Book of the Forest* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 331–33. I have separated van Buitenen's translation into individual verses in order to present it in parallel with the Sanskrit, and I have added superscript verse numbers. I have also altered the translation slightly: in v. 3 I have corrected 'Kānyakubja' to 'Kanyakubja' (cf. van Buitenen's note, p. 463); in v. 15 I have relocated the clause 'which was named Nandī', which van Buitenen places earlier (after 'flawless and lovely cow'); and in v. 38 I have added 'or seven' and changed 'rocks' to 'missiles'.

<sup>45</sup> Incidentally, Holst adapted both of these hymns for solo voice and piano, although neither were included in the collections he published. See Raymond Head, 'Holst and India (II)', *Tempo* (new series) 160 (1987), pp. 29 n., 33, 37.

<sup>46</sup> See Deryck O. Lodrick, 'Symbol and Sustenance: Cattle in South Asian Culture', *Dialectical Anthropology* 29.1 (2005), pp. 67–68.

<sup>47</sup> See Simon Brodbeck, *The Mahābhārata Patriline: Gender, Culture, and the Royal Hereditary* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 79–80; and 'Putrikā Interpretation of the Mahābhārata', *Samskṛtavimarsah: Journal of Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan* 6 (2012), pp. 148–49.

<sup>48</sup> For the accentuation of the Vedic Sanskrit, I have followed H. H. Wilson, trans., *Ṛg-Veda-Samhitā: the Oldest Authority for the Religious and Social Institutions of the Hindus*, ed. W. F. Webster, enlarged edn Nag Sharan Singh (Delhi: Nag, 1990), vol. 6.

**Viśvāmitra and Nandinī****Cast (in Order of Appearance)**

Chorus	<i>soprano, alto, tenor, bass</i>
Forest creatures	
Viśvāmitra	<i>tenor</i>
Hunters	<i>tenor, baritone, bass</i>
Vasiṣṭha	<i>baritone</i>
Boy	<i>treble</i>
Nandinī	<i>mezzo-soprano</i>
Forest warriors	
Indra	<i>bass</i>

**Ṛgveda 10.146**

araṇyāny araṇyāny asau yā prevaḥ naśyāsi |  
kathā grāmaṃ na pṛcchasi na tvā bhīr iva vindatī 3ṃ || 1 ||

vṛṣāravāya vadāte yad upāvāti cicçikaḥ |  
āghāṭibhīr iva dhāvayān araṇyānir mähīyate || 2 ||

uta gāvā ivādanty uta veśméva dṛśyate |  
uto araṇyāniḥ sāyaṃ śakaṭīr iva sarjati || 3 ||

gām aṅgaiṣa ā hvāyati dārv aṅgaiṣo apāvadhīt |  
vasān araṇyānyāṃ sāyam akrukṣad itī manyate || 4 ||

na vā araṇyānir hānty anyaś cen nābhigacchāti |  
svādoḥ phalāsya jagdhvāyā yathākāmaṃ ni pādyaate || 5 ||

āñjanagandhiṃ surābhīm bāhvānnām akṣṣivalām |  
prāham mṛgāṇām mātaram araṇyānim āśaṃsiṣam || 6 ||

*Scene 1: the forest.*

*Chorus:*

Forest, goddess forest  
You seem to vanish before us  
Why don't you want to come into town?  
Aren't you at all afraid?

When one chirping bird  
Is egged on by another  
The forest rejoices  
As if she's dancing with cymbals

The forest at evening  
Is like cattle feeding  
Like a homestead come into view  
Like a creaking cart

You think someone's calling their cow  
You think someone's chopping their wood  
Stay in the forest at evening  
You'll think it's someone screaming

But the forest won't cause harm  
Unless someone else attacks;  
You can eat tasty fruit  
Then rest at your ease

I praise the goddess forest  
The mother of the deer  
Fragrant with the smell of balm  
Unploughed but full of food

*Dance of the forest creatures (incl. jigs, hornpipes, reels, waltzes).*

**Mahābhārata 1.165**

arjuna uvāca |  
kiṃnimittam abhūd vairam viśvāmitravasiṣṭhayoḥ |  
vasator āśrame puṇye śaṃsa naḥ sarvam eva tat || 1 ||

gandharva uvāca |  
idaṃ vāsiṣṭham ākhyānaṃ purāṇaṃ paricakṣate |  
pārtha sarveṣu lokeṣu yathāvat tan nibodha me || 2 ||

kanyakubje mahān āsīt pārthivo bharatarṣabha |  
gādhīti viśruto loke satyadharmaparāyaṇaḥ || 3 ||

tasya dharmātmanaḥ putraḥ samṛddhabalavāhanaḥ |  
viśvāmitra iti khyāto babhūva ripumardanaḥ || 4 ||

sa cacāra sahāmātyo mṛgayām gahane vane |  
mṛgān vidhyan varāhāṃś ca ramyeṣu marudhanvasu || 5 ||

vyāyāmakarśitaḥ so 'tha mṛgalipsuḥ pipāsitaḥ |  
ājagāma naraśreṣṭha vasiṣṭhasyāśramaṃ prati || 6 ||

tam āgatam abhiprekṣya vasiṣṭhaḥ śreṣṭhabhāg ṛṣiḥ |  
viśvāmitram naraśreṣṭhaṃ pratijagrāha pūjayā || 7 ||  
pādyārghyācamaniyena svāgatena ca bhārata |  
tathaiva parijagrāha vanyena haviṣā tathā || 8 ||

tasyātha kāmādhug dhenur vasiṣṭhasya mahātmanaḥ |  
uktā kāmān prayaccheti sā kāmān duduhe tataḥ || 9 ||

<sup>1</sup> Arjuna said:

What caused the feud between Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra, who both lived in holy hermitages? Tell it to us all.

<sup>2</sup> The Gandharva said:

This story of Vasiṣṭha they call purāṇic Lore in all three worlds, Pārtha. Learn from me how it was.

<sup>3</sup> In Kanyakubja once sat a great king, O bull of the Bhāratas, who was famed in the world as Gādhī, devoted to the Law of Truth.

<sup>4</sup> This Law-spirited king had a son with plentiful troops and mounts, a crusher of enemies, who was known as Viśvāmitra.

<sup>5</sup> He was wont to hunt with his ministers far out in the wilderness, shooting deer and boar in the lovely deserts and wastelands.

<sup>6</sup> Once, when questing for deer, he became wan with fatigue and thirst, and he went to Vasiṣṭha's hermitage, O best of men.

<sup>7</sup> Seeing him come, Vasiṣṭha, the lordly seer, received the great Viśvāmitra with homage.

<sup>8</sup> He received him with water to wash his feet, a guest gift, water to rinse his mouth, greetings of welcome, and an offering of forest fare, O Bhārata.

<sup>9</sup> The great-spirited Vasiṣṭha had a Cow of Plenty, which yielded anything he wished when he told her to yield.

*Enter King Viśvāmitra and the hunters.  
Dance of the hunters.*

*Scene 2: Vasiṣṭha's ashram.  
Vasiṣṭha and a boy are there.  
Enter Viśvāmitra and the hunters, exhausted.*

*Vasiṣṭha:  
King Viśvāmitra, son of King Gādhī of Kanyakubja  
Welcome to you and your friends  
What an honour  
Here is water – wash the dust from your feet  
Here is water – rinse the dust from your mouth  
I'll see about some forest food*

*Vasiṣṭha (to the boy): Bring them what they want*

*The boy brings food and drink, with announcements.*

*Nandinī dances unseen.*

grāmyāranyā oṣadhīś ca duduhe paya eva ca |  
 ṣaḍrasaṃ cāmṛtarasaṃ rasāyanam anuttamam || 10 ||

bhojanīyāni peyāni bhakṣyāṇi vividhāni ca |  
 lehyāny amṛtakalpāni coṣyāṇi ca tathārjuna || 11 ||  
 taiḥ kāmāiḥ sarvasaṃpūrṇaiḥ pūjitaḥ ca mahīpatiḥ |  
 sāmātyaḥ sabalaś caiva tutoṣa sa bhṛṣaṃ nṛpaḥ || 12 ||

<sup>10</sup> Herbs of village and woods she yielded, and milk, and incomparable elixir with all six tastes, like the Elixir of Immortality itself,

<sup>11</sup> and various foodstuffs of the kind that are chewed, or drunk, or licked, or sucked, tasty like elixir, Arjuna.

<sup>12</sup> The king was honored with all he desired in great plenty, and he and his minister and his escort became greatly content.

Boy: Root beer

*Viśvāmitra and hunters*: God bless you

Boy: Pink berry pakora

*Viśvāmitra and hunters*: God keep you

Boy: Chateau Bhārgava, sparkling

*Viśvāmitra and hunters*: We are honoured

Boy: Mushroom and wildflower salad with chive croutons  
 and cottage cheese

*Viśvāmitra and hunters*: What a treat

Boy: Côtes du Gomatī, aged in oak

*Viśvāmitra and hunters*: Tasty drop

Boy: Roast peacock with beetroot and pomegranate stuffing

*Viśvāmitra and hunters*: You spoil us

Boy: Venison saṃsāra with brahmin potatoes and  
 soothsayer sauce

*Viśvāmitra and hunters*: Magnificent

Boy: Domaine du Niṣāda

*Viśvāmitra and hunters*: Delightful

Boy: Sprouts-of-the-season soufflé

*Viśvāmitra and hunters*: Succulent

Boy: Rhinoceros and wild garlic biryani

*Viśvāmitra and hunters*: Delicious

Boy: Spiced mango kulfi

*Viśvāmitra and hunters*: Stupendous

Boy: Cream cocktails

*Viśvāmitra and hunters*: Amazing

Boy: Fruits-of-the-forest fondant fancies

*Viśvāmitra and hunters*: Delectable

Boy: Almond fudge

*Viśvāmitra and hunters*: Unbelievable

Boy: Blossom brandy and butter tea

*Viśvāmitra and hunters*: Butter tea, butter tea

*Viśvāmitra*: This is the food of the gods

*Vasiṣṭha*: My cow Nandinī yields whatever is desired

*Viśvāmitra*: Nandinī, Nandinī

ṣaḍāyatām supārsvoruṃ triṣṭhuṃ pañca saṃvṛtām |  
maṇḍūkanetrām svākārām pīnodhasam aninditām || 13 ||  
suvāladhiṃ śaṅkukarṇām cāruśṛṅgām manoramām |  
puṣṭāyataśirogrīvām vismitaḥ so 'bhivīkṣya tām || 14 ||

abhinandati tām nandinī vasiṣṭhasya payasvinīm |  
abravīc ca bhṛṣaṃ tuṣṭo viśvāmitro munim tadā || 15 ||

arbudena gavām brahman mama rājyena vā punaḥ |  
nandinīm saṃprayacchasva bhuṅkṣva rājyaṃ mahāmune || 16 ||

vasiṣṭha uvāca |  
devatātithipitrarthaṃ ājyārthaṃ ca payasvinī |  
adeyā nandinīyaṃ me rājyenāpi tavānagha || 17 ||

viśvāmitra uvāca |  
kṣatriyo 'haṃ bhavān vipras tapaḥsvādhyāyasādhanah |  
brāhmaṇeṣu kuto vīryaṃ praśānteṣu dhṛtātmasu || 18 ||

arbudena gavām yas tvam na dadāsi mamepsitām |  
svadharmam na prahāsyāmi nayiṣye te balena gām || 19 ||

<sup>13-14</sup> With astonishment, he looked at Vasiṣṭha's flawless and lovely cow: she was six measures long, three wide, and five around, with fine flanks and thighs, prominent frog eyes, good carriage, fat udder, beautiful tail, pointed ears, handsome horns, and long, thick neck and head.

<sup>15</sup> Viśvāmitra saluted the beautiful milch cow of Vasiṣṭha, which was named Nandinī, and said contentedly to the hermit,

<sup>16</sup> 'Make Nandinī over to me for a myriad cows or my kingdom! Rule my kingdom, great hermit!'

<sup>17</sup> Vasiṣṭha said:  
I keep Nandinī for offerings to the Gods, my guests, and my ancestors, and for melted butter oblations. I cannot give her away, even for your kingdom, prince sans blame.

<sup>18</sup> Viśvāmitra said:  
I am a baron, you are a brahmin with no more means than asceticism and Vedic study. How can there be resistance in brahmins who are serene and have mastered themselves?

<sup>19</sup> If you do not give me the cow I want for a myriad of mine, I shall not forsake my own Law but take it away from you by force!

Enter Nandinī. Viśvāmitra sees her.  
Viśvāmitra: Oh Vasiṣṭha, your cow Nandinī ...  
Viśvāmitra (to himself):  
Six feet long, five feet round, three feet wide  
Smooth flanks and thighs  
Beautiful eyes, handsome figure  
Prodigious breasts, she's perfect

Lovely tail, pointy ears, pretty horns  
Feast for the mind  
Neck and head so long and thick  
Pale as a swan, pale as the moon

Viśvāmitra and Nandinī dance together.

Viśvāmitra (to Vasiṣṭha):  
I'll give you ten million cows  
I'll give you my kingdom  
Take the kingdom – enjoy it, sage  
But give me Nandinī

Vasiṣṭha:  
I need butter to feed the gods  
And ancestors and guests  
I can't give up rich Nandinī  
Not even for your kingdom

Viśvāmitra:  
I am the government, you are a scholar  
Good with your texts and your toils  
Scholars are peaceful and self-composed  
It's not their role to be bold

But if you don't give me my beloved  
For ten million cows  
I won't neglect my role  
I'll take your cow by force



vasiṣṭha uvāca |  
balasthaś cāsi rājā ca bāhuvīryaś ca kṣatriyaḥ |  
yathecchasi tathā kṣipraṃ kuru tvam mā vicāraya || 20 ||

gandharva uvāca |  
evam uktas tadā pārtha viśvāmitro balād iva |  
haṃsacandrapratīkāśāṃ nandinīm tāṃ jahāra gām || 21 ||  
kaśādaṇḍapratihatā kālyamānā tatas tataḥ |  
hambhāyamānā kalyāṇī vasiṣṭhasyātha nandinī || 22 ||  
āgamyābhimukhī pārtha tasthau bhagavadunmukhī |  
bhṛśaṃ ca tāḍyamānāpi na jagāmāśramāt tataḥ || 23 ||

vasiṣṭha uvāca |  
śṛṇomi te ravaṃ bhadre vinadantyāḥ punaḥ punaḥ |  
balād dhriyasi me nandi kṣamāvān brāhmaṇo hy aham || 24 ||

gandharva uvāca |  
sā tu teṣāṃ balān nandī balānāṃ bharatarṣabha |  
viśvāmitrabhayodvignā vasiṣṭhaṃ samupāgamat || 25 ||  
gaur uvāca |  
pāśāṇadaṇḍābhihatāṃ krandantīm mām anāthavat |  
viśvāmitrabalair ghorair bhagavan kim upekṣase || 26 ||

gandharva uvāca  
evaṃ tasyāṃ tadā partha dharṣitāyāṃ mahāmuniḥ |  
na cukṣubhe na dhairyāc ca vicacāla dhṛtavrataḥ || 27 ||

vasiṣṭha uvāca |  
kṣatriyāṇāṃ balaṃ tejo brāhmaṇānāṃ kṣamā balam |  
kṣamā mām bhajate tasmād gamyatām yadi rocate || 28 ||

<sup>20</sup> Vasiṣṭha said:  
You are a king at the head of an army, a baron of mighty arms. Make haste and do what you wish, take no time to reflect!

<sup>21</sup> The Gandharva said:  
At these words, O Pārtha, Viśvāmitra took the cow Nandinī, translucent like the moon or a wild goose, forcibly away.  
<sup>22</sup> And as she was driven up and beaten with thongs and sticks, Vasiṣṭha's beautiful cow Nandinī began to bellow.  
<sup>23</sup> She came back to him and stood before the blessed Lord, lifting up her head to him; and however sorely she was thrashed, she did not stir from the hermitage.

<sup>24</sup> Vasiṣṭha said:  
I hear your cry for help, my dear, as you keep lowing again and again. You are being taken from me by force, Nandī, for I am a forgiving brahmin.

<sup>25</sup> The Gandharva said:  
Frightened by the force of the troops and the terror of Viśvāmitra, she came closer to Vasiṣṭha.

<sup>26</sup> The cow said:  
Why do you overlook it, good master, when I am beaten with sticks and stones by Viśvāmitra's dreadful troops and cry out like an orphan?

<sup>27</sup> The Gandharva said:  
While the cow was being attacked in this way, the great hermit, who kept to his vows, was not upset or lost his poise.

<sup>28</sup> Vasiṣṭha said:  
A baron's strength is his energy, a brahmin's strength his forbearance. Forbearance possesses me; therefore, go if you wish.

Vasiṣṭha:  
You are the government, you are the king  
Strong with your powerful arms  
So do what you want, do it quickly  
Don't give it a second thought

Viśvāmitra: Put her on the chariot!

Using whips and sticks, the hunters try to drive Nandinī away.

Nandinī resists.

Nandinī: Vasiṣṭha! Master!

Vasiṣṭha:  
I hear your cry, sweet Nandinī  
As you call out again and again  
You're being taken forcibly  
But I am a tolerant scholar

Nandinī:  
I cry out but no one will help me  
I'm beaten with sticks and with stones  
By Viśvāmitra's merciless soldiers  
How can you allow it, my lord?

Vasiṣṭha:  
Firepower's the forte of rulers  
Patience the forte of scholars  
So patience is my lot  
If you want you should go

gaur uvāca |  
kiṃ nu tyaktāsmi bhagavan yad evaṃ mām prabhāṣase |  
atyaktāhaṃ tvayā brahman na śakyā nayituṃ balāt || 29 ||

vasiṣṭha uvāca |  
na tvām tyajāmi kalyāṇi sthīyatām yadi śakyate |  
ḍḍhena dāmnā baddhvaiṣa vatsas te hriyate balāt || 30 ||

gandharva uvāca |  
sthīyatām iti tac chrutvā vasiṣṭhasya payasvinī |  
ūrdhvāñcītaśirogrīvā prababhau ghoradarśanā || 31 ||

krodhaktekṣaṇā sā gaur hambhāravaghanasvanā |  
viśvāmitrasya tat sainyaṃ vyadrāvayata sarvaśaḥ || 32 ||  
kaśāgradaṇḍābhīhatā kālyamānā tatas tataḥ |  
krodhadīptekṣaṇā krodhaṃ bhūya eva samādadhe || 33 ||

āditya iva madhyāhne krodhadīptavapur babhau |  
aṅgāravarṣaṃ muñcantī muhur vāladhito mahat || 34 ||

asṛjat pahlavān pucchāt chakṛtaḥ śabarāñ śakān |  
mūtrataś cāsṛjat cāpi yavanān krodhamūrccitā || 35 ||

puṇḍrān kirātān dramīḍān siṃhalān barbarāṃs tathā |  
tathaiva daradān mlecchān phenataḥ sā sasarja ha || 36 ||

<sup>29</sup> *The cow said:*  
Have you forsaken me, good master, that you speak to me so? If you do not forsake me, brahmin, they will not be able to force me away.

<sup>30</sup> *Vasiṣṭha said:*  
I do not forsake you, my lovely, stay if you can. They have tied your calf with tight fetters and are taking it away by force!

<sup>31</sup> *The Gandharva said:*  
When Vasiṣṭha's cow heard him say 'Stay!' she curved her head and neck upward and her aspect became dreadful.

<sup>32</sup> Her eyes red with anger, and bellowing thunderously, she drove the army of Viśvāmitra about on all sides.

<sup>33</sup> As she was beaten with thongs and sticks and driven hither and thither, her eyes blazed with rage and her rage waxed stronger.

<sup>34</sup> Her body shone with the fires of fury like the sun at noon, and she spouted a huge rain of burning embers from her tail.

<sup>35</sup> From her arse she created the Pahlavas; the Śabaras and Śakas from her dung; from her urine she she created the Yavanas, as she well-nigh swooned with rage.

<sup>36</sup> From her foam she brought forth the Puṇḍras, Kirātas, Dramīḍas, Siṃhalas, Barbaras, Daradas, and Mlecchas.

*Nandinī:*  
Have you forsaken me, my lord  
That you speak to me that way?  
If you haven't forsaken me, my lord  
No army can drive me away

*Vasiṣṭha:*  
I'm not forsaking you, my dear  
If you can you should stay

*Nandinī stands tall and fights back noisily and furiously against the hunters.*

*Chorus:* Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha

*Nandinī pushes the hunters back, but they advance upon her again with their whips and sticks.*

*Chorus:* Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha

*Incandescent with rage, Nandinī emits fireworks.*

*Chorus:* Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha

*Nandinī emits an army of forest warriors from her orifices. The chorus announces each cohort.*

*Nandinī:* I shit on you  
*Chorus:* Black people, brown people  
Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha

*Nandinī:* I piss on you  
*Chorus:* Foreigners, asylum seekers  
Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha

*Nandinī:* I spit on you  
*Chorus:* Fat people, mad people  
Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha

tair viṣṣṭair mahat sainyaṃ nānāmlecchagaṇais tadā |  
nānāvaraṇasaṃchannair nānāyudhadharais tathā |  
avākīryata saṃrabdhair viśvāmitrasya paśyataḥ || 37 ||

ekaikaś ca tadā yodhaḥ pañcabhiḥ saptabhir vṛtaḥ |  
astravarṣeṇa mahatā kālyamānaṃ balaṃ tataḥ |  
prabhagnaṃ sarvatas trastaṃ viśvāmitrasya paśyataḥ || 38 ||

na ca prāṇair viyuḥjanta kecit te sainikās tadā |  
viśvāmitrasya saṃkrudhair vāsiṣṭhair bharataṣabha || 39 ||  
viśvāmitrasya sainyaṃ tu kālyamānaṃ triyojanam |  
kośamānaṃ bhayodvignaṃ trātāraṃ nādhyagacchata || 40 ||

<sup>37</sup> And when she had brought forth these manifold hosts of Barbarians, clad in their manifold armor and brandishing arms, she scattered with her furious troops that large army before Viśvāmitra's eyes.

<sup>38</sup> Every single soldier was surrounded by five or seven others; before Viśvāmitra's very eyes his army was routed with a rain of missiles, till it was everywhere broken down and intimidated.

<sup>39</sup> Yet not a soldier of Viśvāmitra's was separated from his life by Vasiṣṭha's furious soldiers, O bull of the Bhāratas.

<sup>40</sup> Viśvāmitra's army was driven off to a distance of three leagues, and as it yelled in panic it found no savior.

*Nandinī*: I bleed on you  
*Chorus*: Women, prostitutes, single mothers  
Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha

*Nandinī*: I snot on you  
*Chorus*: Homosexuals, vegetarians, smokers  
Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha

*Nandinī*: I sweat on you  
*Chorus*: Cyclists, pedestrians, socialists, republicans  
Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha

*Nandinī*: I pus on you  
*Chorus*: Poor people, old people, disabled people  
Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha

*Nandinī*: I weep on you  
*Chorus*: Homeless people, criminals, drug users  
Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha

*Brandishing various weapons, the forest warriors advance and overpower the hunters, while Viśvāmitra looks on helplessly.*

*The hunters scatter into the forest, wailing in terror, while Viśvāmitra looks on helplessly.*

ḍṛṣṭvā tan mahad āścaryaṃ brahmatejobhavaṃ tadā |  
viśvāmitraḥ kṣatrabhāvān nirviṇṇo vākyam abravīt || 41 ||

dhig balaṃ kṣatriyabalaṃ brahmatejobalaṃ balaṃ |  
balābalaṃ viniścītya tapa eva paraṃ balaṃ || 42 ||

sa rājyaṃ sphītam utsrjya tām ca dīptāṃ nrpaśriyam |  
bhogāṃś ca prṣṭhataḥ kṛtvā tapasy eva mano dadhe || 43 ||

sa gatvā tapasā siddhiṃ lokān viṣṭabhya tejasā |  
tatāpa sarvān dīptaūjā brāhmaṇatvam avāpa ca |  
apibac ca sutam somam indreṇa saha kauśikaḥ || 44 ||

<sup>41</sup> On seeing this great miracle that sprang from brahminic power, Viśvāmitra became loath with his baronhood and said,

<sup>42</sup> 'A curse on the power that is baronial power! Brahminic power is *power*. On weighing weakness and strength, asceticism appears the superior power!'

<sup>43</sup> He relinquished his prosperous kingdom and his blazing kingly fortune, he put all his pleasures behind him and set his mind on austerities.

<sup>44</sup> He became perfected by his austerities; and suffusing the worlds with his splendid might, he burned all the worlds with his fiery puissance and attained to brahminhood. And the Kauśika drank the pressed-out Soma with Indra.

*Scene 3: the forest.*

*Enter Viśvāmitra.*

*Viśvāmitra:*

The power of rulers is no kind of power  
The power of brilliance and truth is true power  
I've realised the meaning of weakness and power  
Self-control's the highest power

I've given up my thriving realm  
My blaze of royal majesty  
And all the things I used to love  
Self-control's my sole concern

*Viśvāmitra stands motionless.*

*Dance of the forest creatures.*

*Lightshow (in the manner of the 'star gate' sequence in Stanley Kubrick's film '2001: A Space Odyssey').*

*Chorus:* Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha

*Enter Indra.*

*Indra dances the soma-pressing dance.*

*Indra offers the soma to Viśvāmitra. Viśvāmitra drinks.*

*Chorus:* He drinks the soma

*Nandinī dances unseen.*

**Ṛgveda 10.127**

rātrī vy ākhyad āyatī pūruṭrā devy aṅkṣabhiḥ |  
viśvā adhi śriyō 'dhita || 1 ||

orv aprā amartyā nivatō devy uḍvatāḥ |  
jyotiṣā bādhatē tamāḥ || 2 ||

nir u svasāram askṛtoṣasām devy āyatī |  
aped ū hāsate tamāḥ || 3 ||

sā nō adya yasyā vayanṁ ni te yāmaṇ avikṣmahi |  
vṛkṣe na vāsatiṁ vayāḥ || 4 ||

ni grāmāso avikṣata ni padvanto ni pakṣiṇāḥ |  
ni śyenāsās cid arthināḥ || 5 ||

yāvayā vṛkyaṁ vṛkām yāvayā steṇam ūrmye |  
athā naḥ sutarā bhava || 6 ||

upā mā pepīṣat tamāḥ kṛṣṇaṁ vyaktam asthita |  
uṣā rnevā yātaya || 7 ||

upā te gā ivākāraṁ vṛṇīṣva dūhitar divaḥ |  
rātri stomāṇ na jigyuṣe || 8 ||

*Chorus and Indra:*

Goddess night is coming  
She's lit up many places with her eyes  
She's put on every jewel

The immortal goddess has filled up space  
The valleys and the peaks  
She drives away the darkness with her light

The goddess is coming  
She's driven away the twilight, her sister  
The darkness is certain to run away too

She'll soon be upon us  
We've settled down in her path – your path  
Like a bird in its nest in a tree

*(Indra gestures towards different sections of the audience)*

The people have settled down  
The creatures with paws and the creatures with wings  
And even the busy birds of prey

*Chorus, Indra, and Viśvāmitra:*

Keep the she-wolf and he-wolf to yourself  
Billowing night, ward off the thief  
Be easy for us to get through

*(Nandini becomes visible)*

Darkness has shown herself to me  
Decorated all over, black and beautiful  
Return her, dawn, as you would borrowed things

Night, daughter of the sky  
I've rounded up this hymn for you  
As if I were rounding up cows  
Look upon it with favour  
As a hymn for a conqueror

### Notes on the Translation

Ṛv 10.146.1. I have translated *vindatīṣm* as if it were *vindati*: the lengthening and nasalisation of the vowel are purely performative features.<sup>49</sup>

Ṛv 10.146.2. The identities of the creatures *vṛṣārava* and *ciccika* are rather obscure. Where previous translators have provided translations, these have tended to be insects and/or birds, though Basham takes *vṛṣārava* literally as ‘lowing of cattle’, as do Jamison and Brereton with their potentially misleading ‘bull-roarer’ (they also supply ‘frog?’ as a parenthetical possibility).<sup>50</sup> In his book on *Birds in Sanskrit Literature*, Dave discusses this verse and identifies the *vṛṣārava* as the hawk-cuckoo and the *ciccika* as the crested swift.<sup>51</sup> I lean towards Dave’s interpretation, but I have left the identities of the birds open so that the image does not depend on the ornithological expertise of the audience.

Ṛv 10.146.6. Many previous translations of *akṣīvalām* – Wilson’s ‘uncultivated’, Griffith’s ‘who tills not’, Basham’s ‘she tills not’, and Jamison and Brereton’s ‘she does no ploughing’ – seem to me to miss part of the point here, which is that the forest bears fruit without a man having ploughed her. The ploughing is not something she hasn’t done, but that hasn’t been done to her (cf. O’Flaherty’s

<sup>49</sup> I am grateful to James Hegarty and Vijay Ramnarace for advice on this. See Brian D. Joseph, ‘A Diachronic Phonological Solution to the Syntax of Vedic Negative Particles’, in Hans Henrich Hock, ed., *Studies in Sanskrit Syntax: a Volume in Honor of the Centennial of Speijer’s Sanskrit Syntax* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), p. 121 n. 8.

<sup>50</sup> For translations of this hymn, see Wilson, *Ṛg-Veda-Samhitā*, vol. 6, pp. 468–69; Ralph T. H. Griffith, trans., *The Hymns of the Ṛgveda Translated with a Popular Commentary*, revd edn J. L. Shastri (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), pp. 640–41; A. L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India: a Survey of the History and Culture of the Indian Sub-Continent Before the Coming of the Muslims*, 3rd revd edn (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1967), pp. 402–03; Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, trans., *The Rig Veda: an Anthology* (London: Penguin, 1981), pp. 242–43; Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Brereton, trans., *The Rigveda: the Earliest Religious Poetry of India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), vol. 3, p. 1632.

<sup>51</sup> K. N. Dave, *Birds in Sanskrit Literature*, revd edn (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2005), pp. 168–69.

‘untilled by a plough’); something like parthenogenesis is implied. The sex-as-ploughing metaphor implicit here is also implicit elsewhere in early Sanskrit literature, for example in connection with Sītā’s birth (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1.65.14; 2.110.27–29); as Olivelle says, using appropriately gender-specific terms, ‘The plough symbolizes man’s dominance over and his manipulation of nature.’<sup>52</sup>

Mbh 1.165.9–11. I have expanded the description of the feeding of the hunting party, and I hope to have introduced some humour at the same time. I have tried to emphasise the forest habitat as well as the dairy products appropriate to Nandinī’s allegedly bovine form. Sathaye suggests that the feast offered to the visitors is a vegetarian one,<sup>53</sup> but this is not entirely evident from the text’s description, and I have devised a menu which takes the word *kāma* (occurring three times in v. 9 and once in v. 12) seriously in relation to the visitors.<sup>54</sup> Van Buitenen’s translation of v. 9 pegs the *kāmān* to Vasiṣṭha, but this is interpretive.

Mbh 1.165.13–14. I have removed the connection between Nandinī’s eyes and a frog’s, so as to conform to common canons of beauty. I have also imported the description *haṃsacandrapratīkāśām* into Viśvāmitra’s speech from v. 21, where it is hard to preserve because it is part of Citraratha’s narration.

Mbh 1.165.18–20, 24, 28. As mentioned above, the necessity of sticking to the tasks appropriate to one’s class is a major concern of the *Mahābhārata*<sup>55</sup> and of

<sup>52</sup> Patrick Olivelle, ‘Village vs. Wilderness: Ascetic Ideals and the Hindu World’, in Olivelle, *Ascetics and Brahmins: Studies in Ideologies and Institutions* (London: Anthem Press, 2011), p. 49.

<sup>53</sup> Sathaye, ‘How to Become a Brahman’, pp. 55–56.

<sup>54</sup> In the account of the hospitality provided to Bharata and his escort at Bharadvāja’s ashram (*Rāmāyaṇa* 2.85), meat and alcohol are certainly present. See Cinzia Pieruccini, ‘Bharadvāja’s Hermitage and the Paradise of the Warrior (*Rāmāyaṇa* II 85)’, in Paola M. Rossi and Cinzia Pieruccini, eds, *Kings and Ascetics in Indian Classical Literature* (Milan: Cisalpino, Istituto Editoriale Universitario, 2009), p. 28.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, *Bhagavadgītā* 18.45–48: ‘A man achieves perfection by contenting himself with his own work; hear how such a man, intent upon his own work, finds that perfection. A man attains perfection by reverencing, through his own specific activity,

this story. Viśvāmitra makes it clear that because he is a *kṣatriya* it is appropriate for him to take Nandinī if he wants, and that because Vasiṣṭha is a brahmin it is not appropriate for him to oppose this. Additionally, although this is not explicitly stated in this chapter, both characters would presumably know that it is the king's duty to enforce obedience to class-duty within his domains.<sup>56</sup> But when this particular chapter is taken out of its literary context and then also out of its cultural context, it is difficult to bring out the full implications of these references to *kṣatriyas* and brahmins. Accordingly, I have turned them into rather impressionistic allusions to the roles of the government and the scholar. If these allusions bring to mind the treatment of British academics by recent governments, then so be it. In any case, the narrative point – that Viśvāmitra implicitly threatens Vasiṣṭha with unpleasant repercussions should he attempt to hold on to Nandinī – is hard to lose, even in translation.

Mbh 1.165.30. As per van Buitenen's translation, Vasiṣṭha tells Nandinī that 'They have tied your calf with tight fetters and are taking it away by force!' This is the only verse that mentions Nandinī's calf; there is nothing in what precedes or follows to suggest that Nandinī has a calf, or that Viśvāmitra would have any interest in it. Vasiṣṭha presumably makes this statement in order to provoke Nandinī into resisting against her assailants.<sup>57</sup> If so, then there may not be any necessity for the statement to be true (there is after all no direct narration to this effect); but if it is true, and the hunters are trying to make Nandinī come along by capturing her more vulnerable calf first, then Vasiṣṭha and the hunters must have contrasting ideas about what Nandinī would do in such

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him from whom all creatures come into being, by whom all this is spread out. It is better to do one's own duty inadequately than another's well; no man is at fault performing an action enjoined by his own nature. Son of Kunti, a man should not abandon the work he was born into, even if it is faulty, for just as fire is wreathed in smoke all undertakings are attended by faults.' W. J. Johnson, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 78-79.

<sup>56</sup> For this rule (largely in relation to brahmins), see for example *Mahābhārata* 12.62-65.

<sup>57</sup> This is the apparent implication of the one-line star passage (\*1767) that the southern-recension manuscripts interpolate after v. 30: *yena kenāpy upāyena tvayā vatso nivāryatām |*

circumstances. Vasiṣṭha's statement about the calf seems to provoke such thoughts in the audience; but in so doing it implies a possible maternal motivation for Nandinī's violence which Citraratha then seems to nullify, stating as he does – in the next verse – that Nandinī's transformation was prompted just by Vasiṣṭha asking her to stay (which he did *before* he mentioned the calf). Thus although the mention of the calf seems to show Vasiṣṭha manipulating Nandinī towards the violence that he as a brahmin has been forced to eschew, it also complicates the question of Nandinī's motivations. In order to keep things simple, and to maximise the dramatic effect of Vasiṣṭha's instruction to Nandinī to stay if she can, in my translation I have omitted the second line of this verse. I considered reversing the order of the two lines and having Vasiṣṭha address the line about the calf to himself (thus the calf would be Nandinī herself); but that wouldn't work because the hunters have not tied Nandinī up.

Mbh 1.165.31. The chorus line – which is repeated as Nandinī's rage bears fruit, and which also recurs in the following scene as a lead-in for Indra – is intended to complement and enhance the intensity of the episode. Its eight-syllable pattern is taken from Act Two of Philip Glass's opera *Satyagraha*.

Mbh 1.165.35-36. In addition to introducing new lines for Nandinī and the chorus in order to make it clear what is happening, I have also replaced the eleven types of people listed in the Sanskrit text with very approximate English equivalents. The Sanskrit labels them *pahlavas*, *śabaras*, *śakas*, *yavanas*, *puṇḍras*, *kirātas*, *dramiḍas*, *siṃhalas*, *barbaras*, *daradas*, and *mlecchas*, this last word then being used again in v. 37 as a general category subsuming them all. These Sanskrit words for the most part denote distinct 'outsider' ethnic groups stereotyped as culturally and linguistically inferior.<sup>58</sup> In the translation I have

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<sup>58</sup> On these groups, see for example John Brockington, 'Concepts of Race in the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa', in Peter Robb, ed., *The Concept of Race in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995); Alok Parasher-Sen, "'Foreigner' and 'Tribe' as Barbarian (Mleccha) in Early North India', in Parasher-Sen, ed., *Subordinate and Marginal Groups in Early India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004). Both writers discuss this passage. Brockington says of these groups that 'their role in this context is to defend brahmanical

extended the theme beyond ethnic groups and included also other types of group who have been subject to prejudice, bullying, or marginalisation; and in order to prolong and emphasise this pivotal moment, I have also extended the range of bodily functions and fluids that Nandinī uses to create her army.

Mbh 1.165.41–44. The final episode of *Mahābhārata* 1.165 presents particular difficulties, partly because of the specific notions of brahmin and *ksatriya* mentioned above, and partly because it is narrated so briefly. Viśvāmitra is clearly plunged into existential crisis because his royal power has proved to be impotent – but in competition with what? In the Sanskrit there is a slippage between the power whereby Nandinī was able to repel Viśvāmitra and his men with her motley armies, and the power whereby Vasiṣṭha and his forest ashram were more attractive to Nandinī than Viśvāmitra and his palace. In the Sanskrit this ambiguity is tilted towards the latter pole in the sequel, by the statement in *pāda* 42b (*brahmatejobalam balam*) and by Viśvāmitra’s eventual attainment of brahminhood (this being, presumably, what he wanted instead of the royal status he discarded). But I have tried to retain the ambiguity and keep the appeal of this Viśvāmitra – and the terms of his striving in this scene – as open as possible. He has behaved correctly according to his education and experience, but has then been denied the expected result, and he is consequently coming to new terms with himself and his desires. His victory is thus a yogic one.

Ṛv 10.127.5. The verb *avikṣata* is in the second person plural. The poet seems to be addressing at least the people (and probably also the various creatures)

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values ... though impure in various ways, these groups are acting in support of brāhman values’ (‘Concepts of Race’, pp. 101–02). This is true in a way, especially if one sees Nandinī as ‘the symbol of Brahman power’ (Sathaye, ‘How to Become a Brahman’, p. 57); but in a perhaps more obvious sense, their role is to limit the *ksatriya*’s exploitation of his domains. Parasher-Sen seems to be closer to the mark when she says that ‘The intention probably was to offer some explanation for the presence of a large army consisting of peoples who already formed different elements of the population and were in particular noted for their military might’ (“Foreigner” and “Tribe”, p. 284); but once again, this army’s immediate role is to curtail the *ksatriya*’s options.

directly, and were it not for their accents, the nouns and adjectives (*grāmāso, padvanto, pakṣiṇaḥ, śyenāsaś, arthinaḥ*) could be read as vocatives. But maintaining this second person sense in the English translation would sound odd, since both of the neighbouring verses have night, the hymn’s subject, in the second person. Perhaps because of this, all the translations I have consulted translate *avikṣata* as if it is in the third person plural.<sup>59</sup> I have followed suit; but I have also preserved something of the second-person effect by means of a stage direction.

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<sup>59</sup> See Wilson, *Ṛg-Veda-Saṃhitā*, vol. 6, p. 431; Griffith, *The Hymns of the Ṛgveda*, p. 632; Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, p. 402; O’Flaherty, *The Rig Veda*, p. 199; Jamison and Brereton, *The Rigveda*, vol. 3, p. 1605.



### **Closing Remarks**

**James M. Hegarty and Simon Brodbeck**

It has been a great pleasure for us to present work that owes its existence to the encouragement and scholarly example of Will Johnson. His contribution to Indology is unquestionable. His contribution to the creation, in English, of something of the playful brilliance of Sanskrit literature is one that numberless individuals, now and in the future, will enjoy and benefit from. As for ourselves, it has been a privilege for us to be his junior colleagues and to receive his mentorship. He is truly a gentleman and a scholar, a *sahādaya* and a *brahmarṣi*.