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Authors' signatures in early Kāvya*

A clear instance of the phenomenon to be dealt with here is found in the works of Harṣa (seventh century). Of this author we possess three plays, two so-called *nāṭikās* and one play of a completely different type. To begin with the two *nāṭikās*, in Harṣa's *Privyadarśikā* the heroine by that name gets lost on her way to king Udayana, to whom she is to be married. The girl is "found" in a forest and brought to Udayana's court where she lives some time without anybody being aware of her identity. To the courtiers she is known as Āraṇyikā after the place (*araṇya*) where she has been found. The plot of Harṣa's *Ratnāvalī* is almost identical. In this play, however, the girl has suffered shipwreck at sea (*sāgara*). Accordingly, she is known by the name Sāgarikā. Harṣa's third play, the *Nāgānanda*, is, at least at first sight, completely different from the two referred to just now. To mention one of the more obvious differences, it does not deal with princesses staying incognito at a king's court. The plot of the *Nāgānanda* is also found in Harṣa's predecessor Candragomin's *Lokānanda*. One of the changes made by Harṣa compared to his predecessor's *Lokānanda* concerns the name of the protagonist¹. In the *Lokānanda* he is called Manicūḍa, a name which refers to the crest-jewel

* A draft version of this paper was also presented at a meeting at the École Française d'Extrême-Orient in Pondicherry on August 4th 2005. I am especially grateful to Dominic Goodall for his insightful comments. The phenomenon discussed in this paper has already been mentioned in the margin of my previous publications dealing with other topics (see Tieklen 2001b and forthcoming). I think, however, that it deserves to be treated separately, because it seems to reveal a phenomenon hitherto unacknowledged about the way the early Kāvya authors proceeded in their work.

¹ However, the plot of the *Nāgānanda* does not seem to have been borrowed from the earlier *Lokānanda*. For a source Harṣa himself refers to a *vichādhara-jātaka*; see Zin 2004.

A palm leaf of the *Abhisārikasambhogasāṅgāra* manuscript
(photo L. Sudyka)

(*ciñāmani*) he is born with. Though the same crest-jewel plays an important role in the *Nāgānanda* as well², in that version the hero is called Jimūtavāhana, or "He who rides on the clouds". The reason behind the change of the name may be found in the story itself. For, after Jimūtavāhana substituted himself for someone else as a victim at a human sacrifice, he is carried off into the sky by the bird Garuda. So, in the same way as in the *Priyadarśikā* and *Ratnāvalī*, the heroines were named Āraṅyikā and Sagarikā after the settings in which they had disappeared, a forest and the sea respectively, the protagonist of the *Nāgānanda*, Manicūṭa, is renamed Jimūtavāhana after the fact that he had disappeared into the sky³.

Harsa's three plays thus appear to share a similar element in their stories. We do not seem to be dealing with a coincidence but with something planned, as becomes clear from the names given to the protagonists. The names in question seem to function as a kind of signature of the author.

Something similar may be observed in the three plays by Bhavabhūti (eighth century). His *Mahāvīracarita* and *Uttararāmacarita*, taken together, cover the complete *Rāmāyana*, namely books 1-6 and 7 (the *Uttarakāṇḍa*) respectively. An important element in both plays is Śītā's absence. In the *Mahāvīracarita* she is kidnapped by Rāvaṇa and in the *Uttararāmacarita* she is residing in heaven after she had been banished by Rāma. Interestingly, in Bhavabhūti's third play, the *Mālatīmādhava*, the female protagonist, Mālatī, is kidnapped twice, the first time by the *kāpālika* Aghoraghanta and the second time by the latter's pupil Kapālikuṇḍalā. As far as the wife's or lover's absences are concerned it is almost as if the two Rāma plays have been compressed into the *Mālatīmādhava*.

In the same way the curse plays an important role in all works of Kālidāsa (fourth or fifth century) with one exception, about which later more. To begin with the *Abhijñānaśākuntala*, in which Śakuntalā is cursed by the short-tempered sage Durvāsas after he had not received a proper reception at

² After Jimūtavāhana had been carried off into the sky by Garuda his blood-stained crest-jewel fell down into Malayavati's lap. In this way she came to know that her husband was in serious danger.

³ As argued by Zin (2004) the name Jimūtavāhana of the *Nāgānanda* was probably "invented" by Harsa and it might well be from this playwright's drama that the name has found its way into, among other texts, the *Bṛhatkathāślokaṃuṅgarī* and *Kathāsaritāgāra*.

the girl's father's *āśrama*. The curse entails that Śakuntalā's lover Dusyanta will forget her (prelude to the fourth act). With the curse we seem to be dealing with an element introduced by Kālidāsa himself, as it is not found in the *Mahābhārata* version of the story, in which Dusyanta's loss of memory is not explained at all. Only after a voice from heaven urges Dusyanta to acknowledge Śakuntalā's son as his own does he come forward with the feeble excuse that he had merely tried to test Śakuntalā. At the same time, in the play the curse is a most important element, as it is responsible for the postponement of the "happy ending", when Dusyanta realizes that he has the much desired son and heir who is to secure the continuation of the dynasty.

Like the *Abhijñānaśākuntala*, the *Vikramorvaśya* revolves around the postponed union of father and son, or, to be more to the point, of king and heir. Only at the end of the play Purūravas becomes aware of the fact that he has a son, who had been kept hidden from him by his wife Urvaśī. Urvaśī's behaviour, in turn, is the result of a curse she had incurred when she was still an *apsaras* in heaven. While playing her part in the drama *Lakṣmīsvayamvara* there, she had called Viṣṇu by the name of her lover Purūravas. Because of this error Bharata cursed her to lose her status of heavenly demigod and sent her down from heaven. Subsequently, however, the god Indra diminished the severity of the curse by specifying that Urvaśī could stay on earth with Purūravas on condition that the latter would not see his children⁴.

While the curse in the *Abhijñānaśākuntala* is almost certainly Kālidāsa's own invention, this seems not to be the case in his *Vikramorvaśya*. Admittedly, the curse is absent in the oldest version of the story of Urvaśī and Purūravas in the *Ṛgveda*, which only mentions a pact (*samaya*), according to which Purūravas is not to appear naked in front of Urvaśī⁵. In later versions, however, the curse does occur, for instance in Śaḍguruśiṣya's commentary on the *Sarvānukramanī*, in the *Harivamśa*, the *Kathāsaritāgāra*⁶, the *Uttarakaṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyana*⁷ and the *Viṣṇupurāna* (4.6.35-78).

In the *Meghadūtā* the curse is mentioned at the very beginning in verse 1, resulting in the *yakṣa* being banished from his home town by Kubera. The

⁴ The incidence is reported by a pupil of Bharata in the interlude between acts two and three.

⁵ Pischel and Geldner 1889: 243.

⁶ Pischel and Geldner 1889: 248, 250, and 258 respectively.

⁷ Jacobi 1893: 198.

story of the *Meghadūtā* including the curse seems to have been invented by Kālidāsa himself.

In the *Kumārāsambhava* the curse, which is pivotal to the plot, is mentioned almost casually. The poem revolves around the need of Umā to seduce Śiva in order to conceive a son, who might rescue the gods from the oppression by the demon Tāraka. Kāma is called in to help. Śiva, however, burns Kāma's body with the fire from his third eye. When thereupon Kāma's wife Rati wants to commit *saṭī*, a voice from heaven is heard, informing her that this bodiless state of Kāma is just temporary. It is the result of a curse uttered by Prajāpati, who, hit by Kāma's arrows, had fallen in love with his own daughters. It is predicted, however, that as soon as Śiva has married Umā, Kāma will be provided with his body again.⁸ Umā, who after Kāma's discomfiture has to manage the seduction of Śiva on her own, resorts to asceticism, by which Śiva becomes so impressed that he goes to her father to ask for permission to marry his daughter. At the end of the marriage ceremony the gods suggest to Śiva that he avail himself of the services of Kāma, who, as predicted, had in the meantime regained his body. Śiva did indeed agree to submit himself to the workings of Kāma's arrows.⁹ What follows is the greatest and longest wedding night ever, in the course of which Umā conceives Kumāra.

While at the end of both the *Abhijñānśākuntala* and *Vikramorvaśīya* the king is presented with grown-up sons, the *Kumārāsambhava* closes with the son's conception. Something similar is seen in the *Raghnvanśa*, at the end of which the ministers discover that the widowed queen is pregnant. In this way the dynasty is rescued from extinction after the last king had prematurely died. The main theme of the *Raghnvanśa* is indeed the continuation of the dynasty.¹⁰ The problematical nature of the king's duty in this matter has not only been elaborated upon at the end of the text but also at the very beginning. There we are presented with Dilīpa who is worried by the fact that he and his wife fail to have children. They visit Vasīṣṭha in order to ask him for advice. Vasīṣṭha informs the king that their childlessness is due to a curse: once, while in a hurry to perform his *dharma* and sleep with his wife, the king had failed to circumambulate the cow Surabhi. Surabhi had cursed him, saying that he would not get any children without first propitiating Surabhi's offspring. The

⁸ *Kumārāsambhava* IV 40-42.

⁹ *Kumārāsambhava* VI 92-93.

¹⁰ Ticken 1989.

king was unaware of the curse, as Surabhi's voice had been drowned by the thundering noise of the river Gaṅgā.¹¹

Here, as in most of the other works, the curse seems to be Kālidāsa's own invention. All the more striking is the absence of the curse in his *Mālavikāgnimitra*. The plot of the *Mālavikāgnimitra* presents an early instance of the *nāṭikā* type of play, as exemplified by Harṣa's *Prīyadarśikā* and *Ratnāvalī*. One of the most striking differences between this play and Kālidāsa's other works is that whereas the latter are all set in a mythological world peopled by semi-divine beings, the *Mālavikāgnimitra* is set in the real world, its protagonist being historical figures. Also, while, as we have seen, in all the other works the persons are thwarted in their aims by divine curses, in the *Mālavikāgnimitra* a curse is strikingly absent. The play simply does not feature any such supernatural phenomenon. All we find by way of a poor substitute is coincidence, for instance, when Mālavikā after having been kidnapped on her way to Vidīśā lands by accident in the very place of her destination.

The absence in the *Mālavikāgnimitra* of characters known from mythology as well as of the curse becomes all the more conspicuous if we turn to the play within the play. As part of the contest between the two dancing masters of the court Mālavikā gives a dramatic dance performance. Unfortunately, the performance is cut short by the announcement of the king's bath, so that all we have is a fragment, consisting of a song and a few comments concerning the mode of the performance.¹² The contents of the song, a woman passing through a range of emotions, need not concern us here. More important is the information supplied concerning the protagonist of the dramatic scene, namely a certain Sarmiṣṭhā. This is the same Sarmiṣṭhā, known from the *Mahābhārata* (I 70-80), who, like Mālavikā in the play, passed her life as a servant of the wife of the man who under normal circumstances would have been her husband. In the *Mahābhārata* her mistress's husband, Yayāti, manages to father no fewer than three sons on her, the youngest one of whom, Pūru, becoming the ancestor of the Pauravas. As such, the protagonists of the play-within-the-play has been plucked from the same genealogical tree which provided the characters for the *Abhijñānśākuntala* and *Vikramorvaśīya*. Needless to say,

¹¹ *Raghnvanśa* I 77-78.

¹² The type of dramatic performance has been discussed by Bansat-Boudon 1992 and Ticken 2001a: 191-193.

the story of Yayāti (and Śarmiṣṭhā) is to a high degree determined by curses¹³. For instance, as a punishment for his infidelity Yayāti is cursed by his father-in-law with losing his youth and falling instantly into senility.

With the play-within-the-play Kālīdāsa seems to say that “normal” plays deal with gods and epic heroes and feature stories full of curses. With its insertion in the *Mālavikāgnimitra* he underlines the exceptional nature of that play within his oeuvre, which otherwise consists of mythological stories full of curses¹⁴.

Another oeuvre to be dealt with here is that of Bāṇa (seventh century), in particular his *Harsacarita* and *Kādambarī*. For one thing, these two works, though completely different, the one being a chronicle of the adventures of King Harṣa, the other a fantasy tale, appear to form a kind of sequel. Thus, where the *Harsacarita* deals with, among other things, the author’s youth, the *Kādambarī* is the author’s last work. In fact, he is said to have died before the work was finished. The *Kādambarī* was completed by the author’s son, as a result of which it is divided into two parts. This division is the second point Bāṇa’s two texts have in common, for his *Harsacarita* is likewise divided into two parts.

Bāṇa’s *Harsacarita* is divided into eight chapters, or *ucchvāsas*. Typically, however, apart from this division, there is another division, namely into two. The latter division is, however, not formally indicated and does not coincide with the one in *ucchvāsas*. In fact, the transition takes place somewhere in the middle of the third *ucchvāsa*¹⁵. Thus, the first part of the *Harsacarita* consists of the so-called autobiography of the author. It relates in detail his youth, his relationship with King Harṣa and how he was persuaded by his relatives and friends to tell Harṣa’s adventures¹⁶. The story of King Harṣa,

¹³ The story is dealt with, by, among other scholars, Dumézil 1971: 159-377, id. 1973, and Defounny 1978.

¹⁴ As I have argued elsewhere (Tieken 2001b), the claim in the prologue that the *Mālavikāgnimitra* is the work of a contemporary poet should most probably be considered in the light of the this-worldly nature of the plot and setting.

¹⁵ Something similar is found in Daṇḍin’s *Dasakumāracarita*, which knows two types of divisions, one into *ucchvāsas* and the other in a *pūrvapīhikā*, middle part and *uttarapīhikā*. The transition from the *pūrvapīhikā* to the middle part takes place somewhere halfway through an *ucchvāsa*.

¹⁶ On closer consideration Bāṇa is the protagonist of the story, which is basically about telling stories; see Tieken 2001c.

which is the main part of the text, starts only somewhere in the middle of the third *ucchvāsa* with the words *śrībhātān, asti...*¹⁷

Bāṇa’s *Kādambarī* is likewise divided into two parts, the *pūrvabhāga* and *uttarabhāga*. The division is equally irregular and accidental as in the *Harsacarita*, as it coincides with the author’s death. The *pūrvabhāga* is said to have been written by Bāṇa himself, who, however, died after having finished only approximately two thirds of the text planned. After his death the work was completed by his son, who was responsible for the *uttarabhāga*.

Of Bāṇa’s death and of the son’s taking over the work we are informed in the introductory verses to the *uttarabhāga*. Elsewhere I have argued that Bāṇa’s death might well be a literary fabrication, invented as an excuse to divide the text into two parts in a convincing way¹⁸. The fabrication may be the work of Bāṇa himself or of a later “editor” who thus wanted to mark the text as being written by Bāṇa, the author of the *Harsacarita*¹⁹. Here I only want to draw attention to the fact that the text is divided into two parts is already mentioned at the very beginning. Thus, in verse 20 of the introduction to the *pūrvabhāga* the story is described as an *atīkṣayī kathā*. The compound *atīkṣayī* has been translated in various ways, for instance as “without a second”. However *dvaya* normally means “two-fold, consisting of two parts”. The implications of the word *atī* clearly needs some consideration in this context. The word might refer to the extraordinary event of the author’s death which led to the interruption of the text. It might, however, equally well refer to the breach of the literary convention involved in the division (like *atī* in *atīpāṭa*). Note in this connection that according to Bhāmaha the *kathā* is not divided into chapters like the *ākhyāyikā*, which is divided into *ucchvāsas*²⁰.

¹⁷ *Harsacarita* p. 94.

¹⁸ Tieken forthcoming. Note in this connection that the very last sentence supposedly written by Bāṇa contains the word “death”: *jñāsyasi maraṇena prāṇim (Kādambarī*, p. 337 (§ 226). Note also that in the story itself the relationship between father and son plays an important role, for instance in the history of the narrator of the text, the parrot Vaiśampāyana, and his father and the story of King Tārāpīḍa and the *yuvarāja* Candāpīḍa.

¹⁹ If we are indeed dealing with a later feature, it is not clear why the *Canāḍīśaraka*, which is generally attributed to Bāṇa, has not been divided into two parts as well.

²⁰ *Kāvyālankāra* 1.25. Note that according to Daṇḍin’s *Kāvyāḍarśa* (1.26) the division into *ucchvāsas* is occasionally also found in *kathās*.

Each of the authors discussed above seems to have developed his own speciality, which served as a kind of signature. This signature appears to have played a role in the author's selection and subsequent adaptation of the story. For instance, Harṣa seems to have specialized in plays in which the protagonists were lost and retrieved, Kālidāsa in compositions which were all set in a mythological world and were full of curses, and Bāṅa apparently liked to experiment with stories divided into two parts. It is interesting to note that this aspect of their poetic practice is, as far as I know, not explicitly discussed or acknowledged by the indigenous poetics. But then, this is not the only poetic practice which was left unnoticed²¹.

The findings presented above are based on some of the earlier Kāvya poets²². It is as yet unclear if the phenomenon discussed is also present in the oeuvres of those later poets of whom we possess more than one composition, such as Rāṅśekhara. Another question which arises is if, for instance, Kālidāsa wrote other texts like the *Mālavikāgnimitra* as well, that is, texts which did not feature gods or demigods and did not contain curses and therefore were put aside. Thus, while it is clear that the signature was something which was consciously developed and adhered to by the authors dealt with above, it is not clear if or to what extent the picture has been sharpened by a later process of selection. In this connection it would be interesting to investigate Māḅha's *Śiṣupālavadhā* and Bhāravi's *Kirātārjunīya*, two works by different authors which have often been compared and connected with each other, and to find out if among the elements connecting the two works there are some which are comparable to what we have seen within the oeuvre of, for instance, Harṣa or Bāṅa.

²¹ Another aspect of the poetic practice is the concatenation of verses in Kāvya by repeating words. For this phenomenon, see Schubring 1955.

²² An author left out of consideration here is Aśvaghoṣa. While his *Buddhacarita* and *Sāṅdarānanda* are connected in the same way as the works discussed above, we are unable to ascertain if the findings can be extended to his whole oeuvre. It should be noted that while in the *Buddhacarita* the Buddha's conversion is triggered by the ugly and distressing sight of an old, a sick and a dead man, in the *Sāṅdarānanda* the conversion of the Buddha's brother is set in motion after he discovered that there are women even more beautiful than his own wife.

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