

CULT/URE

THE GRADUATE JOURNAL OF HARVARD DIVINITY SCHOOL

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Aaron S. White, Mara Brecht, Robert Davis, and Julie Regan

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

C*ult/ure's* mission is to promote scholarship that brings cult and culture—religious worlds and the social and political contexts in which they inhere—into creative and constructive dialogue. The title expresses the conviction that religious life and cultural life are co-constitutive, and that the scholarly investigation of religion and religious claims must be part of a broader cultural conversation. The title also expresses our intent to cultivate emerging voices in the discipline of religious studies. Our hope is that the journal will provide a fertile ground for the growth of new critical insights in the dialogue on religious and cultural life.

This inaugural issue of *Cult/ure* presents seven examples of recent graduate work emerging from the matrix of questions and concerns that animates the study of religion at Harvard. Taking very different approaches to a variety of historical and religious contexts, these essays exhibit the disciplined and patient attention required for learning from the life-world of another and the critical distance required for gaining new insights into one's own religious, historical, and cultural situation.

Brenna Moore's article, "Arendt and Barth on Terrifying Ordinarity," examines the intellectual climate of post-WWII Europe to arrive at new insights into the mechanics of violence and the possibilities for resistance. Thinking with Hannah Arendt and Karl Barth, she argues for the moral and political importance of critical thinking, empirical attentiveness, and imaginative empathy as a bulwark against evil. Mari Jyväsjarvi's "Buddhist Nuns in Sri Lanka" warns of the dangers of imposing one's own horizons on the historical and religious context of another. She argues for, and simultaneously demonstrates in her own research, the nuance and empathetic imagination necessary to accurately understand distant worlds, and to bring that understanding to bear, in a non-reductive way, on our most pressing concerns about gender and

religious communities. Carl Hughes's study of Jewish responses to the Kantian critique of religious faith, "Particularistic Religious Practice after the Enlightenment," asks a question on the minds of many people currently doing work in theology, philosophy, and religious studies: what is the role of the embodied practices of particular religious communities in shaping and challenging the putatively "universal" structures of rationality?

Joshua Schapiro's "Is Archaeology Historical?" is a self-reflective analysis of the relevance of the Foucaultian projects of archaeology and genealogy for the study of religion, in his case the study of Tibetan Buddhism. He suggests that drawing on the Foucaultian model can help the religious historiographer address concerns both past and present to open up new possibilities for thinking in the future. "The Corrupt Queen and the Ideal Wife," by Harshita K. Mruthinti, mines an ancient Sanskrit epic for new ways of thinking about gender, social hierarchy, and subversive forms of agency. Steven M. Vose's "The Violence of Devotion" balances textual analysis with historical reconstruction to urge a more careful discernment of "history" in projects of medieval Jain historiography.

Finally, Joseph D. Moser Jr.'s "Genetic Lottery 1984," a sermon originally delivered to the Unitarian Universalist congregation of First Church in Boston, reflects on the aesthetic dimensions of violence and the ethical value of beauty to challenge what he sees as his religious community's often blind faith in human rationality and autonomy. His sermon addresses the kinds of issues with which many of these articles are concerned: the proliferation of violence in human societies, the sober and clear-eyed assessment of history, and the practical possibilities for envisioning a more humane future. Moser's sermon is a good example of the ways in which religious leaders can bring philosophical, literary, and historical insights into dialogue with the lived reality of religious communities.

We hope that this inaugural issue of *Cult/ure* leads to increased conversation and consideration of the work that engages us as students of religion, and that these pages give credence to the conviction that motivates them: that the study of religion, in all of its approaches, is an indispensable dialogue partner in the most urgent intellectual, cultural, and political challenges facing this university and the world beyond its walls.

ARENDRT AND BARTH ON TERRIFYING ORDINARINESS

Sober Reflections on Evil in Postwar Europe

Brenna Moore

In the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, Karl Barth and Hannah Arendt tried to come to terms with evil. Both tried to take away its promethean heroism, its mysterious inevitability, its profundity and reality. Arendt's famous definition of evil as banal is well known and often cited, but a close reading of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* shows that it is actually a deceptively subtle formulation of human nature, one that defies easy categorization. There are some intriguing parallels between Arendt's findings and Karl Barth's theological reflection on human nature and its sinful proclivity towards sloth, stupidity, sluggishness, and even the emptiness of evil. Read together, I argue, Hannah Arendt and Karl Barth take away our mythological fantasies of the demonic without underestimating the extremity of its scope or abrogating responsibility for resistance.

Both Arendt and Barth also disable any grand systematic treatments of theodicy. Neither nature nor nurture, free will nor mystery, have any purchase. In fact for both of them, one would be hard pressed to find anything that sounds *at all* like a theodicy, but that is not to say that their perspective is utopian. Arendt and Barth take an entirely different route; rather than seeking to understand evil in the abstract, they attempt to trace the contours of the individuals who are threatened by it. In other words, the problem of evil, in the postwar writings of Hannah Arendt and Karl Barth, immediately raises issues of the human person. Despite the differences in method and religious commitments, Arendt and Barth are two brilliant German intellectuals writing at mid-century, looking at the same shards of glass, the same shattered physical and psychological ruins of postwar Europe. On the basis of these arresting observations, both reject certain inherited philosophical conventions and practice instead a process that Arendt calls “attentive facing up to” and Barth calls “sober observation”—the courage and the clarity to describe what they see—which for both was, at least partially, just so terrifyingly ordinary.

In this essay, I will examine Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and then explore striking similarities in Barth’s understanding of evil as non-being and of human sin as sloth as developed in his *Church Dogmatics*. I argue that a creative synthesis between Arendt and Barth on the issue of human nature and evil gives us a vision of the human person that is neither morose nor sanguine, and one that appears strikingly fresh and accurate now, half a century later. Perhaps most importantly, their articulation of a kind of evil that preys upon human initiative, intellectual alertness, complex thought, and moral responsibility, seems particularly relevant to the contemporary American cultural and political climate.

Hannah Arendt and the Eichmann Trial

In her famous coverage of the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann, later published in a series of essays for *The New Yorker* in 1963, Arendt claims that the historical valuation of Eichmann’s legacy had failed to grasp his real offence.¹ Eichmann was a moderately high ranking official in the German Nazi Army who was brought to trial, prosecuted, convicted, and ultimately executed in Jerusalem after having been found in hiding in Argentina. From Arendt’s perspective, Eichmann clearly did not understand the gravity of his offense, but even more striking was the extent to which the judges and prosecution remained willfully ignorant of the real issues at play with Eichmann. Arendt observes that although Eichmann’s accusers tried to display a “perverted sadist” and an “abnormal mon-

ster," the fact is that he was, more than anything, an idiot—a foolish administrator whose only aberration was an extraordinarily dull mind. The prosecution tried to peel back the layers in order to expose something wicked and demonic lurking in the innermost stratum of his soul, but Eichmann only kept repeating a number of hackneyed clichés. Nothing was revealed but a persisting vanity and thoughtlessness. Arendt points out that when the prosecution finally acknowledged that all he said was "empty talk," they insisted the emptiness was feigned, and that his true "hideous" thoughts lay somewhere beneath, unarticulated.² They wanted a fanatic, a despiser of Jews, a liar. But in fact the even more chilling truth, Arendt emphasizes, is that *nothing* secret and profound actually lay beneath the banality. Such was the rather sorry, even disappointing form of evil responsible for the atrocities of Nazism.

Discussing his role in the Final Solution before an audience of Jewish Holocaust survivors, for example, Eichmann returned incessantly to his personal frustration at being wrongly overlooked for promotion within the Army. Arendt describes Eichmann at the end of her book, facing death at the gallows, rehearsing empty platitudes about death and resurrection. He mused that "we will all meet again" even after declaring that he was an atheist. Even Eichmann's memory, Arendt observes, had been flattened. She writes that his was not the erratic or selective memory of a lunatic, but that his memory was itself thoroughly trite and mundane, "like a storehouse, filled with human interest stories of the worst type."³ Recalling days when he personally oversaw the exportation of thousands of Jewish men, women and children to their death, he remembered going bowling with a superior and being flattered, the sorts of drinks they had, and the warmth of the pleasant conversation.⁴

Eichmann, we learn from Arendt, was thoughtless—that is, he was literally void of real thoughts:

The longer one listened to him the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else. No communication was possible with him, not because he lied but because he was surrounded by the most reliable of all safeguards against the words and the presence of others, and hence against reality as such.⁵

There were so many in the Nazi party like him, "neither perverted nor sadistic, and they were and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal."⁶ Or to put it as chillingly as Arendt did in her epilogue, "He *merely*, to put the matter colloquially, *never realized what he was doing*."⁷ If evil is always this thoughtless and ordinary, then attempting to construct a profound philosophy of evil will

inevitably be thwarted by the lack of anything profound within evil to explore. It is for this reason that Arendt is forced to admit that there simply is no diabolical or demonic depth in the case of someone like Eichmann. His evil is thus disappointingly dull, casual, unintelligent, and insipid.⁸

One might say, then, that evil is banal, but that is not to say it is ineffectual; in fact banality is evil precisely because of its capacity to eat away at almost everything and everyone, corroding even the spheres of one's own agency and initiative. Arendt explicates this link between evil and what Charles Matthews calls its "strange stupor producing effect."⁹ This leads to one of Arendt's great, albeit disturbing, insights, which is her challenge to moral visions that harken back to some pure, protected realm like the primacy of conscience, which in the case of totalitarianism often becomes irrevocably corrupted. With Eichmann, his conscience functioned normally "for about four months," she says sarcastically, but then it started to function in the reverse. Arendt insists here that Eichmann's conscience was not formed *a priori* of the totalitarian society in which he lived; rather it was his totalitarian context that created his conscience and molded it into its banal and pathetic form. Conscience in this radical condition is the imprint of the outer world onto an inner voice:

And just as the law in civilized countries assumes that the voice of conscience tells everybody, "Though shalt not kill," even though man's natural desires and inclinations may at times be murderous, so the law of Hitler's land demanded that the voice of conscience tell everybody, "Thou shalt kill," although the organizers of the massacres knew full well that murder is against the normal desires and inclinations of most people. Evil in the Third Reich had lost the quality by which most people recognize it—the quality of temptation. Many Germans and many Nazis, probably an overwhelming majority of them, must have been tempted *not* to murder, *not* to rob, *not* to let their neighbors go off to their dooms, and not to become accomplices in all these crimes by benefiting from them. But, God knows, they had learned how to resist temptation.¹⁰

This reversal of conscience helps explain why Eichmann felt he had to "confess his sins" to his superior after he made two exceptions to his orders and helped two Jews.

Arendt acknowledges that the issue of conscience is complicated, but throughout the trial she consistently makes the link between Eichmann's actions and the leveling of speech and thought within Eichmann and his context. For example, the repetition of heroic, empty phrases and coined slogans was a frequently used mechanism to dull the citizen's and soldier's capacity to

think. The effect these slogans had on men like Eichmann was to give them the vague feeling of being a part of something grand and unique (“a great task that occurs once in two thousand years,” was one such slogan with this effect), providing them with “safeguards” against the factuality of other people and other words and thoughts, “and hence against reality as such.” These slogans spread like a pestilence, slowly corroding complex thinking and awareness of reality, leaving only the slumbering residues of cliché, sentimentality, and thoughtlessness in its place. Insipidness colonizes even the most intimate spheres of the human person. Although it is banal, this evil is certainly not benign; its scope is subtle and its power insidious.

Arendt’s insights into the odd affinity between evil and thoughtlessness enable her to link the possibilities for resisting evil with keen comprehension and intellect, without which we are paralyzed in thoughtlessness and total passivity before the cultural and political climate in which we find ourselves: “Comprehension, in short, means the unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality—whatever it may be.”¹¹ It was not only Eichmann who was guilty of an inability to comprehend and “face up to” the reality of evil—a lack of attention to the sorry, pathetic form that Eichmann’s evil took also caused the world to misunderstand him.

How does one face up to, and thus resist, this kind of evil? Throughout her writings, Arendt makes explicit links between intellect, thought, and human agency. In a later, second preface to her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt extends this insight to include artistic and spiritual forms of resistance as well: “Intellectual, spiritual, or artistic initiative is as dangerous to totalitarianism as the gangster initiative of the mob, and both are more dangerous than mere political opposition.”¹² The possibilities of these forms of resistance constitute a powerful antidote in Arendt’s philosophical vision. We see an example of this power in a story Arendt relates from the Eichmann trial. A witness told the story of a German sergeant named Anton Schmidt, who disobeyed orders and secretly offered help to members of the Jewish underground in the early years of the war. His covert resistance was soon discovered, and he was later executed. While there had been reports of other rare resisters throughout the trial, this was the first example of a German soldier doing so. As a witness told Schmidt’s story, Arendt explains that

a hush settled over the courtroom; it was as though the crowd had spontaneously decided to observe the usual two minutes of silence in honor of the man named Anton Schmidt. And in those two minutes, which were like a sudden burst of light in the midst of impenetrable, unfathomable darkness, a single thought stood out clearly, irrefutably,

beyond question—how utterly different everything would be today in this courtroom, in Israel, in Germany, in all of Europe, and perhaps in all countries of the world, if only more such stories could have been told.¹³

Arendt alerts us to two important points in this example. First, we see in such moments of agency and initiative that the scope of evil's banalization of the mind and spirit is not unlimited. This is the fatal flaw in arguments insisting that social conditioning by the Nazis was total and unstoppable and the implication, which Arendt refuses, that the individual participants were therefore not guilty. While the totalitarian government *tried* to wipe away every tiny trace of mental, physical, and spiritual resistance, they could not obliterate it completely. "Holes of oblivion do not exist. Nothing human is that perfect, and there are simply too many people in the world to make oblivion possible. One man will always be alive to tell the story." Anton Schmidt's story—a tiny story with significant reverberations—affirms that most people will always comply, but "*some people will not.*" The Final Solution could have happened everywhere, but it did not. Arendt ends the chapter by concluding that, "Humanly speaking, no more is required, and no more can reasonably be asked, for this planet to remain a place fit for human habitation."¹⁴

Arendt is reluctant, however, to analyze why, and under what precise conditions, some obey and others do not obey; here it is enough to observe that a burst of light, a moment of silence, shone in the courtroom as the story of Schmidt's resistance was told. She is not overly optimistic in insisting that these kinds of courageous acts will necessarily change the situation or reverse the course of totalitarianism. She simply and keenly observes that the story of this man's courage, his memory made vivid in the courtroom, awoke a slumbering audience to consider the radical difference that thinking, resistance, and agency can make in history.

Overall, Arendt's unimpassioned observations of Eichmann show us that she is not trying to resolve the problem of evil philosophically but is instead trying to learn lessons and draw conclusions from what she finds to be its ontological emptiness. In her months listening to Adolf Eichmann reflect so cluelessly on his time overseeing and participating in the death of thousands of men, women, and children, she saw only thoughtlessness and nothingness. Arendt herself practices here what she counsils to her readers in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: the importance of unpremeditated and attentive facing up to the uncomfortable, brutal, and in this case, banal realities in our midst. In Eichmann Arendt sees no initiative, no spontaneity, no agency, and no capacity

to think from another's perspective. One can imagine Arendt's impatience with grand philosophical explanations for evil's existence, and these are precisely what she seeks to overturn. Arendt cuts through centuries-old traditions of evil's glorification as demonic profundity or hideous monstrosity to see through to its emptiness. For the subtlety of this evil is what makes it so threatening to people who would otherwise be very capable of thought, defiance, and resistance, but who because of the persistence of evil did *not* think, resist, and defy, and who left us no stories to tell.

Karl Barth and the Divine Summons

Moving to the work of Karl Barth, we enter the world of another brilliant German mind trying to wrap itself around the horrors and devastation of Nazism. Barth too tries to look into the unspeakable and render it intelligible, and he too, at least in part, sees there something utterly and terrifyingly ordinary. Immediately we see that both thinkers display an extraordinary capacity to break convention and to resist the tendency to solve the problem of evil abstractly or systematically. To get at Barth's ideas, I will work backwards, and begin by looking at his rather novel understanding of sin as sloth that appears in his later writings in *Church Dogmatics* V/2. Barth finished this volume in 1955, six years before Arendt sat in as an observer in Eichmann's trial. In those six years, the occupation of West Germany had ended and Germany had joined NATO, stabilizing somewhat the political climate in Europe.

Halfway through *CD IV/2*, Barth asks, what is sin? What is it that makes human beings say yes to evil and no to God? And what does it look like? Barth initially grants the "heroic, Promethean form of sin" which is pride, but moves quickly to a more developed consideration of a much more "trivial and unheroic" capacity for sin in the human person, something that must be admitted through honest and "sober observation."¹⁵ This something for Barth is not fantastic or demonic or even interesting. Rather, for the overwhelming majority of people, sin is "merely banal and ugly and loathsome."¹⁶ Barth goes on to insist that it is difficult to acknowledge this; he observes that in Christianity there is always the temptation to associate sin with something impressive, but such a vision does not recognize the "real man," who instead might best be described as merely a "lazy-bones, a sluggard, a good-for-nothing, a slow-coach and a loafer...who does not exist only in an exalted world of evil; he exists also in a very mean and petty world of evil." Barth assembles these terms together under the theological concept of sloth.¹⁷

The slothful sinner, as Barth pointedly describes it, “does not live as a wise man, but as a stupid fool.” Thus Barth links together the concepts of sin, evil, sloth, and foolishness. By the term “foolishness,” however, he does not mean that this kind of sin is something that can be eradicated with patient and gradual “education and enlightenment.” Rather this kind of foolishness is actually *evil*. Barth’s term for evil is *das Nichtige*, which can also mean “vanity.” The practical stupidity of the human being, Barth tells us, results in an orientation that is vainly self- rather than other-directed. It results in “thinking we can and should be without our neighbors and therefore alone.”¹⁸ This kind of sin also resembles foolishness in the more colloquial sense, because it relapses into “incoherent, confused, and corrupt thought and speech and action.” At its root it disables one from thinking imaginatively from a perspective beyond oneself.

Barth adds that this form of evil—the vain, stupid, and sluggish form—is remarkably powerful because it appears in a subtle and misunderstood form for which we must always “be on the watch.” It is “particularly and supremely dangerous because it has an uncanny quality of being able to attract, to magnetize and thus to increase.”¹⁹ Compliments and mutual boasting increase the scope of sloth. “It is dangerous,” Barth tells us, because

at a first glance it is so innocuous, so kindly disposed, so familiar, knowing how to awaken tolerance or a pardoning sympathy or even a certain recognition, but concealing it somewhere, and probably behind its probity and gentleness (like the claws of the feline species behind their soft pads), the supreme malice and aggressiveness and violence which will pounce on a victim and tear it to pieces before it is even aware of them.²⁰

Is this not, nearly *exactly*, what Arendt would so terrifyingly observe in Eichmann’s trial six years after Barth published these chilling words? One imagines the clinking of the glasses, toasts, compliments, and job promotions padding the Nazi conversations about going forward with the Final Solution to exterminate hundreds of thousands of Jewish men, women, and children. One recalls Eichmann’s inability to think from a perspective beyond himself. One calls to mind his confused and incoherent speech, the terror that lurked behind his sappy memories and gentle. Barth’s fundamental observation about sin is his insistence that the will to power, or pride, cannot encompass all of human fallenness. There is simply something more subtle at work.

But this idea of sin and of evil in Barth’s system cannot be understood by observation alone. More explicitly, for Barth there is never really any “human condition”—even the sinful condition apart from Christ: “Only when we know

Jesus Christ do we really know that man is the man of sin, and what sin is, and what it means for man."²¹ But what does this do for Barth's understanding of evil, and human capacities or incapacities to resist it? As Hans Urs Von Balthasar says in his *Theology of Karl Barth*, "Barth's inquiry centers on what man is by nature in light of revelation, that is, from the person of Jesus Christ; this is a light that shines not only from without but (as the real ground of creation!) establishes from within the very creatureliness of creation."²² But in addition to revelation, we have also seen that Barth takes seriously "sober observation," looking realistically at the sluggishness and foolishness of evildoers in our midst. This hermeneutic seems more modest and realistic than one based on revelation alone, on which Barth is typically understood to rely. How does he hold these together? As Barth describes his method, it is the light of revelation that enables us to see both the real and the ideal nature of the human person. For Barth, the revelation of ideal humanity highlights the stark contrast of real human beings in his time. Fallen humanity, he sees, is not wicked or perverted, but foolish and slothful. The revelation of Jesus calls human beings away from sloth and pulls them toward intellectual alertness into a posture of resistance to sloth, thoughtlessness, and evil.

Barth connects Jesus with resistance to evil by considering the issue of divine election, and what this means for humanity. Barth insists that God in Christ bonded Godself with humanity, and chose to be *partners* with the human person in its history, death, and suffering. Therefore through Jesus we see that solidarity, not distance, constitutes the divine-human relationship; God "is active from within history from the very first."²³ This means that the human persons are summoned *for* God because they are chosen *by* God. Through God's election humanity becomes co-partner with the divine, which means a call to greater freedom and agency. Barth lifts up the biblical call to be "Awake!" as the divine summons away from the slothful, vain, and thoughtless tendencies of sin. "To be summoned means to have heard, to have been awakened, to have to arouse oneself, to be claimed."²⁴ The sinner with God is a "disturbed" sinner. J. B. Webster's reading of Barth is instructive here:

Barth's theology takes with great seriousness the command for rebellion against sin: the defeat of sin is not merely a vicarious achievement, passively received from the hands of an omnipotent Lord, but a summons to us to recover our agency and assume the liberty in which we stand.²⁵

This emphasis on agency as freedom for responsibility runs throughout Barth's corpus, and it is particularly evident in his notion here of humanity as co-partner with God.

Consider, for example, Barth's understanding of divine power, which he says penetrates the human person from the very start. But this does not mean "that [God] overtakes and overwhelms and crushes [the individual], forcing him to be what He would have him be. He does not dispose of him like a mere object. He treats him, and indeed establishes him, as a free subject. He sets him on his own feet as His partner."²⁶ Some of the most beautiful language in the entire *Church Dogmatics* appears in those passages centered on the divine act by which the human person is made "awake," given agency and possibility to live, to resist evil, and to be a partner with all that is good and godly by the person of Christ. For example, in CD IV.2 Barth elegantly explains that Jesus' miraculous action is to bring the human person

out of this shadow, to free him from this prison, to remove the need and pain of his cosmic determination. He unburdens man; He releases him. He calls and causes him to live as a creature. Man can again rise up and walk, again see and hear and speak. He can come from the heart of the storm to dry land. He can eat and be more than satisfied. He can drink and he is given wine—good wine. He is delivered from every torment and embarrassment and he can breathe again. He can be man again—a whole man in this elemental sense. His existence as a creature in the natural cosmos is normalized....It is as such that he is radically blessed by the miracles of Jesus.²⁷

It is what Barth calls elsewhere "the strange form of divine majesty" which makes it possible for the human person to free herself from total social determinism—total burdening and imprisonment—and dare to be released, to live, to hear, and to speak more freely and deliberately. He uses the metaphor of throwing one's trust in God as something like casting a ship's anchor overboard: while it is outwardly propelling, it results in greater inward security.

But the human sinner often says no to God's summons to partnership. Why? Barth really does not fully address this question. The choice to sin, he tells us, "cannot be deduced or explained or justified. It is simply a fact."²⁸ The individual does not sin by some mysterious power at the root of her soul, nor is she defenseless against a superior power of evil pressing from without. On the contrary, an individual chooses that which is against God; she grasps that which is "impossible" and unreal. This unreality can corrode, and eventually destroy the person, leaving only non-being in its wake. So sin—and by extension evil—"has only a negative character. It lacks both necessity and possibil-

ity.”²⁹ Here again Barth anticipates some of the observations Arendt will make six years later: the human capacity for evil, or in Christian theological terms, to sin, is neither demonic nor deep, neither fantastic nor inevitable. It is rather something we do or do not do that allows that which is ugly, lifeless, and banal to corrode that which is life-affirming and spontaneous within us as otherwise free and alert subjects. Sin keeps us focused on ourselves, thinking and acting sluggishly and foolishly. Like Arendt’s evil, Barth’s sin possesses no ontological being or profundity whatsoever.

Barth would undeniably also agree with Arendt’s modest hope. For her, total evil, or total banality (“the holes of oblivion”), does not exist, since “nothing human is that perfect, and there are simply too many people in the world to make oblivion possible.” Barth would agree, but would add that these moments of alertness, resistance, initiative, and agency that interrupt the nothingness of evil are inextinguishable since they are the unconditional gifts of an omnipotent God. “Man has not fallen lower than the depth to which God humbled himself in Jesus Christ. But God in Jesus Christ did not become a devil or nothingness.”³⁰ In fact, only God has the capacity to give the creature the necessary power to resist the onslaught of banality. Barth asks:

For what power has creaturely being to prevent its own dissolution accompanying and threatening it as the sum of its ontological impossibility? But the Creator who gave it being can go further and give it a being secure against non-being. And it is the will of God to do this. God created it with the aim of becoming secure. As the Creator, He did not will a threatened and lost creation, but a saved and preserved.³¹

Barth frames theologically—or more to the point, Christologically—what Arendt explains philosophically. For both, evil is not a mysterious, overpowering force that lurks in human nature. Nor is it something for which God has a secret plan. Evil is non-being. It is that which is against God, and it is that which the human person is invited to be against too. For both Barth and Arendt the human person is invited to be awake, to be alert, to live and hear and speak freely, and to resist. Both recognize, to be sure, that this alertness is rarely practiced in history. Too often we invite the non-being of evil into our lives and allow banality and sloth to eat away at our agency like a parasite. Barth determines this from what he knows theologically, anticipating what Arendt will observe six years later at Eichmann’s trial. The possibilities of resistance lie in intellectual, spiritual, and artistic initiative, being for another, and in the telling of stories that have the power to break through the darkness of evil.

Forgiveness, Grace, and the Cultivation of Resistance

Arendt and Barth offer brilliant and unflinching insights into human nature. But what are we to *do* with these insights? We see in both a call to alertness and initiative, but we are left wondering how, and from what sources, agency and resistance can be secured. We have seen so far that both Arendt and Barth are reluctant to go beyond making an observation, however penetrating, about human foolishness, banality, and evil. While noting that evil's scope is inherently limited, neither offers concrete plans or practices for overcoming it. In *The Human Condition*, however, which Arendt wrote before *Eichmann*, the practice of forgiveness stands out as one possibility for interrupting and breaking the cycle of violence.³² "Only through forgiveness, this constant mutual release from what they do, can men remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start anew again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new."³³ *Eichmann in Jerusalem* makes it clear, however, that this is not always the case: Arendt believes that Eichmann deserved to be condemned, even condemned to death, but for reasons different than those articulated by the prosecution. Nonetheless Arendt does invite her readers to consider the political power of the practices of forgiveness, as well as the practices of intellectual activity and storytelling.

What, in turn, can we learn about the sources of resistance and greater agency in the *Church Dogmatics*? The question is a bit more complicated for Barth, who is scornful of a certain understanding of "natural theology" that attributes innate capacities to human beings, such as the capacity to identify and resist evil. Barth understands, by contrast, the biblical call to be "Awake!" not as a human achievement but as a divine invitation. He consistently seeks to ground the life of faith in God and God alone,³⁴ such that there can be no question of "any capacity or equipment for the performance of what is a command; of any latent faith; of any outward preparation."³⁵

Elsewhere in the *Church Dogmatics*, however, Barth seems to equivocate on this point. Typically Barth rigorously dispenses with any system that sounds like "work righteousness" on the part of slothful, needy, and broken human beings. It is thus surprising, then, when in the beginning of CD IV/2, Barth acknowledges his attraction to the *Rule* of St. Benedict, which suggests that through cultivated practices and disciplined preparation, human subjectivity—including capacities for resisting evil (especially sloth!)—is formed. Presumably this would be antithetical to Barth's vision of faith, in which the disciple has only to say yes to God's beckoning. And yet I am struck in these passages by Barth's cautious enthusiasm for Benedict's *Rule*. "St. Benedict," Barth writes,

“displays an extraordinary knowledge of life and the soul and men.”³⁶ Usually the tone of the *Church Dogmatics* is confident, exuberant, and exhilarating. But here, as he ponders what theology might learn from a monastic community whose members explicitly work, study, and pray to cultivate interior forms of selfhood to better resist sin and evil, Barth is halting. Full of questions, he seems genuinely puzzled: “Might not a reasonable asceticism in this regard be a valuable asset in even our Christian and theological circles?”³⁷ Barth oscillates for six pages and at one point admits that in reading the Benedictine rule, there were monastics who were

relatively quietly and continuously and richly and fruitfully occupied with spiritual and physical labor, with all kinds of arts and serious scholarship, with the exercise of hospitality and works of charity, even with preaching and pastoral work among the people, with social work and teaching, and above all with the supremely monastic *opus Dei*, the *officium*, the adoration of God in private and communal worship, and above all and beyond all this—we have only to read the Benedictine rule—with a whole range of other very inward problems of individual and social morality. In his own way he could and can positively attest something of that freedom for God and his fellows which is supposed to be the *telos* of monastic asceticism.³⁸

At the same time, the emphasis placed on obedience in monastic life makes Barth nervous. This must be attributed in part to Barth’s potentially problematic, critical stance towards the papacy—“obedience” opens the door for Barth to an ascending hierarchy of ecclesial power, leading “up to and including the Pope himself.” Whatever the circumstances of Barth’s feelings toward the Roman Catholic church, we can note that the vow of monastic obedience rings too strongly for him of heteronomy and offends his theological commitments to the unmediated power of God and the freedom of the believer: “In a relationship between sinful men, will not this [vow] necessarily mean that the majesty of God is obscured, that a burden is laid both upon those who have to command and those who have to obey?”³⁹

Throughout this short but fascinating excursus on the value and danger of ascetic practices of study and prayer, Barth wrestles with, and remains ultimately ambivalent on, several intractable theological questions: “Can there be either for the Church or for individuals any genuine approach to the world or men unless there is equally any genuine retreat?”⁴⁰ In the end, Barth concludes that monastic asceticism, with its emphasis on embodied practice as a source for human agency and growth in partnership with God, is part of a theological orientation that at least “commands our attention.” Barth leaves it there, tucked

away in the small print of IV/2, and returns to the larger theological issue of reconciliation.

From my perspective, I am inclined to believe that his instincts are correct: any vision of the human person whose central claim concerns the possibilities for human agency and resistance to inertia, sluggishness and evil, *must* attend to issues of how human beings can be formed in various ways through concrete practices. And yet, perhaps for thinkers such as Hannah Arendt and Karl Barth and for many Europeans writing in the context of the postwar era, the articulation of a particular program for cultivating resistance may have required an entirely untenable optimism about the human capacity for positive self-direction.

Instead, these thinkers offer a sober realism that looks unflinchingly on the worst of human nature. They are less interested here in the power of the human being than its vulnerability. Barth's theological portrait of the slothful sinner and Arendt's observations of Adolf Eichmann show us how bland, passive, and banal humans can be, thus revealing just how threatening and insidious evil, as nothing, is. It is an absence that always lurks on the edges of presence. Eichmann's hair-raising tales teach the lesson of "word and thought-defying" evil, of slogans and repeated clichés that leave mental sloth in their wake, a sloth that can be devastating and annihilating. For both German postwar thinkers, we must remember, evil, while certainly vigorously destructive, does not take the form of a monstrous or mysterious force or an inherited inevitability.

Both in message and in medium, Barth and Arendt suggest how attention to reality and imaginative thinking can become politically and morally powerful countermeasures. From these insights one might consider the importance of intellectual life itself, even those mental activities scholars of religion engage in that are often derided for having little to do with the real world—learning Latin or Sanskrit, struggling through tough theologians and philosophers and creatively making sense out of them, piecing together the puzzling prayers of a mystic, and finding the reality and humanity in a distant culture's ritual, practices, and texts. Intellectual passion for understanding can enable one to slice through the shields against reality that passive thoughtlessness creates. It can be a way to help one "emerge out of the shadows" of captivity and be alert. Public discourse that is unintelligent and riddled with clichés can lay waste to initiative and agency, the human bulwark against evil. This is a point in need of reiterating now more than ever.

While Barth and Arendt would say that comprehension and attentiveness are crucial, both would affirm (in different ways) that even without generous spaces devoted to intellectual creativity, there will nonetheless always be some

who will emerge out of the shadows. Despair is not the antidote to evil. Stories like Schmidt's will continue to be told. That total "holes of oblivion" are not possible, and that God became a human being, are reasons for hope. That the banality of evil and sin always lurks on the edges of society and the soul, however, is a reason for critical awareness and the cultivation of resistance.

NOTES

- 1 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1973 edition).
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid., 81.
- 4 Ibid., 82.
- 5 Ibid., 49.
- 6 Ibid., 121.
- 7 Ibid., 198.
- 8 Ibid., 251.
- 9 Charles Matthews, "A Tale of Two Judgments: Bonhoeffer and Arendt on Evil, Understanding and Limits, and the Limits of Understanding Evil". *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 80, No. 3 (July 2000): 402.
- 10 *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 150.
- 11 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004 edition), viii.
- 12 *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 339.
- 13 *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 231.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, V/2, 405.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Interestingly, this is also what early Christian feminist insights suggested: the will to power does not encompass universal sin. In 1960, Valerie Saiving developed a gendered notion of sin, insisting that rather than pride, women's sin is precisely the opposite of pride and better understood as "triviality, distractibility, and diffuseness; lack of an organizing center of focus, dependence on others for one's own self-definition; tolerance at the expense of standards of excellence; inability to respect the boundaries of privacy, sentimentality, gossipy sociability, mistrust of reason—in short, underdevel-

opment or negation of self." See Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," (1960), rpt. in *Womanspirit Rising*, ed. Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow (New York: Harper Collins, 1979), 37. Judith Plaskow makes a similar critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's understanding of sin. See her *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich* (Washington DC: University Press of America, 1980).

18 CD IV/2, 434.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., 424.

21 CD IV/1, 389.

22 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992 edition), 126.

23 CD III/2, 146.

24 CD III/2, 151.

25 John Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 76.

26 CD IV/3, 941.

27 CD IV/2, 222.

28 CD IV/1, 419.

29 Ibid.

30 CD IV/1, 480.

31 CD III/2, 144.

32 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 238.

33 Ibid., 240.

34 Ibid., 537.

35 Ibid., 535.

36 CD IV/2, 13.

37 Ibid., 16.

38 Ibid., 16.

39 It is comments such as these that impel me to think that Barth's misogynistic statement in CD III/2 concerning divinely ordered subordination of wife to husband is best understood as Barth at his most "slothful and ugly and loathsome" moments, to borrow his own parlance, rather than a necessary outworking of his whole system.

40 *CD IV/2*, 14.

BUDDHIST NUNS IN ANCIENT
SRI LANKA
A Gendered and Dialogical Reading of the
Dīpavaṃsa

Mari Jyväsjarvi

Considering that the history of Buddhist nuns in ancient Sri Lanka spanned over twelve centuries—from the third century BCE to the late tenth century CE—it is disappointing that evidence regarding them is scanty at best. Apart from the occasional reference in an obscure royal inscription or legendary narratives in monastic chronicles, a historian has little to work with. Considering this dearth of sources, it is unsurprising that the *Dīpavaṃsa*, the fourth-century “Chronicle of the Island,” which describes the order of Sri Lankan Buddhist nuns in some detail, has come to dominate attempts at reconstructing its history. Some feminist historians even celebrate this text as the earliest example of recorded “women’s history.”¹ Moreover, its stories about nuns continue to have relevance for the present: contemporary

Sri Lankans still cite them in order to legitimate their views regarding issues such as the re-establishment of the nuns' lineage.²

This essay is an inquiry into the history of Sri Lankan Buddhist nuns through an examination of this consequential text with a focus on the period of its composition, the early fourth century CE. At the same time, it is a methodological case study that seeks to complicate earlier scholarly readings of the *Dīpavaṃsa* that have uncritically appropriated it for their own feminist historical agendas. For, as Bernard Faure points out, gender-sensitive readings of the past have not always gone hand in hand with critical reflection on the sources and interpretive strategies they use. Recent studies of women and gender in Buddhism have usually adopted one of two standard approaches: they either highlight the androcentric or misogynistic bias of Buddhist traditions or emphasize the active role and agency of Buddhist women by singling out *exceptional* women.³ Yet both approaches run the risk of ignoring cultural and historical contexts or highlighting gender inequalities while downplaying other inequalities and competitions. What Faure calls for is close scrutiny of the historical and anthropological record that is itself “informed by feminist insights, and question[s] its documents in terms of gender.”⁴ This essay attempts to respond to Faure's challenge and present a *gendered* reading of the *Dīpavaṃsa* that, despite emphasizing questions of gender, does not compromise historical considerations. This means that my questions about gender are situated within a broader inquiry into issues such as lineage legitimation and intersectorian competition, and that I also draw on sources which do not seem to bear immediate relevance to the nuns.

In other words, while I am interested in what this text might tell us about Sri Lankan nuns at the time of (or prior to) its composition, and what kind of status it assigns to nuns *vis-à-vis* monks, the guiding question of this essay is perhaps better rephrased as follows: what kinds of *claims* does the text make about the order of nuns, and how are those claims related to other claims it is making—about Buddhism and Theravāda, for example, or the relationship between the *saṅgha* (monastic community) and kingship? I argue that such a wider perspective not only yields a more accurate picture of the Sri Lankan *bhikkhuni-saṅgha* (community of the nuns) than the rather myopic kind of historiography that is exclusively concerned with gender agendas; it also throws light on the significance of the order of nuns for broader Buddhist, monastic, and royal interests.⁵

At the outset, it must be acknowledged that the *Dīpavaṃsa*—a polemical, fragmentary, and incoherent narrative—is highly problematic as a source for history. In fact, much of the recent scholarly debate about it has revolved

around the question of whether it can be read as a historical document at all. For reading the *Dīpavaṃsa* historically, I adopt a methodology of *dialogical reading* jointly put forward by Ronald Inden, Jonathan Walters, and Daud Ali in their recent work.⁶ They challenge the construal of texts as “monological” utterances, as closed entities; rather, they argue, texts are deeply enmeshed in the circumstances in which they are created and used. As Inden puts it, “texts are ‘dialogical’ moments in the relations that agents, relatively simple or complex, have with themselves and with other agents.”⁷ They should be read as discursive, as situated within what he calls a “living, changing scale of texts,” a scale of agents and texts overlapping with earlier and later ones, criticizing, appropriating, and expanding one another.⁸ In this essay, I read the *Dīpavaṃsa* in this way as a dialogical, discursive text, a polemical work with heterogeneous arguments that not only *reflects* its context but is actively involved in reworking it and intervening in it.

I begin with a brief survey of the traces that Buddhist nuns left in the epigraphical and textual record of Sri Lanka. This overview serves to sketch a historical backdrop for my subsequent reading of the *Dīpavaṃsa*, but also illustrates some possibilities of reading even these partial and fragmentary sources dialogically, alongside and against each other. The second part of the essay is a close reading of the *Dīpavaṃsa*’s account of the nuns’ order and its history. I then proceed to discuss how this material has been analyzed by recent scholars, and critique what I see as their insufficient problematization of the text and their failure to attend to both questions of gender *and* those of ideology and politics. Finally, I attempt to bring these two perspectives together in an analysis of the *Dīpavaṃsa*’s agenda and the nuns’ place in it.

The Sources for the History of Buddhist Nuns in Sri Lanka: An Overview

The earliest historical evidence for the presence of Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka dates back to between the third century BCE and first century CE. Cave inscriptions from this period, written in the Brāhmī script and recording the donation of caves to the Buddhist *sangha*, name ten individual nuns (*śamaṇī*) as donors.⁹ Even though donations by monks and laypeople are much more numerous, these inscriptions are nevertheless an important indication that nuns were among the patrons of Buddhist institutions at the earliest stages of Sri Lankan Buddhism.

In the absence of inscripational evidence about nuns for most of the first millennium CE, historians have had to rely on the *vaṃsa* chronicles—namely,

Dīpavaṃsa and *Mahāvāṃsa*, which relate the history of the Sri Lankan *sangha* until the early fourth century CE, and the later medieval compilation, *Cūlavāṃsa*. These chronicles attest to continued royal patronage of Buddhist nuns through the centuries, mostly through the establishment of new nunneries. For example, the *Cūlavāṃsa* mentions King Moggallāna I (r. 496-513 CE) founding the Rājini nunnery.¹⁰ At least two queens, the wives of Aggabodhi II (r. 608-18 CE) and Aggabodhi IV (r. 667-83 CE), are also said to have established nunneries.¹¹

When nuns reappear in the epigraphical record, in tenth-century inscriptions from Anurādhapura and the surrounding area, we find some supporting evidence for the historicity of the *Cūlavāṃsa*'s account. For example, a pillar-inscription of King Kassapa IV (r. 898-914 CE) refers to a nunnery called Mihind-aram, or Mahinda-ārāma, which may well refer to a nunnery mentioned in the *Cūlavāṃsa*, founded by Mahinda I (r. 730-33 CE) and named after him.¹²

There are also both textual and epigraphical references to nuns being entrusted with the duty of caring for the sacred Bodhi-tree. A pillar-inscription at Mahākālattaewa, apparently also from the reign of Kassapa IV, assigns the nuns at Nālārāma nunnery, built by the king's chief secretary Sena, the duty of watering the Bodhi-tree at a "great monastery."¹³ The *Cūlavāṃsa* describes a similar situation: it relates that the king's general Sena built Tissārāma nunnery "as a home for bhikkhunīs and entrusted these with the care of the sacred Bodhi Tree in the Maricavaṭṭi(-vihāra)."¹⁴ A pillar-inscription of Kassapa V (r. 914-23 CE), which grants certain immunities to the "Tisaram nunnery" (*Tisaram meheṇivar*) built by General Sena, most likely refers to the same Tissārāma.¹⁵ Thus there seem to have been either two nunneries founded by Sena and assigned to water the Bodhi-tree, or one nunnery known by two names, Nālārāma and Tissārāma. These references are particularly interesting in light of the special relationship between the order of nuns and the Bodhi-tree that is constructed in the *vāṃsas*.

Nunneries were thus usually established by kings and queens but also by generals and their wives. According to the *Cūlavāṃsa*, the wife of the general of Kassapa V donated a dwelling "to the bhikkhunīs of the universally revered Thera School."¹⁶ Most nunneries mentioned belong to the Mahāvihāra/Thera school of Sri Lankan Buddhism, the other two monastic lineages being Abhayagiri and Jetavana. Only one inscription of Kassapa V mentions nunneries that may belong to Abhayagiri, but even this inscription is unclear.¹⁷

The last references to nuns are from the reign of Mahinda IV (r. 956-72? CE), who states in an inscription that he built an alms-hall for nuns and repaired

“nunneries belonging to communities of helpless nuns.”¹⁸ The *Cūlavamsa* also attests that he built a nunnery.¹⁹ Even though the evidence of new nunneries being established in the tenth century suggests that nuns continued to receive royal support and that their numbers may even have been growing, all references to them now suddenly come to an end. Historians have found it hard to resist the rather dramatic rhetoric of *mystery* and *disappearance* when discussing this turn of events. Gunawardana, for example, writes: “Nuns left the stage of history as quietly as they had occupied it, and there are no clues to help the curious historian to determine the causes of their disappearance.”²⁰ One major *clue*, though, is the ensuing period of war and occupation by South Indian Cōlas in the eleventh century. Even the order of monks was seriously affected by these vicissitudes, and Burmese monks had to be brought in to re-establish their ordination lineage. The nuns’ order, on the other hand, was never resuscitated.²¹

As for inscriptional evidence from outside Sri Lanka, scholars have speculated that a Prakrit inscription from the Buddhist site of Nāgārjunikoṇḍa in Andhra Pradesh, India might refer to Sri Lankan nuns, thus indicating their presence there in the third century CE. This interpretation, however, is contested: it depends on the interpretation of a single epithet, *theriyānaṃ*, which could refer to either “nuns” or to “fraternities (of monks).”²² In light of other inscriptional evidence, however, the latter reading seems more plausible.²³

Disappointingly, the travel records of Chinese Buddhist pilgrims in South Asia—Fa-xian (early fifth century), Xuanzang and Yi-Cing (seventh century)—yield no information about Sri Lankan nuns, even though Fa-xian himself lived in a Sri Lankan monastery for three years (412-15 CE). However, Chinese sources do attest that some Sri Lankan nuns traveled to China in the fifth century, being the first foreign Buddhist nuns to come to China. According to the *Bi-qui-ni zhuan* (*Biographies of Buddhist Nuns*), in 429 CE a merchant’s ship brought eight Sinhalese nuns to Nanking to establish the nuns’ ordination lineage in China.²⁴ Another eleven nuns arrived a few years later to complete the required quorum of ten fully ordained nuns.²⁵

As this overview of the available evidence makes clear, our sources set certain limits to the kinds of questions we can ask about ancient Sri Lankan nuns. They record mostly political and institutional history, and mention nuns only from that point of view. They tell us little about the material circumstances in which the nuns lived or their religious and educational practices, not to mention the social backgrounds and experiences of individual nuns. Let us now turn to the *Dīpavaṃsa*, the literary work that claims to document these dimensions.

The *Dīpavaṃsa* as a Source for Ancient Sinhalese Nuns' History

The word *vaṃsa* has the primary sense of “lineage” or “descent,” and acquires the sense of “history” because it describes the lineage or descent of institutions and practices over time.²⁶ Both *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvaṃsa* begin their “descents” with the mythical past and end with the reign of King Mahāsena (r. 274-301? CE). *Dīpavaṃsa* is the earlier of the two, usually dated to the fourth century. Scholars often make note of its clumsy language and meter, its repetitions, incoherencies, and fragmentary character.²⁷ On this basis, it is thought to be the work of many authors, or a compilation of several earlier sources. The dominant view is that both chronicles drew on a common source, the *Sihala-attḥakathā-mahāvaṃsa*, which is no longer extant.²⁸

Mahāvaṃsa is dated between late fourth and early sixth centuries and has traditionally been attributed to the monk Mahānāma, of whom little is known. It is considered to be a more literary and coherent reproduction of the earlier chronicle, written in much more elegant Pāli. It is also considerably longer. As K. R. Norman points out, it “begins and ends where the *Dīpavaṃsa* does, but it both adds and subtracts.”²⁹ It is worth stressing that these two *vaṃsas* do not represent the heritage of the ancient Sri Lankan Buddhist community as a whole. They articulate the views of only one particular group of monastics who produced them, the Mahāvihāra order. Apparently, the Abhayagiri and Jetavana monastic lineages had their own *vaṃsas*, but only Mahāvihāra’s accounts have survived.³⁰

The *Dīpavaṃsa* is the earliest known Pāli text composed in Sri Lanka, the first extant attempt at chronicling the island’s history. Its repetitions, omissions, and abrupt thematic transitions betray its genealogy as a compilation: it incorporates mythical accounts of the Buddha’s visits to the island, lists of Sinhalese kings, the history of the Buddhist *sangha* in India, and a chronicle of Sri Lanka.³¹ These topics, like threads running through the text, never become fully interwoven; a reader can often tell where the breaks are. Nor do the author(s) make a secret of it being a composite work, as we see in the very opening lines of the text:

I will set forth the history of Buddha’s coming to the Island, of the arrival of the relic and of the Bo (branch), of the doctrine of the teachers who made the recensions (of Dhamma and Vinaya), of the propagation of the Faith in the Island, of the arrival of the chief of men (Vijaya) [...]. I will proclaim a history, handed down from generation to generation, highly praised, adorned in many ways, joined together in this (work), just as flowers of various kinds (from a garland).³²

Thus, this history (*vamsa*) is unapologetically presented as ancient traditions “joined” or “tied together” (*ganthitam*) like various flowers in a garland, not as one unified account.

Two sections of the *Dīpavaṃsa*, in particular, foreground the history of the nuns. The first relates the arrival of Buddhist nuns to Sri Lanka and the ordination of the first Sri Lankan women (chs. 15 and 16). The second describes the nuns’ lineage and the accomplishments of some prominent nuns (ch. 18). What follows is a close reading of these sections.

The Arrival of the Order of Buddhist Nuns to Sri Lanka

According to both the *Dīpavaṃsa* and the *Mahāvamsa*, Buddhism was brought to Sri Lanka during the reign of King Devānampiya Tissa (r. 250-10 BCE) by Mahinda, the son of Emperor Aśoka, who had been ordained as a Buddhist monk. Mahinda arrives in Sri Lanka together with a retinue of monks (by flying through the air) and preaches the Dhamma to the king and forty thousand other men, who all take refuge. When Queen Anulā, the king’s sister-in-law, comes to hear Mahinda’s teaching, she immediately attains the *sotāpatti* (stream-enterer) stage, being the first person in Sri Lanka to reach that level of attainment.³³ Her five hundred female attendants also become *sotāpattis*.

Later, Anulā approaches the king and announces her desire to become a nun. The king deliberates over this matter, but there is an odd gap, a silence, in the text: “Having sat down in order to hold a council (about this matter), he thus addressed the ministers... Prince Ariṭṭha, having heard what the king said...” (15.81-82). The king’s speech is omitted, but its content seems to be that he grants Anulā’s request. Since the presence of ten nuns is required for a woman’s *pabbajjā* (going forth) ordination, Mahinda sends for his sister Sanghamittā, Aśoka’s daughter, who is a nun in India. While waiting for her arrival, Anulā and the five hundred women live together observing the ten precepts.³⁴

When the nun Sanghamittā—who is described as learned, wise, and endowed with supernatural faculties—arrives in Sri Lanka accompanied by a group of nuns, she brings with her a sapling from the sacred Bodhi-tree.³⁵ The story thus constructs a special relationship between the nuns and the Bodhi-tree, which quite naturally comes to symbolize the Buddha’s teaching taking root in Sri Lanka. The first Sri Lankan ordination ceremony then follows:

The five hundred high-born, illustrious virgins of the royal court who were free from passion and steadfast, all received the Pabbajjā ordination. [...] Prince Ariṭṭha, released from the chain of fear, received the

Pabbajjā ordination according to the doctrine of the Jina, together with five hundred companions. All these persons attained Arahatship and full perfection in the doctrine of the Jina.³⁶

As we reflect on the *Dīpavaṃsa*'s presentation of women and nuns, it seems significant that, although men are the first to take refuge, Queen Anulā is the first person to attain stream-entry. As for ordination, according to the above account, the first *pabbajjā* ceremony is conducted simultaneously for both men and women after Saṅghamittā's arrival. However, this is one instance of inconsistency in the text: there is also a different version in which the noblemen headed by Prince Ariṭṭha receive ordination before any women do.³⁷

“Learned and Virtuous They Illuminate the Earth”: The Nuns’ Lineage and the List of Prominent Nuns

Chapter 18 of the *Dīpavaṃsa* begins with a description of the prominent monks and nuns in Sri Lanka. However, this section clearly gives greater attention to nuns than to monks. The first few verses give a generic description of monks, without mentioning any one of them by name:

At the present time there are other aged, middle-aged, and young (Bhikkhus), holders of the Vibhajja doctrine, preservers of the tradition of the Vinaya and of the Faith. Learned and virtuous they illuminate this earth [...]. (18.1-2)

Later in the chapter, a practically synonymous statement describes the nuns:

At the present time there are other aged, middle-aged, and young (Bhikkhunīs), holders of the Vibhajja doctrine and of the Vinaya, preservers of the tradition of the Faith. Learned and virtuous they illuminate this earth. (18.44)

However, this latter passage is preceded by what we might call a *bhikkhunīvaṃsa*, an account of the nuns' lineage from the Buddha's time to the text's present (18.7-44). It mentions numerous nuns by name, listing their virtues and accomplishments. There is no corresponding list of monks in this chapter, or anywhere in the *Dīpavaṃsa*. This has obviously raised questions as to why the text highlights nuns while making only a passing reference to monks.

The list of prominent nuns begins with the first Buddhist nun, the Buddha's aunt Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, and other important female disciples of the Buddha. It then goes on to name the nuns who brought the lineage to Sri Lanka:

The Therī Saṅghamittā, and wise Uttarā, Hemā, and Pasādapālā, and Aggimittā, Dāsikā, Pheggu, Pabbatā, and Mattā, Mallā, and Dhamaḍāsīyā, these young Bhikkhunis (these eleven Bhikkhunis?) came hither from Jambudīpa. They taught the Vinaya Piṭaka in Anurādhapura. They (also) taught the five Collections (of the Sutta Piṭaka) and the seven Treatises (of the Abhidhamma). (18.11-14)

The nuns' knowledge of canonical teachings and their role as teachers of monastic discipline figure prominently in this account. The phrases "well versed in the Vinaya" and "they taught the Vinaya Piṭaka in Anurādhapura" are repeated many times. But other qualities and abilities attributed to them are also worth noting. One nun, Mahilā, is said to have practiced the *dhutaṅga* precepts, which entail difficult ascetic practices (18.15). Sumanā was knowledgeable about the history of Buddhism (18.17). Some possessed the six supernatural faculties and magical powers (18.25, 18.28). The text clearly stresses the nuns' spiritual attainments; they were "Bhikkhunis who were passionless and tranquil, the resolutions of whose minds were pure, who were firmly grounded in the true Faith and in the Vinaya" (18.18). The section concludes by saying that some nuns attained enlightenment (18.43).

In a few instances, the text specifies the name or the social status of a nun's father: some of them are daughters of a king (18.20, 18.34), while one's father is a head priest and another's "a rogue" (18.21). Many of the nuns are said to be "honoured and high-born" (18.36, 18.40). King Abhaya (Duṭṭhāgamaṇī, r. 167-131? BCE) is mentioned several times as an illustrious patron of the nuns who invited 20,000 *bhikkhunis* to come to Sri Lanka from India (18.23, 18.32).

In these passages, the *Dīpavaṃsa* is making several important claims about nuns. First, it highlights the authenticity of their ordination lineage, which can be traced all the way back to Saṅghamittā and even further to Mahāpajāpatī, who was herself ordained by the Buddha. It stresses that many of the nuns are upper-class women, some even of royal blood. The theme of proper knowledge and learning also resonates throughout these passages: the nuns are learned in the Buddhist tradition and monastic discipline and provide instruction to others. Finally, they are virtuous, spiritually accomplished, and some of them have attained enlightenment.

Ruptures, Layers, Inconsistencies

Any discussion regarding the *Dīpavaṃsa's* authorship and authorial motivations must take into account its composite nature. It is not the work of any

single author—monk or nun—but a compilation of several sources. This can be established on stylistic grounds alone:

Some passages, if the interpolations are omitted, are free from irregularities in metre and mistakes in grammar. Some accounts have one part in one metre and another part in another metre. Some, like the accounts of Vijaya give only a summary of the story. Others, like the visits of the Buddha and the bringing of the Bo-tree, are narrated in greater detail. [...] The double accounts seem to be derived from two different sources.³⁸

In the narratives discussed above, we have already seen at least three points where the text's inconsistencies indicate that the *Dīpavaṃsa* was drawing on different sources and not always smoothing out the seams. First of all, there is the apparent omission of King Devānampiya Tissa's speech regarding the question of Anulā's ordination. Secondly, there are two different versions of the first ordination ceremony in Sri Lanka. According to one version, the first nuns, led by Queen Anulā, are ordained at the same time as the first monks, Prince Ariṭṭha and his companions. In the other version, women are absent.

A third place of inconsistency is the striking asymmetry in the section on prominent monks and nuns in Chapter 18. The monks and nuns are described in near-synonymous terms in two verses, but while the text elaborates on the nuns' lineage in an additional 36 verses, there is no corresponding account of the monks. In a footnote, the translator Oldenberg offers a clue which few scholars have noted. In the introduction to his commentary on the Vinaya, Buddhaghosa cites verses which he attributes to "the Porāṇas"—that is, to the *Sihala-aṭṭhakathā*, the source of both *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvaṃsa*—describing the succession of the male monastic teachers.³⁹ The language closely resembles that of the *Dīpavaṃsa*'s list of nuns:

....For as the Porāṇas say:
Thereupon Mahinda, Itṭhiya, Uttiya and Sambala... and the learned Bhadda—These sinless sages of great wisdom came hither from Jambudīpa. They taught the Vinaya Piṭaka in Tambapaṇṇi. They also taught the five Nikāyas and the seven (Abhidhamma) treatises. Then the wise Ariṭṭha and the learned Tissadatta, the skilled Kālasamana, the Elder named Dīgha...⁴⁰

It is indeed conceivable that the two lists of prominent monks and nuns existed side by side in an earlier source, possibly in the *Sihala-aṭṭhakathā* (the Porāṇa). From this source, the compilers of the *Dīpavaṃsa* extracted only the list of nuns, whereas Buddhaghosa cited only the list of monks. Since the ear-

lier source is no longer extant, we cannot verify this possibility. What is clear, however, from the layers, omissions, and interpolations in the *Dīpavaṃsa*'s passages on nuns is that it is a heterogeneous text, a patchwork of alternative and sometimes conflicting accounts, and that it would be misleading to take it as representing any one view.

Scholarly Interpretations: the Dīpavaṃsa as "Feminist Historiography"

Whatever the identity and the overall agenda of the *Dīpavaṃsa*'s compilers may have been, it seems fair to say that they considered it important to record and highlight the role of nuns in Sri Lanka. This has attracted a great deal of attention from scholars. In fact, much of the modern scholarly discussion on the *Dīpavaṃsa* has revolved around the proposition, first put forth by Hugh Nevill, that the "unique consequence given to nuns" in this text suggests that it was in fact written by nuns.⁴¹ Nevill's suggestion has received at least a careful nod from most other scholars. In G. P. Malalasekera's estimation, it "is very ingenious and deserves careful consideration," but we cannot come to any definite conclusions about it.⁴² Jonathan Walters also endorses the hypothesis as "reasonable."⁴³

One of the more enthusiastic defenses of this thesis has been put forth by Leslie Gunawardana, who writes: "Nevill was probably justified in suggesting that the *Dīpavaṃsa* was a work of the nuns... it would appear that nuns not only excelled in their study of the Buddhist Canon but were also among the pioneers in historiography in the island."⁴⁴ This is part of his larger argument for the existence of a strong and independent *bhikkhuni-sangha* in ancient Sri Lanka. He conjectures that, since many nuns were from upper-class backgrounds and thus accustomed to being in a position of authority, they could not have been content with the subordinate status to which the Vinaya assigned them. This discontent "found expression in the independent spirit displayed by the nuns."⁴⁵

As evidence for this independent spirit, Gunawardana cites the "strong tradition of scriptural study" among nuns implied in the *Dīpavaṃsa*'s list of prominent nuns, pointing out that no names of monks occur as teachers in that list. Therefore, he argues, the nuns may even have had their own versions of the Vinaya and their own tradition of interpretation.⁴⁶ He also portrays Sinhalese nuns as active missionaries, spreading Buddhism in Sri Lanka and abroad: "Like the paradigmatic Sanghamittā, they were all women who travelled to distant lands to propagate Buddhism."⁴⁷ This, of course, is an exaggeration: we

have undisputable evidence of only a small group of Sri Lankan nuns traveling to only one distant land, namely, China.

In a recent article, Hema Goonatilake adopts Gunawardana's presentation of Sri Lankan nuns wholesale and proceeds to construct a scenario of an ideological battle between the two sexes that she sees reflected in the *vamsas*. In her view, the *Dīpavamsa* "records in detail" the history of the nuns' order in Sri Lanka and the spiritual and intellectual achievements of individual nuns.⁴⁸ In the absence of an equally detailed account in the *Mahāvamsa*, Goonatilake concludes that the latter text must represent "a deliberate effort on the part of the monk scribes to delegitimize the earlier contribution of the nuns."⁴⁹ The *Dīpavamsa*, then, would be supplanted by the "concerted anti-woman representation by Sri Lankan monks."⁵⁰

Goonatilake also elaborates on Gunawardana's hypothesis that, disapproving of the way they were presented in the Vinaya and other texts, the nuns developed their own independent tradition. She concludes: "[T]he women of Anuradhapura were the pioneer historiographers in the country, and perhaps anywhere in the world. What is significant is their attempt to present their own version of the story—which can be called feminist historiography."⁵¹

Goonatilake's bold thesis is undermined by a number of problems, echoing those that Faure identifies as the main methodological problems in this kind of feminist scholarship:

First among these is a certain hermeneutical naiveté or wishful thinking that insists on taking texts at face-value and on reading them through one single code; second, a certain ideological problem, the danger of ventriloquism when speaking in the name of a silent other; third, a problem due to the lack of sociohistorical context.⁵²

Goonatilake naively accepts the hypothesis of the nuns' authorship as a given, mostly on the basis of secondary scholarship that is itself speculative. She glosses over the complexities and disjunctures in both *Dīpavamsa* and *Mahāvamsa* and presents them as monolithic entities, as "feminist historiography" and "male repression" respectively, without attending to the plural voices in the two texts. As a matter of fact, there is no such neat gender divide between them. While relating the nuns' history in some detail, the *Dīpavamsa* is still largely written from the point of view of monks: even though it omits a full list of prominent monks comparable to the list of nuns, it does highlight the legitimacy of the monks' ordination lineage and mentions many illustrious monks by name.⁵³ As for the *Mahāvamsa*, it does give a great deal of attention to nuns, in some respects more than the *Dīpavamsa*. Its account of the arrival of the

Bodhi-tree, for example, is more extended and detailed. Unlike the *Dīpavamsa*, it also mentions by name the first “nunnery” of Anulā, the Upāsika-vihāra, and describes the founding of the Hatthāḷhaka nunnery.⁵⁴ Finally, Goonatilake’s claim that the story of Queen Anulā becoming the first “stream-enterer” does not appear in the *Mahāvamsa* is simply not true.⁵⁵ *Mahāvamsa* 14.58 describes Anulā and other noblewomen attaining that stage, well before any men do.

Another example of uncritical reading—or wishful thinking—on both Goonatilake’s and Gunawardana’s part is their argument that, since many nuns were upper-class women, they must have resented being subject to the authority of the monks. Here they accept at face-value the text’s claim that the nuns were “high-born,” without pausing to consider that this is only how the text *represents* them, an attribute carefully chosen and quite possibly politically motivated. Finally, when claiming to speak for the “forgotten women of Anurādhapura,” Goonatilake ends up putting words into their mouths: “It is clear that the nuns were reacting to the narration in the *Cullavagga* by writing their own version of the establishment of the nuns’ order.”⁵⁶ Yet the text itself hardly warrants such a conclusion as “clear.”

The *Vamsas* as “Historical” Documents

Ever since the first Western translations of the *vamsas* appeared in the nineteenth century, scholars have been preoccupied with determining their reliability as sources of history. While some have dismissed them altogether for their mythological elements and exaggerations, others have accepted the narrative they present as the standard textbook account of ancient Sri Lankan Buddhist history. The problem with the kind of scholarship exemplified by Gunawardana and Goonatilake is that they neither problematize the historicity of the sources they use nor reflect on their own interpretive strategies. Yet a critical consideration of the nature of the *vamsas* as textual documents can radically alter our readings and complicate our interpretations.

One way of reading the Sinhalese chronicles emphasizes their *ideological* nature. Heinz Bechert, for example, argues that we should look for the motivations of their authors in order to understand their historical function.⁵⁷ The chronicles’ accounts of the Buddha’s visits to the island and their presentation of it as *dharmadīpa*, “the island of the Buddha’s teaching,” should be understood against the background of the ideology of state-*sangha* relations. According to Bechert, the *vamsas* try to articulate and propagate a concept of “national identity closely connected to a religious tradition.”⁵⁸ It was in the interests of the monastics who composed them to propagate a state ideology in which the

dharmic king protects the *saṅgha*, while the *saṅgha* acts as the guide of the nation.⁵⁹

Steven Kemper also sees the *vaṃsa* narratives as “written around the evolution of two intertwined institutions—the *rājaparamparāva* (line of kingly descent) on the one side and the *theraparamparāva* (line of monastic descent) on the other.”⁶⁰ The *vaṃsas* are court chronicles and, as such, political in character. At the same time, they are sacred history, Buddhist history: the leading characters are Buddhist monastics, the themes are distinctly religious, and many a chapter ends with a moral reflection.⁶¹ As Kemper points out, the historical chronology of practices and events is always intertwined with these ideological and mythological elements.⁶² The historiographical problem, then, lies in separating the former from the latter.⁶³

The idea that the *vaṃsas* articulate a certain ideology of power, influenced by both royal and religious interests, is also the beginning assumption of Jonathan Walters’ recent work. His approach is to try to see these texts as *dialogical*, to attend to “the ways in which these *Vaṃsas* reflected and reacted to the circumstances that produced them, as well as the ways in which they participated in and changed those very circumstances.”⁶⁴ The period of the *Dīpavaṃsa*’s composition, Walters argues, was a time when a distinctly Theravādan and distinctly Mahāvihāran self-identity was first being worked out. The earliest textual evidence for this is found in the *Dīpavaṃsa*; as we will see below, it is the first text to make the claim that Mahāvihāran Theravāda is the true Buddhist disciplinary order of Sri Lanka.⁶⁵ We may ask, then: what was happening at the time of its composition that effected such a shift?

Answering this question requires a closer examination of the historical context of the *Dīpavaṃsa*, the circumstances in which it seems to have been produced and the debates in which it participated. This takes us to the reign of King Mahāsena (r. 274-301? CE), the last king mentioned in the text, and a key player in the *Dīpavaṃsa*’s present moment, or recent past.⁶⁶

The Mahāsena Episode: A Background of Political Tension and Religious Rivalry

Both *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvaṃsa* conclude with the reign of Mahāsena, and present it as a time of considerable tension for the Mahāvihārans. However, the background of events is detailed only in the *Mahāvaṃsa*, which traces them back to the reign of Mahāsena’s father, King Goṭhābhaya. In an effort to suppress Buddhist heresies, this king, who favored the Mahāvihāra, seized sixty bhikkhus living in the Abhayagiri “who had turned to the Vetulya-doc-

trine [Mahāyāna teachings] and were like a thorn in the doctrine of the Buddha,” and had them deported to South India (MV 36.111-112). Later, one of their disciples, a South Indian monk named Sanghamitta, traveled to Sri Lanka “embittered against the bhikkhus of the Mahāvihāra” (36.113). The king appointed him the teacher of his two sons, Jeṭṭhatissa and Mahāsenā. Jeṭṭhatissa succeeded to the throne after his father, but died after ten years and was followed by Mahāsenā. This is where the *Dīpavaṃsa* narrative picks up:

After Jeṭṭhatissa’s death his younger brother, king Mahāsenā, reigned twenty-seven years. This king once thought thus: “There are two kinds of Bhikkhus in the Religion (of the Buddha); which of them hold the right doctrine and which hold the wrong doctrine, which are modest and which are shameless?” When thinking about this matter and searching after modest persons, he saw wicked Bhikkhus who were no (true) Samaṇas and (only) looked like (Samaṇas), Dummitta and Pāpasoṇa and other shameless men. He went to those wicked Bhikkhus and asked them about the sense (of the Religion) and the doctrine. Dummitta and Pāpasoṇa and other shameless men secretly consulted in order to mislead the pious (king). [... They], for the sake of their own advantage, taught that (the true doctrine) was a false doctrine. (DV 18.66-71, 74)

Dummitta (“bad friend”), of course, is a derogatory nickname for Sanghamitta, while Pāpasoṇa literally means “evil Soṇa” and refers to one of Mahāsenā’s ministers (MV 37.10). The text’s tone is heavily sarcastic and bitter. It accuses “the wicked bhikkhus” of deceiving the king into believing that the Mahāvihārāns teach a false doctrine. The repercussions were serious for the Mahāvihāra. The king instituted a royal penalty, so that anyone who gave food to a Mahāvihāra monk had to pay a fine (MV 37.5). Mahāvihāra monks had to leave their monastery and seek shelter in another part of Sri Lanka, where they stayed for nine years (37.6-7). While the Mahāvihāra was abandoned, Sanghamitta persuaded the king to destroy its property or carry it away to Abhayagiri (36.9-16), and some monks even attempted to shift the monastery’s boundaries (37.36). Eventually one of Mahāsenā’s wives, who supported the Mahāvihāra, had Sanghamitta and Sona murdered (37.26-28). The king apologized and had the Mahāvihāra restored again (37.23, 29-31). The chronicles then end with Mahāsenā’s death.

If we are to believe the *vaṃsa*’s account, the period preceding the *Dīpavaṃsa*’s composition seems indeed to have been a time when the very existence of the Mahāvihāra order was under threat. This would explain its defensiveness about the legitimacy of Theravāda doctrine and the Mahāvihāra lineage. In its

account of the Buddhist Councils, for example, the *Dīpavaṃsa* unequivocally presents the great schisms in terms of other, dissenting sects breaking away from orthodox Theravāda: “Seventeen are the heretical sects, and there is one orthodox sect; together with the orthodox sects they are eighteen at all. The most excellent Theravāda which resembles a large banyan tree, is the complete doctrine of the Jina, free from omissions and additions.” (5.51-52) The text also claims that Mahāvihāra, earlier known as Mahāmeghavana, was the first monastery in Sri Lanka. It was established by Prince Mahinda and was the seat of the first Bodhi-tree (13.34). The illustrious nuns and monks are also explicitly identified as “holders of the Vibhajja doctrine” (18.1, 44).

But the question is: *are* we to believe the account of the two *vaṃsas*? After all, they are clearly polemical, “partisan rearticulations of the past.”⁶⁷ If, like Walters, we wish to read the *Dīpavaṃsa* as a dialogical text, we are faced with the challenge of having to reconstruct the *dialogue* it participates in without access to the other side of the story. Is there evidence in support of the situation that the text paints before us—an intense sectarian rivalry between a pro-Theravādan Mahāvihāra and a pro-Mahāyāna Abhayagiri—outside the *vaṃsas*?⁶⁸

That the Mahāvihāran account of the authenticity of Theravāda was called to question by representatives of the other two disciplinary orders, the Abhayagiri and Jetavana, may be reconstructed on the basis of later Mahāvihāran sources. The *Vaṃsātthappakāsinī*, for example, refutes the claims of Abhayagiri and Jetavana that *they* were the first orders in Sri Lanka and that Mahāvihāra represented a late, corrupt group that broke away from them.⁶⁹

Evidence from non-Mahāvihāran sources also verifies that the Mahāvihāra’s prominent role was by no means as self-evident as its advocates seem to wish. According to the travel records of Chinese pilgrims, for much of Anurādhapurān history, the largest, wealthiest, and most populated monastery was in fact not Mahāvihāra, but Abhayagiri. Fa-xian reports that there were five thousand monks living at Abhayagiri where he was staying, but only three thousand monks at Mahāvihāra.⁷⁰ Moreover, the mere fact that the Chinese monk-scholar resided at Abhayagiri indicates that this monastery may have had more cosmopolitan connections. Abhayagiri was a place where both Hināyāna and Mahāyāna scriptures were studied.⁷¹ Thus, it was more “ecumenical” and cosmopolitan than Mahāvihāra; it “connected Anurādhapura with Indian universities, Chinese imperial courts, Javanese trading communities.”⁷² It is easy to see why it might have been more likely to attract royal support more than the more localized Mahāvihāra.

The inscriptional record further supports the historicity of the Mahāsena episode. The Nāgārjunikoṇḍa inscription mentioned earlier attests to the presence of Sri Lankan *theriyas* there in the mid-third century—that is, around the time when Mahāsena’s father supposedly deported sixty monks for their Mahāyāna leanings. Nāgārjunikoṇḍa was a center of Mahāyāna, and it is conceivable that the exiled Sri Lankan monks sought refuge there.

A fragmentary slab-inscription unearthed in Anurādhapura in 1893 may also provide supporting evidence. Everything hinges on whether or not it can be attributed to Mahāsena; it is an edict issued by a king whose name, alas, is not preserved.⁷³ In this inscription, an unnamed king censures the monks of the “Five Great Residences”—which, according to Paranavitana and Walters, refers to Mahāvihāra—who, though rebuked, continued to sin in various ways.⁷⁴ The edict also appears to accuse them of causing disturbances and creating confusion. Significantly, it endorses the Vetulyavāda as the teaching that will point out the path to individual and communal well-being.⁷⁵

This edict has been tentatively assigned to Mahāsena for the following reasons. First of all, on paleographical grounds it can be dated to the third or fourth century CE. Secondly, it was discovered in the precincts of the Jetavanārāma, apparently established by Mahāsena.⁷⁶ Finally, it reflects a moment of controversy when a king, himself in favor of the Vetulyavāda (Mahāyāna), attempts to eradicate other teachings.⁷⁷ Mahāsena is the only king in the literary record that *matches*. Moreover, both the script and the stone of the inscription are of a variety which is foreign to Sri Lanka, but which has been used in Nāgārjunikoṇḍa inscriptions.⁷⁸ As we remember from the *vamsas*’ account, Mahāsena’s oppression of the Mahāvihāran monks was due to the influence of a monk coming from South India. If the king of this inscription is in fact Mahāsena, this would reinforce further the Mahāsena—Vetulyavāda—South India connection.

Finally, an unedited inscription by Mahāsena’s son, Sirimeghavaṇṇa, records a grant of money for repairs at the Mahāvihāra. Is it a curious coincidence that repairs were needed at the Mahāvihāra right after Mahāsena’s reign?⁷⁹ This also accords with the *Cūlavamsa*’s account that, after his father’s death, Sirimeghavaṇṇa went to the Mahāvihāra to inquire about the damage brought about by his father, and had everything restored to its original condition.⁸⁰

Thus intertextual evidence does seem to corroborate, and certainly does not disprove, the scenario of intersectorial rivalry and the withdrawal of royal patronage from the Mahāvihāra which is presented in the *vamsas*. Against this background, the *Dīpavamsa* can indeed be read as a polemic authored by Mahāvihārans who were “put on to defend their place and the orthodoxy of their tradition.”⁸¹ It is significant that they did so by invoking the past, the

history of Buddhism and the authentic transmission of the teachings they preserved. In the end, the *Dīpavaṃsa* seems to have succeeded: the Mahāvihāra did survive and, centuries later, became the dominant order of Sri Lankan Buddhism.⁸² In rearticulating the events of the past the text repositioned the Theravādins of the Mahāvihāra in relation to the king, the Abhayagirivihāra, and to the cosmic Buddhist history. The concluding section of the essay examines how the *Dīpavaṃsa*'s portrayal of nuns figures in this repositioning.

A History in Fragments

I have tried to trace the political and historical context of the *Dīpavaṃsa*'s composition at some length because my methodological point of departure is that any examination of the text's presentation of nuns ought to take into account its situatedness within a larger context, its overall agenda. That is, a *gendered* reading necessitates a *dialogical* reading.

Perhaps the most crucial aspect of the *Dīpavaṃsa*'s location in both textual and social history is its sectarian commitment: it is first and foremost a Mahāvihāran chronicle, and the specific claims it is making about Buddhist monastic history, doctrine, and lineage should be understood in light of this affiliation. The work of Walters, in clarifying the context that the text both reflects and intervenes in, helps us to interpret some of these claims. However, Walters' consideration of how the nuns figure in his scheme is less satisfying. Apart from acknowledging the proposition of the nuns' authorship as "reasonable," and even speculating that the nuns might have composed the text during the nine years when the monks were away from the Mahāvihāra, he makes no attempt to analyze what the text might be saying about nuns. His otherwise persuasive reading fails to attend to issues of gender.

Earlier, I have demonstrated that the *Dīpavaṃsa*'s narratives about nuns also bear evidence of disjunctures and layers. Insofar as the text is a collection of different recensions, it makes sense that some parts of it are more supportive of nuns than others. As Walters points out, its unique contribution was "to string these various prooftexts, anecdotes and dating mnemonics into a single historical narrative."⁸³ But again, how do we read such a text?

In her recent work, historian Gabrielle Spiegel stresses that the production of meaning in a given text is not merely a discursive process, but also a material one. The most fruitful approach to investigating history through such texts, she suggests, is to focus one's analysis on the "moment of inscription," the moment of choice and decision when the text takes its shape in history and its meaning is fixed.⁸⁴ A variety of unstated misunderstandings and interests, arising "from

pressures that are social and not merely intertextual,” leave their imprint on a literary text when it is shaped.⁸⁵ Spiegel sees history as “the forces and texts against which [a text] constructs itself, incorporating not a single meaning but layers of contested and conflictual meanings and silences.”⁸⁶

One way to approach the hermeneutical problems presented by the *Dīpavaṃsa*'s composite nature is to follow Spiegel's suggestion and focus on the moment of its inscription as its “authorial moment.” At the moment of compilation the authors—the compilers—made certain choices that shaped the text and fixed its meaning. What they chose to include or leave out is indicative of their particular commitments and interests. Whatever the different attitudes towards nuns might have been in the sources that the *Dīpavaṃsa* draws on, the compilers of this text considered it important to include passages that highlight the nuns' order and its history. The question we are left with, however, is: *why* was it important? What were the social and intertextual pressures against which the *Dīpavaṃsa* constructed itself? Why did they bring out these particular interests, and not other ones?

Conclusion: Intertwined Claims and Possibilities of Reading

Some of the conclusions summarized here are necessarily hypothetical, as we simply do not have conclusive evidence. However, some things can be established with confidence:

1) The *Dīpavaṃsa* is a heterogeneous text, compiled from various sources. As such, it does not articulate a single view about nuns. However, for our purposes it is significant that the compilers decided to include material that highlights the nuns and their particular history.

2) The “authors” of the *Dīpavaṃsa*, the people who compiled it, may have been either monks or nuns; we do not have enough evidence to either prove or disprove the hypothesis of the nuns' authorship. However, given that the work assembled material from different sources and recensions, it is possible that it also drew upon traditions transmitted exclusively by nuns—whether or not these traditions existed in a written form prior to the *Dīpavaṃsa*. The point is worth reiterating: nuns may have been *among* the many unnamed “authors” and transmitters of the traditional sources the text draws on.

3) What we do know is that the compilers belonged to the Mahāvihāran monastic order. They emphasized the legitimacy of the nuns' lineage as part of their larger claims regarding the legitimacy of Mahāvihāra and Theravāda as the custodians of true Buddhist teachings. We could hypothesize at least two situations in which the need to do so would arise. The presence of nuns in the

sangha—either the *sangha* in general, or the Mahāvihāra in particular—could have been contested, and the *Dīpavaṃsa* had to prove that the nuns were not only learned, accomplished, high-born, and virtuous, but that their lineage went all the way back to the Buddha himself. Another possibility is that the nuns in the other *vihāras*—Abhayagiri being the most likely candidate—were favored by the king, or otherwise in a position to claim that they were more powerful, more accomplished, pure, virtuous, or more active in spreading Buddhism. Consequently, the Mahāvihāra needed to make the case that their nuns were also learned and virtuous.

We have one piece of evidence to support the latter possibility. The *Mahāvāṃsa* tells that King Mahāsena established two nunneries during his reign, Uttara and Abhaya (MV 37.43). Although the text does not specify the sectarian affiliation of these nunneries, it is quite likely that they were connected to the Abhayagiri. As both Malalasekera and Walters point out, the Abhayagirivihāra was also known as Uttaravihāra, the “Northern Monastery.” The *vāṃsas* use these names interchangeably, or even refer to the “Abhayuttara” monastery.⁸⁷ If these two nunneries were indeed Abhayagiri nunneries, it would strongly suggest that Mahāsena not only favored Abhayagiri over Mahāvihāra but also extended his patronage specifically to the nuns of the former *nikāya* (monastic lineage). In response, the compilers of the *Dīpavaṃsa*, by choosing to include certain sources pertaining to nuns, were striving to present Mahāvihāran nuns as nuns of the true Buddhist lineage, as a worthy field of merit.

Evoking images of the learned and virtuous Mahāvihāra *bhikkhunīs* may have served yet other political or ideological purposes. For example, patronage extended to nuns who were from high-ranking families may have a role to play in family or clan politics at court. We can also imagine a situation in which the Bodhi-tree itself became an important symbol of power, perhaps even a kind of a palladium or a ritual focus of the royal family, which would explain the *Dīpavaṃsa*’s emphasis on the nuns as the “guardians” of the Bodhi-tree. Nor is it necessarily an accident that the text stresses the involvement of King Duṭṭhāgamaṇi (r. 167-31? BCE) in strengthening the numbers of *bhikkhunīs* and providing them with generous support. This king is regarded as one of the hero-kings of Sri Lanka who brought the island under a single sovereign authority. In celebrating him as the patron of the nuns’ community, the compilers of the text may have sought to reinforce the link between the well-being of the nuns and the well-being of the state.⁸⁸

In the end, it turns out that the *Dīpavaṃsa* has its limitations as a source. It is not the social history of Sri Lankan nuns we might wish to take it to be (and

as many, in fact, have). It cannot be read as a transparent historical narrative. Yet, as I have argued, it is an important testimony that the *bhikkhuni-sangha* was seen by some as integral to what we might call the politics of self-representation among Sri Lankan monastics: a legitimate, doctrinally pure monastic tradition also had to be able to boast of legitimate, doctrinally pure nuns. The attributes that the text assigns to nuns—in particular, learning, the mastery of discipline and spiritual practices, upper-class status, and being part of an authentic succession of teachers—suggest that these were qualities that constituted nuns as pure, worthy, and attractive to patrons. However, rather than simply attribute the *Dīpavaṃsa*'s positive appraisal of nuns to the competition between the sexes, we ought to keep in mind other competitions and inequalities—a more complex world where monks may have been oppressed or outshadowed by other monks, nuns by other nuns, monastics by monarchs, Sri Lankans by South Indians—or vice versa.

NOTES

- 1 Hema Goonatilake, "The Forgotten Women of Anuradhapura: 'Her Story' Replaced by 'History,'" in *Gendering the Spirit*, ed. Durre S. Ahmed (New York: Zed Books, 2002), 92.
- 2 Tessa Bartholomeusz, *Women under the Bō Tree: Buddhist Nuns in Sri Lanka* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 17.
- 3 Bernard Faure, *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 3.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 5 I have limited my inquiry to the *vaṃsas* and inscriptional evidence. Other sources, such as other Buddhist narratives, Sinhala texts, and inscriptional material not directly related to nuns, might also yield valuable insights and deserve to be explored; however, they are outside the scope of the present paper.
- 6 Ronald Inden, Jonathan Walters, and Daud Ali, *Querying the Medieval: Texts and the History of Practices in South Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- 7 Ronald Inden, "Introduction: From Philological to Dialogical Texts," in *Querying the Medieval*, 3, 5, 11-12.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 12-13.
- 9 S. Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon I* (Colombo: Archaeological Department, 1970), 7, 13, 18, 26, 37, 55, 66, 76.

- 10 *Cūlavamsa* (henceforth abbreviated as CV) 39. 43.
- 11 CV 42. 46-47; 46. 27-28. The former queen built the nunnery for the queen of the Kāliṅga country, who had come to Lanka to ordain as a nun. The latter, Queen Jeṭṭhā, named her nunnery Jeṭṭhārāma.
- 12 *Epigraphia Zeylanica* (henceforth abbreviated as EZ) Vol. II, 19-25; CV 48.36.
- 13 Edward Muller, *Ancient Inscriptions of Ceylon* (London: Trubner & Co., 1883), 112.
- 14 CV 52. 24.
- 15 EZ Vol. II, 34-38.
- 16 CV 52. 63.
- 17 EZ Vol. I, 41-53. These “schools,” or *nikāyas*, might more accurately be described as disciplinary orders. As a term of monastic organization, *nikāya* refers to a group of monks who have the same ordination lineage and who perform certain rituals together. See R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough: Monasticism and Economic Interest in Early Medieval Sri Lanka* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1979), 8.
- 18 EZ Vol. I, 213-229.
- 19 CV 54. 48.
- 20 Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough*, 39. Tessa Bartholomeusz also notes that “the order of nuns ended mysteriously in the eleventh century” (*Women under the Bō Tree*, 21).
- 21 *Ibid.*, 15. There apparently were Buddhist nuns in Burma at the time; thus it would have been possible to bring the necessary quorum of nuns from Burma to reinstitute the nuns’ ordination lineage. See Peter Skilling, “A Note on the History of the Bhikkhuni-sangha,” *W. F. B. Review* XXX-XXXI (1993-94): 34.
- 22 J. Ph. Vogel, “Prakrit Inscriptions from a Buddhist Site at Nagarjunikonda,” *EI* 20 (1929-30): 7-8, 22-23; N. Dutt, “Notes on the Nāgārjunikoṇḍa Inscriptions,” *Indian Historical Quarterly* 7.3 (September 1931): 651-53.
- 23 As Sircar and Lahiri point out, in another third-century inscription, *theriyā* is clearly a masculine epithet. See D. C. Sircar and A. N. Lahiri, “Footprint Slab Inscription from Nagarjunikonda,” *EI* 33 (1959-60): 247-50.
- 24 *Biographies of Buddhist Nuns* (BDK English Tripiṭaka 76-VI), trans. Li Rongxi (Berkeley, CA: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2002), 103-4.
- 25 Chikusa Masaaki, “The Formation and Growth of Buddhist Nun Communities in China,” in *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan*, trans. Philip Yampolsky ed. Barbara Ruch (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2002), 10.
- 26 Steven Kemper, *The Presence of the Past: Chronicles, Politics, and Culture in Sinbala Life* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 31.

- 27 G. P. Malalasekera, *The Pāli Literature of Ceylon* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1994 [1973]), 135.
- 28 Erich Frauwallner, "Über den geschichtlichen Wert der alten ceylonesischen Chroniken," in *Nachtgelassene Werke I: Aufsätze, Beiträge, Skizzen*, ed. E. Steinkeller (Wien: ÖAW Sitzungsberichte, 1984), 7-33.
- 29 K. R. Norman, *Pāli Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983), 117.
- 30 Malalasekera, *The Pāli Literature of Ceylon*, 134; Jonathan S. Walters, "Buddhist History: The Sri Lankan Pāli Vamsas and Their Commentary," in *Querying the Medieval: Texts and the History of Practices in South Asia*, eds. Ronald Inden, Jonathan Walters, and Daud Ali (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 123-24.
- 31 These four different topics were identified by Frauwallner, following Geiger ("Über den geschichtlichen Wert der alten ceylonesischen Chroniken," 24).
- 32 DV I.1, 4.
- 33 DV 12.36-58; 85-86.
- 34 DV 15.84-85.
- 35 DV 17.22-23.
- 36 DV 16.38-40
- 37 DV 14.77.
- 38 G. G. Mendis, "The Pāli Chronicles of Ceylon," *University of Ceylon Review* 2 (October 1946): 18.
- 39 Oldenberg also remarks that the first short paragraph on monks was "evidently intended to form the conclusion of a list of Theras which, however, is wanting in the *Dīpavamsa* or at least in the MSS. we possess." DV, p. 204, n.1.
- 40 Buddhaghosa, *The Inception of the Discipline and the Vinaya Nidāna*, trans. N. A. Jayawickrama (London: Luzac & Co, 1962), 55-56.
- 41 *Catalogue of the Hugh Nevill Collection of Sinhalese manuscripts in the British Library*, cited in Malalasekera, *The Pāli Literature of Ceylon*, 136.
- 42 Malalasekera, *The Pāli Literature of Ceylon*, 137.
- 43 Walters, "Buddhist History," 114.
- 44 R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, "Subtle Silks of Ferreous Firmness: Buddhist Nuns in Ancient and Early Medieval Sri Lanka and their Role in the Propagation of Buddhism," *Sri Lankan Journal of the Humanities* XIV (1988): 17.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 22.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 13-14, 26.

- 47 Ibid., 39.
- 48 Goonatilake, "The Forgotten Women of Anuradhapura: 'Her Story' Replaced by 'History,'" 91.
- 49 Ibid., 92.
- 50 Ibid., 95.
- 51 Ibid., 100.
- 52 Faure, *The Power of Denial*, 4.
- 53 DV 5. 83-96; 19. 5-7; 21.2.
- 54 MV 18.12; 19.20-21; 19.77-84.
- 55 Goonatilake, "The Forgotten Women of Anuradhapura," 93.
- 56 Ibid., 97; my emphasis.
- 57 Heinz Bechert, "The Beginnings of Buddhist Historiography: Mahāvamsa and Political Thinking," in *Religion and Legitimation of Power*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith (Chambersburg, PA: ANIMA Books, 1978), 4.
- 58 Ibid., 7.
- 59 Ibid., 8, 9.
- 60 Kemper, *The Presence of the Past*, 33.
- 61 Ibid., 33, 27.
- 62 Ibid., 28.
- 63 Ibid., 47.
- 64 Walters, "Buddhist History," 100. See also Steven Collins' article "On the Very Idea of the Pali Canon" where he discusses the formation of the Pali Canon against the background of sectarian monastic rivalries (*Journal of the Pali Text Society* XV [1990]: 89-125).
- 65 Ibid., 111.
- 66 For the date of the *Dipavamsa*, see Malalasekera, *The Pali Literature of Ceylon*, 138; von Hinüber, *Handbook of Pali Literature*, 89; Walters, "Mahāsena at the Mahāvihāra: On the Interpretation and Politics of History in Pre-Colonial Sri Lanka," in *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia* ed. Daud Ali (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002 [1999]), 331.
- 67 Walters, "Buddhist History," 100.
- 68 To speak of "Mahāyāna" and "Theravāda/Hināyāna" at this time is, of course, problematic and anachronistic. I do not suggest that they existed as two self-consciously distinct and rigid entities or "sects" at the time of the *Dipavamsa's* composition; on the contrary,

it appears that they were still rather fluid terms. I use these terms here as placeholders, as it were, for what the *vamsas* themselves polemically identify as and “Theravāda’ and “Vetulyavāda”—the latter signifying, above all, the endorsement of what we might now call Mahāyāna sūtras.

- 69 Walters, “Mahāyāna Theravāda and the Origins of the Mahāvihāra,” 103.
- 70 Fa-Hien, *Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms*, trans. James Legge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), 102, 107.
- 71 Walpola Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon* (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Co, 1956), 89; Walters, “Mahāyāna Theravāda and the Origins of the Mahāvihāra,” *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* 23: 1-2 (1997): 106.
- 72 *Ibid.*, 116.
- 73 S. Paranavitana, “A Fragmentary Inscription from Jetavanārāma now in the Colombo Museum,” *EZ* Vol. IV, 276.
- 74 *Ibid.*, 278-79; Walters, “Mahāyāna Theravāda,” 113.
- 75 “[T]he Vayatuḍala which creates (i.e. points out) the path of... with faith in one’s mind and... of heart in the community of bhikkhus and in one’s own self...” (Paranavitana’s translation; “A Fragmentary Inscription,” 282).
- 76 *Ibid.*, 280.
- 77 *Ibid.*, 277. See also Lakshman S. Perera, *The Institutions of Ancient Ceylon from Inscriptions*, Vol. 1 (from 300 BCE to 830 CE), (Kandy: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2001), 142.
- 78 Paranavitana, “A Fragmentary Inscription,” 274.
- 79 Perera, *The Institutions of Ancient Ceylon from Inscriptions*, Vol. 1, 111.
- 80 CV 37.54-61.
- 81 Kemper, *The Presence of the Past*, 36. Note that the *Dīpavamsa* refers to Abhayagiri in respectful terms (e.g., 12.13, 23); its claim for the superiority of the Mahāvihāra is nuanced and careful.
- 82 According to Walters, the *Dīpavamsa* was able make its case because of four moves: it was composed in Pāli rather than Elu (proto-Sinhala); it engaged in “some skilled suturing” in presenting the history of the Buddhist sects in a manner that helped to legitimate Theravāda; it portrayed the Sri Lankan kings as descendants of the legendary Ikṣvāku; and it associated Mahinda, the missionary monk and son of Aśoka, specifically with the Mahāvihāra (Walters, “Buddhist History,” 115-18).
- 83 Walters, “Mahāsena at the Mahāvihāra,” 333.
- 84 Gabrielle Spiegel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, [1997] 1999), 25.

85 Ibid., 26.

86 Ibid.

87 Malalasekera, *Robe and Plough*, 38; Walters, "Buddhist Histories," 121. See CV 37.123; 53.17, 34.

88 I am thankful to Professor Anne M. Blackburn for her comments and suggestions which helped to shape this essay, particularly its concluding section.

PARTICULARISTIC RELIGIOUS PRACTICE AFTER THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Buber and Rosenzweig Respond to Kant

Carl Hughes

Virtually every Western religious community experienced the philosophical Enlightenment of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a profound challenge to its traditional self-understanding. In often analogous ways, Judaism, Christianity, and even Islam grappled and still grapple today with Enlightenment thought's emphasis on individual autonomy, recognition of the limits of reason, and trust in the scientific method as providing knowledge about the world. Perhaps no religious community, however, felt the impact of the Enlightenment more concretely than European Jews. Even to the most traditionalist among them, the Enlightenment promised, at least initially, political emancipation. Christendom's hegemony splintered, Jewish ghettos emptied, and Jews gained increased legal rights. But the philosophy underlying these changes threatened traditional Jewish life as much as it dimin-

ished political oppression. Enlightenment philosophy challenged Israel's claim to be God's chosen people, to possess revelation given in history, and, perhaps most significantly, to live according to distinctive patterns of ritual and law. The secular thought that grew out of the Enlightenment was content to recognize Judaism as a religious denomination among others, but hostile to Judaism as a way of life—a holistic framework determining how Jews eat, work, pray, worship, and believe. Like the other religious traditions of the West, Judaism remains divided to this day over the proper response to the challenges posed by Enlightenment philosophy.

In this paper, I will consider the response of two prominent 20th century Jewish theologians, Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, a paradigmatic and lastingly influential Enlightenment philosopher. I will begin with a brief sketch of Kant's assertions about religion in general and Judaism in particular, focusing especially on the challenge his thought poses to the observance of *halakha*, or the body of Jewish law regulating daily life and ritual observance. I will then turn to examining how Buber and Rosenzweig re-envision Judaism in the wake of the modernist upheaval that shook Europe's religious foundations. While Buber and Rosenzweig both believe that modernity lacks a spiritual dimension that Jewish faith can provide, their post-Enlightenment reinterpretations of Judaism are starkly different. The Judaism that Buber promotes—an "invisible Judaism" characterized by inward attitude rather than outward practice—is deeply indebted to Kant's thought in a way that Rosenzweig's Judaism is not. Rosenzweig explicitly rejects Kant's efforts to constrict religion within the bounds of universal reason and reasserts the value of Judaism's liturgical and legal particularity in *halakhab*. Despite the beauty and universal relevance of Buber's thought, I will conclude that Rosenzweig's emphasis on the subjective transformation enabled by traditional ritual practice provides a more substantial and existentially valuable vision of Judaism for the modern world. Rosenzweig's subtle philosophical defense of the transformative potential of traditional Jewish practice is, I suggest, easily applicable within the context of other religious traditions as well.

Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig are both well-versed in the German philosophical tradition, and each believes himself to be responding in his own way to the challenges that Enlightenment philosophy posed to Judaism. Neither thinker abandons philosophy entirely, yet neither is willing to accept without qualification the claims of Enlightenment reason. Buber and Rosenzweig are each in dialogue with numerous philosophers (both were influenced by Kierkegaard; Rosenzweig had studied Hegel extensively; and Buber quickly became associated with existentialism) but the classical expression of Enlight-

enment philosophy to which they refer is the work of Immanuel Kant. Before examining in depth how each thinker sought to guide Jewish thinking between the poles of modern philosophy and traditional Judaism, it is worth establishing briefly what these poles represented for Kant, for his work set the terms of debate for centuries in Jewish thought. My exposition of Kant's prescriptions for rational religion will be necessarily brief, focusing on *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, in which Kant applies his philosophy most concretely to Jewish religion. As we will see, in the spheres of both belief and practice, Kant's philosophy shakes the foundations of traditional Jewish life.

On a basic level, Kant's thought poses a challenge to all forms of religion because it confidently asserts that knowledge of God is impossible. Kant argues in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that God cannot be an object of knowledge because God is not an object of possible experience. Cognition, Kant claims, results from the synthesis of *a priori* concepts and sensory intuition, and since no sensory intuition of God is possible, claims to knowledge of God are untenable. Nonetheless, Kant writes extensively about religion in the three *Critiques* and in *Religion within the Boundaries*, in which he maintains that religion when properly conceived is good and empowering for the human being. Cognition is not the only realm in which religion makes claims. Religion also makes claims in the realm of moral practice, and in this realm its claims are entirely justified, even necessary. Even as humans can *know* nothing of God, they are nonetheless entitled to *believe* certain things about God to the extent that these beliefs empower their moral progress. In short, humans are entitled to the hope that God will ultimately reward virtue with happiness, since such a hope is (at least for most people) a requisite condition of moral development.

Given these basic claims about religion, Kant undertakes in *Religion within the Boundaries* to describe more concretely what lived religion should look like in an Enlightened world. Kant's basic conclusion is that religious traditions must not claim for themselves and their principles ends other than moral progress, defined in terms of the universal moral law prescribed by reason. Religion must not claim to offer a truth that must be believed for its own sake, independent of its moral result. "True religion is not to be placed in the knowledge or the profession of what God does or has done for our salvation," Kant writes, "but in what we must do to become worthy of it."¹ To the extent that religion claims to offer a revealed truth not discernable through moral reason, it degenerates into superstition. Events in history, such as miracles and direct revelation, cannot form the basis of pure religion, Kant contends. In the first place, belief in miracles contradicts the regularity of nature fundamental to the possibility of knowledge, and, even more significantly, such belief contradicts

the essence of the moral religion that Kant advocates. Whereas reason represents moral law as God's command because the law is moral in itself, religion founded in miracles or special revelation requires adherence to an arbitrary law known contingently through history. When religion advocates observance of a law that does not accord with the universal law of reason, it represents a "fetishism" of statutory law, a "counterfeit service" conceived according to the wiles of "priestcraft." Kant writes:

Whoever therefore gives precedence to the observance of statutory laws, requiring a revelation as necessary to religion, not indeed merely as a means to the moral disposition but as the objective condition for becoming well-pleasing to God directly...transforms the service of God into mere *fetishism*; he engages in a counterfeit service, which sets back all the work leading to true religion.²

Because the supreme moral law is universally binding and apparent, rational religion in its service will be similarly universal. Kant believes that pure religion is applicable and apparent to all human beings through reason. While Kant holds that Christian faith has most closely approximated the sort of pure religion he advocates,³ he makes no particularistic claims for any one faith. He speaks approvingly, for example, of the moral potential within Islam and Hinduism.⁴ What is important for Kant is that religious people of every religious tradition interpret their respective religion within the boundaries of reason. This means viewing the prescriptions of the tradition not as ends in themselves but as means to moral progress.

Kant judges Judaism with particular severity because it does not seem to meet his criteria of pure religion. Due in part to a vestigial Christian supersessionism, Kant berates traditional Judaism⁵ in the third essay of *Religion within the Boundaries*, contending at one point that "strictly speaking, Judaism is not a religion at all."⁶ Without attempting to excavate the origins of Kant's anti-Semitic rhetoric, it is useful to understand the reasons he gives for why Judaism conflicts so fundamentally with reason. Given what we have seen of Kant's view of pure religion already, these reasons should be easy to discern. Judaism claims for its adherents special status as the chosen people of God, rather than asserting the universality of its claims. It believes in a historical event of revelation at Sinai, contradicting the regularity of nature. Further, the law revealed at Sinai applies only to the Jewish people, rather than to humanity in the universal sense, and this law is not rationally discernable. Kant can see in *halakhic* observance only heteronymous subservience to cult. One can certainly take issue today with Kant's caricatured and polemical portrayal of Jewish faith. Still,

Kant's claims about religion and his application of them to Judaism became so ingrained in philosophy in subsequent centuries that they had an enormous impact on Jewish thought itself. Let us consider now how two prominent 20th century Jewish theologians, Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, reinterpret Judaism in the wake of Kant's assertions.

Buber was a scholar of Jewish tradition whose life was fundamentally shaped by his Jewish identity, yet he is far more amenable to Kant's universalizing paradigm than is Rosenzweig. As we will see, Buber largely accepts Kant's arguments against the value of *halakhic* law and himself espouses an ethic that, though often deriving its vocabulary from Judaism, is universally applicable. While Buber claims that religion represents a distinct mode of knowing not subject to the limitations of objective experience, he frames this assertion that is consistent with the Kantian critique.

Buber's famous work *I and Thou*, nonetheless, presents itself as a response to Enlightened modernity—a reassertion of a mode of being that is more fundamental than scientific objectivity. Buber certainly does not contest the reality or the prominence of the modern, scientific mode of existing—the mode in which the individual encounters the world as It. His point, however, is that humans are capable of living in a fuller way than they do when they relate to an It. “The basic word I-It can never be spoken with one's whole being,” Buber writes.⁷ The I-It mode of existing does not exhaust the possibility of human subjectivity, for the human being is constituted *a priori*—Buber claims in *riposte* to Kant—for more than objective knowing. Human beings by nature are capable of relating as subject to another subject, a You. The human being contains what Buber calls “an *a priori* of relation; *the innate You*.”⁸ When humans relate to a You rather than to an It, they involve more of themselves than they do in the I-It mode; they exist in a fuller way. By arguing for this innate *a priori* relational mode, Buber retorts to Kant that the human being is constituted by more than *a priori* concepts determining objective knowledge; the human being has an *a priori* capacity for relationship as well.

As fundamental as Buber asserts the I-You mode of existence to be, he acknowledges that in every case of human relationship, the lived reality fails to match the pure I-You relation for which humans long. But though our human relationships fall short of pure mutuality, Buber maintains that in them we nonetheless glimpse the divine. Through our imperfect I-You relationships we, in Buber's words, “gaze toward the train of the eternal You; in each we perceive the breath of it; in every You we address the eternal You.”⁹ This pure You to which our imperfect I-You relations point is what humans call “God,” and each time we address a You we are ultimately addressing God. Religion for

Buber thus develops, not out of objective experience—not even, for example, out of purported knowledge of acts of God in history—but out of the human experience of the I-You relation. To be religious is to relate, even for a fleeting moment, to a You that is eternal and animates all the imperfect relations of this world. Buber accepts the Kantian claim that objective knowledge of God is impossible, but responds that God is a You, not an object, and that humans are constituted *a priori* to be able to encounter this You.

Though Buber is quick to affirm the reality of I-You encounter, however, he attributes no propositional content to it and can describe no concrete patterns of life that lead to it. Buber speaks of the I-You relationship as “revelation,” but he gives the term a meaning far different from its traditional use in Judaism. Traditionally in Judaism, revelation refers to the Torah, given to Moses at Sinai. Buber, on the other hand, resists fixing the content of revelation in an event of history, a body of knowledge, or a prescribed legal code—in any It. Revelation, as Buber describes it, is “man’s emerging from the moment of the supreme encounter, being no longer the same as he was when entering into it.”¹⁰ Revelation in Buber’s thought refers to an existential transformation in the individual as a result of encounter with the divine. Yet precisely *what* this transformation consists in cannot be stated. The individual who has lived the I-You encounter cannot describe the encounter empirically or assert a set of dogmas or laws that lead to it. To do these things would be to objectify the I-You relation. Buber writes:

We cannot go to others with what we have received, saying: This is what needs to be known, this is what needs to be done. We can only go out and put the proof in action. And even this is not what we “ought to” do: rather we can—we cannot do otherwise.¹¹

Revelation, as Buber understands it, leaves no objective trace. The individual is different than before, to be sure, but Buber argues that the difference is so profound that it cannot be summarized in a set of propositions or commandments.

While Buber intends his thought to serve as a corrective to the scientific and secular worldview, it is important to recognize how embedded within Enlightenment philosophy it is. His assertions about the I-You mode of relation make no effort to dispute the way Enlightenment rationality characterizes I-It experience. Far from arguing that divine revelation has occurred in history, Buber contends that divine revelation by definition *cannot* be historically given. Buber leaves intact the Kantian rejection of miracles, historical revelation, and particularistic religious law. Most telling in Buber’s reassessment of Judaism

is his discarding of *halakhic* practice as inessential to Jewish life. Buber does promote certain forms of action in *I and Thou*, but these grow out of a universal ethic rather than the particularistic law of the Torah. Buber writes, for example, that humans should not use other human beings as a means to their own ends, but must treat each person as a You, an intrinsically valuable end.¹² This ethical imperative is uncontroversial to modern ears, for it echoes Kant's formulation that we must treat each human being as an end ("You") rather than a means ("It"). What Buber does not defend is the particularistic law of the Torah. The Jewish legal code is an It, Buber says, and, rather than observing its idiosyncratic laws, Jews should seek to recover the I-You encounter that gave rise to it.

Buber's philosophy also bears Kant's stamp in so far as it locates the worth of an action not in its outward form but in the intention behind it. One of the central values Buber sees in Hasidism, for example, is the idea that any act emerging from the I-You encounter is sacred.¹³ It is impossible to prescribe particular acts pleasing to God, Buber claims, expanding upon Hasidic tradition; "any natural act, if hallowed, leads to God," he writes.¹⁴ What makes an action sacred for Buber is not that it conforms to an arbitrary religious law, but that it arises from the posture of I-You relation. Buber's acceptance of the Kantian heritage is not difficult to discern here. For Kant moral worth does not reside in a deed's outward conformity with law but in the dutiful will that gives rise to it.¹⁵

To a European culture increasingly dismissive of traditional Judaism, Buber thus argues that the essential elements of Jewish tradition are in harmony with an Enlightenment worldview. He does seek to broaden Enlightenment reason's focus on scientific objectivity by arguing for the importance of subjective relationships, yet he makes this point also in Kantian terms, asserting that humans have an *a priori* capacity for the I-You relationship. In terms of the outward forms of action that Buber promotes, the religious way of being that Buber describes in *I and Thou* is entirely in conformity with Kantian ethics, grounded in universal reason. Just as particularistic Jewish law is a fundamental stumbling block to Enlightenment philosophy, Buber also regards it as inessential to healthy and authentic Jewish life.

Franz Rosenzweig, though a friend of and collaborator with Martin Buber, approaches the legacy of the Enlightenment much more cautiously than Buber does. Rosenzweig seeks to return to Jewish learning the self-confidence to assert its distinctiveness in opposition to the reigning assumptions of modernity. Rosenzweig had an extensive philosophical education, and his book *The Star of Redemption* tackles philosophical questions with far greater sophistica-

tion than does *I and Thou*. Yet Rosenzweig is hostile to secular philosophy in a way that Buber is not. As we will see, in his essays and correspondence from the later years of his life, Rosenzweig strongly affirms the value of traditional Jewish practice and provides a nuanced philosophical defense of this seemingly anti-philosophical position. Far from accepting the Enlightenment view that observance of religious law is harmful to the individual as an acceptance of heteronomy, he argues that it is the secular worldview that harms the existential health of the individual. He maintains that the individual infected with the secular outlook can only recover health by recovering Jewish learning—an all-encompassing, particularistic discipline of study and practice.

Assessing Rosenzweig's attitude toward philosophy and Jewish practice is a complex task because Rosenzweig's thought evolved considerably on these subjects over the course of his short life. Born into an assimilated German Jewish family, Rosenzweig did not practice Judaism as a child, and as a young adult he seriously considered converting to Christianity. After an experience at a Yom Kippur service in 1913, however, Rosenzweig committed himself to Jewish faith. Over the course of his remaining years, he became increasingly observant. Though Rosenzweig speaks highly of the Jewish liturgical year in *The Star of Redemption*,¹⁶ he gives a more robust defense of *halakhic* practice in the essays and letters that he writes after this book.¹⁷ Since what interests me here is Rosenzweig's concept of Jewish practice in relation to modern philosophy, I will focus on Rosenzweig's writings after the *Star*.

Rosenzweig criticizes secular philosophy as incapable of grounding healthy human existence and claims that human life must be centered around three basic foci—God, man,¹⁸ and the world. The natural tendency of philosophical systems, he asserts, is to minimize at least one of these foci—achieving systematic cohesion at the expense of existential truth. In *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy*, Rosenzweig goes so far as to characterize philosophy as “common sense crippled by a stroke.”¹⁹ For Rosenzweig the lived practice of Judaism, especially the context provided by its liturgical year, constitutes a far more existentially valuable framework for life than secular thought. *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy* tells a whimsical story of how a crippled philosopher undergoes treatment at a sanatorium located equidistant from the three peaks of God, man, and world. There he learns to view the valley of his everyday life from a vantage in which the three peaks are visible. The path by which the philosopher ascends to this vantage is participation in the Jewish liturgical year. Whereas philosophy brought existential ill, the lived structure of holidays and workdays restores spiritual health for everyday life. Rosenzweig explains: “The holiday will serve as a training school for every day. Once a man's legs are accus-

tomed to its rhythms, he will have no difficulty walking the streets of the work a day world....If he is well trained here, he will not stumble later."²⁰ Though the integration of belief and practice in holistic Jewish life seems distinctively anti-modern, Rosenzweig believes that its existential value far outweighs that of secular philosophy.

Rosenzweig's life embodies the rejection of academic philosophy in favor of an all-encompassing Jewish learning that embraces both practice and thought. Rejecting the prospect of a promising university career as a philosopher, Rosenzweig chose in 1920 to found and head the *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt, which he ran as a center for Jewish adult education until his untimely paralysis. Committing his life to this center rather than to academic philosophy meant sacrificing a great deal of cultural prestige. Eschewing the scientific study of Judaism (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*) characteristic of the university, the *Lehrhaus* directed its teaching to Jewish laypeople, seeking to provide religious grounding for existence rather than to cultivate scholarship. The detachment of the academy in relation to Jewish texts did little, Rosenzweig believed, to encourage the lived practice of Judaism. In his essay "Towards a Renaissance of Jewish Learning," Rosenzweig wrote that "[b]ooks are not now the prime need of the day. But what we need more than ever, or at least as much as ever, are human beings—Jewish human beings."²¹ Despite his intellectual brilliance and erudition, Rosenzweig gave up book-learning in favor of a learning that sought to nurture healthy Jewish human beings in the midst of modernity.

Throughout his writings, Rosenzweig blames the philosophy originating in the Enlightenment for human beings' increasing lack of orientation in life. In "Toward a Renaissance of Jewish Learning," Rosenzweig reflects on the danger inherent in the Enlightenment's emancipation of the Jews: "Emancipated Jewry lacks a platform of Jewish life upon which the bookless present can come into its own. Up to the time of the emancipation, such a platform was provided by existence within the bounds of old Jewish law and in the Jewish home and synagogue service."²² Though Rosenzweig presumably does not long for a return to Jewish isolation in ghettos, his vocation as a post-Enlightenment Jewish thinker is to reestablish the comprehensive context for life that traditional Judaism provides. In modernity, Rosenzweig believes, Judaism is crippled by continually having to justify its rituals and requirements rationally. "From Mendelssohn on," Rosenzweig writes in "The Builders," "our entire people has subjected itself to the torture of this embarrassing questioning; the Jewishness of every individual has squirmed on the needle point of a 'why.'"²³ Rosenzweig seeks to foster a Jewish learning that is not so preoccupied with self-justifi-

cation that it cannot ground healthy existence in which neither learning nor practice is isolated.

Though Rosenzweig, hardly an unsophisticated thinker, does not argue that Judaism is the only tradition that can provide such an existential framework,²⁴ he affirms Judaism as his own and seeks to enable this tradition to realize its full potential. In order to do this, he hopes to revitalize a specifically Jewish sort of learning, in which “study” encompasses all spheres of life, not merely the dry knowledge of books.²⁵ During the 1920s Rosenzweig increasingly came to believe that *halakhic* practice was vital to this sort of integrated learning. As we have seen, few beliefs could be more foreign to the cultured world of early 20th century Germany than the belief that the idiosyncratic laws of the Torah should be observed. Since these laws do not even purport to be universally binding, and since their origin is supposed to be in divine revelation in history, submitting oneself to them seems to lead directly to Kantian heteronomy. Rosenzweig is certainly aware of this charge, and he does answer it. He argues that observance of the law provides access to a sort of existential knowledge that is vital to life, even as it is inaccessible to reason. Though this knowledge cannot be proved rationally, it is self-justifying in the context of practice. For those who are engaged in it, observance of the law is a means of contact with God. Rosenzweig writes:

Only in the commandment can the voice of him who commands be heard. No matter how well the written word may fit in with our own thoughts, it cannot give us the faith that creation is completed to the degree that we experience this by keeping the Sabbath, and inaugurating it with, “And the heaven and the earth were completed.” Not that doing necessarily results in hearing and understanding. But one hears differently when one hears in the doing.²⁶

Rosenzweig asserts that participation in Jewish liturgy and observance of *halakhah* enable a means of communion with God unavailable through reason. Ritual observance of the Sabbath, for example, leads to a belief in the completeness of creation that reason cannot develop on its own. Beliefs such as this are essential to situating the human being between the points of God, man, and world, and, to those engaged in the practice from which such beliefs emerge, they are certain.

Buber, as we would expect, poses legitimate questions to Rosenzweig’s claims about the value of *halakhic* practice. Why should an autonomous human being feel compelled to submit to the “yoke of the Torah”? On what basis can someone be certain that the prescriptions of Jewish law in fact come

from God, especially when they are obviously not derived from practical reason? In a letter to Rosenzweig, Buber pointedly states his disagreement: "For me the one question which is sounded in my soul from abyss to abyss is: Is the Law God's Law?"²⁷ Buber cannot reconcile his belief in his own autonomy with the injunction to submit to a law that seems patently contrary to reason. Rosenzweig's response to Buber is not a simplistic assertion of blind faith in the revelation of the Torah. He admits that no objective grounds can be given to convince someone to adopt *halakhab* as divine command. Nonetheless, he uses Buber's own relational language to argue that the validity of the law can only be known in the I-You mode. He writes:

The question concerning the Law, as well as the one concerning God Himself, should not be treated in the "third person." I, too, do not know whether the Law "is" God's law. I know that as little, and even less than I know that God "is." Knowledge or ignorance is not valid when an experience is made.²⁸

From a third-person, objective point of view one cannot, indeed, be certain of the divine origin of the law, Rosenzweig admits. Yet to Jews who are immersed in Jewish tradition, Jewish practice becomes self-justifying. Adopting Buberian language, Rosenzweig asserts that the objective point of view should not be given final authority. Rather, the lived relationship to God, as experienced through practice, should be considered ultimate. Just as Buber is quick to assert that humans should relate to God as You rather than It, so too Rosenzweig argues that Jews must experience the law as coming from a divine You, rather than a stale It. Buber's philosophy rejects such a claim in advance, by presupposing that "revelation" can only be a fleeting moment that transcends language and reproducibility.

As Nahum Glatzer observes, for Rosenzweig "practice...can be approached only through practicing."²⁹ To make this point, Rosenzweig uses the metaphor of a marriage as a phenomenon incomprehensible to those outside of it. Certainly it is possible for external observers to know *that* two people are married, but *what* the lived experience of the marriage is like is knowable only to the two engaged in it.³⁰ The truth of the law is similarly knowable only to those practicing it: "The matter of the details of the Law is analogous to the wealth of experiences, of which only that experience holds which is in the act of being undergone, and holds only for him who is undergoing it."³¹ For Rosenzweig whether or not the law comes from God is not a question that Buber can hope to answer through reason. The experience of direct personal address through commandment can only be lived. "We know [the law] differently..." Rosenzweig

writes, “for we know it only when—we do.”³² Rosenzweig can give no objective proof of the divine origin of the law. But through his analysis of the existential poverty of secular philosophy, he hopes to give sufficient enticement to non-observant Jews such as Buber to adopt *halakhic* practice, even without objective proof of its validity. Once engaged in such practice themselves, Rosenzweig believes, Jews will ascend to a vantage point from which they can affirm its validity with new eyes.

Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig each articulate a vision of Jewish life that takes account of the philosophical critique of Judaism leveled pointedly by Immanuel Kant. Each thinker reasserts in his own way the continuing significance of Judaism in the face of this critique. As we have seen, both philosophers argue for a means of “knowing” God that Kant does not envision. For Buber this religious conception of knowledge of God is possible in the I-You encounter; for Rosenzweig, it is possible in the context of liturgical and *halakhic* practice. Yet Buber can give no description of the I-You encounter or instruction in how to enter into it beyond the Enlightenment ethic of treating others as ends rather than means. Rosenzweig, on the other hand, defends the continuing value of the particularities of traditional Jewish life with full cognizance of the challenges posed to them by the Enlightenment. He defends the cognitive value of religious practice, emphasizing that holistic Jewish life provides a context for contact with God that secular philosophy cannot envision. Arguing that those outside of *halakhic* practice cannot rightfully assess its value, Rosenzweig gives a philosophical defense of the anti-philosophical life of traditional Judaism, and in so doing enables this tradition to ground healthy, authentic existence in the modern world. The question of the value of submission to particularistic ritual patterns, however, is not one unique to Judaism. To those immersed in a wide range of religious traditions, Rosenzweig’s thought suggests that holistic religious practice, while it is perhaps indefensible on the basis of Enlightenment reason, can transform the practitioner’s thought and experience, grounding a spiritually healthy existence that Enlightenment reason cannot imagine.

NOTES

1 Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason in Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. and ed. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 160.

2 *Ibid.*, 197.

3 Ibid., 95.

4 Ibid., 143.

5 Kant does seem to be aware that a more “Enlightened” interpretation of Judaism is possible than the one he treats here. He speaks approvingly of the rationalized interpretation of the Torah practiced in some forms of “late Judaism” (*Religion within the Boundaries*, 143). Nonetheless, he seems to take the “superseded” faith of the “Old Testament” as normative for Judaism, and he only rarely acknowledges diversity within Judaism since that time.

6 Ibid., 154.

7 Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Touchstone, 1970), 54.

8 Ibid., 78.

9 Ibid., 57.

10 Ibid., 157.

11 Ibid., 160.

12 See, for example, Buber’s condemnation of treating other human beings as objects to be experienced, used, and enjoyed (*I and Thou*, 85).

13 Martin Buber, *Hasidism and Modern Man*, trans. Maurice Friedman (New York: Humanity Books, 2000), 136.

14 Ibid., 136.

15 See the opening pages of the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, for example: “A good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes...but only because of its volition, that is, it is good in itself and, regarded for itself, is to be valued incomparably higher than all that could merely be brought about by it.” Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals in Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 50.

16 In this stage of his thinking Rosenzweig still believed that he was bound only by commandments that he understood as expressions of “Love the Lord your God.” He had not yet adopted full *halakhic* observance. Cf. N. N. Glazer, introduction to *On Jewish Learning*, by Franz Rosenzweig, ed. N. N. Glazer (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1955), 19.

17 Cf. Arnold M. Eisen, “Buber, Rosenzweig, and the Authority of the Commandments” in *Rethinking Modern Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 206.

18 I reproduce here Rosenzweig’s non-inclusive language so as to avoid confusion.

19 Franz Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy*, trans. Nahum Glazer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 42.

20 Ibid., 99.

21 Rosenzweig, "Towards a Renaissance of Jewish Learning" in *On Jewish Learning*, 55.

22 Ibid., 61.

23 Rosenzweig, "The Builders: Concerning the Law" in *On Jewish Learning*, 78.

24 In *The Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig argues that the Christian liturgical year can provide a similar grounding to that provided by Jewish ritual life, and in *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy* he makes clear that there are many possible paths leading to the summit from which all three essential existential peaks are visible. In this work the fictional director of the sanatorium explains that there are many roads to the summit: "I made use of whatever roads and pathways I found....All of these roads terminate in a single highway which alone leads to the summit....My choice of a 'typical road' was justified by the therapeutic purpose it was to serve. However, it should be understood that alternate routes may prove equally useful" (*Understanding the Sick and the Healthy*, 61).

25 Rosenzweig, "Upon Opening the Jüdisches Lehrhaus" in *On Jewish Learning*, 96.

26 Rosenzweig, "The Commandments: Divine or Human?" in *On Jewish Learning*, 122.

27 Martin Buber to Franz Rosenzweig, "Revelation and Law: Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig" in *On Jewish Learning*, 117.

28 Franz Rosenzweig to Martin Buber, "Revelation and Law: Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig" in *On Jewish Learning*, 117-18.

29 N. N. Glatzer, introduction to *On Jewish Learning*, 20.

30 Rosenzweig, "The Commandments: Divine or Human" in *On Jewish Learning*, 120.

31 Ibid., 120-21.

32 Ibid., 122.

IS ARCHAEOLOGY HISTORICAL?

Problems and Prospects for a Foucaultian Project in the Study of Religion

Joshua Schapiro

*There is no reason why people should not treat utterances as something other than historical objects: it is just if they do so, they are not doing history. As historians, we must study the meanings that actually existed in the past. —Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*¹*

As Sigmund Freud is to the Unconscious, Rudolf Otto to the Holy, Martin Heidegger to Being, or Emmanuel Levinas to the Other, so too is Michel Foucault to Power. Or so might proceed a conversation about critical terms for religious studies, each master theorist of the past century coupled with his respective discovery; each discovery whittled down to a memorable term to be used in thinking about religion, *prêt-à-porter*. In the writings of Foucault, however, long before Power (or more precisely “power relations”) emerged as the principle character of *Discipline and Punish*, studies of the regularities and ruptures of discourse, called “archaeology,” took center stage. The question driving this paper is whether an archaeological project in the Foucaultian mold is appropriate for a study of a foreign religion, in my case that of Tibetan Buddhism. I wonder whether it is possible to engage in historical scholarship in the mode of an intellectual historian, where one endeavors

to recover ideas from the past and re-present them in a robust, contextualized manner, and simultaneously carry out an analysis of the conditions of possibility of past thinking following Foucault's model. I will therefore attempt to accomplish two things within this essay. First, I will clarify the goals and procedures of the archaeological project by subjecting it to a critique from historian Mark Bevir. This exercise will put into play select statements by Foucault and constructive reformulations of Foucaultian method by Gilles Deleuze. Second, I will reflect on my own uneasiness regarding the ethics of archaeology as it applies to Tibetan Buddhist intellectual history.

My discussion will open with a consideration of Foucault's relationship to what Bevir calls "hermeneutic meanings," which Bevir defines as that which a specific individual took a particular past utterance to mean.² Here, I will consider Bevir's criticism of the supposed ahistoricity of the archaeological method. The next sections will explore what *is* historical about Foucault's method and ask why this method abandons the project of recovering the past ideas of historical agents. Deleuze's reading of Foucault—one that privileges the question of thinking as such above any specified inquiry into the content of past human thoughts—helps to answer this question. His interpretation entails a broad criticism of the individual as the grounds for true knowledge. It likewise clarifies a crucial component of Foucault's agenda: his desire to provoke a new mode of thinking for the future.

Despite a shared inclination to work with analytic materials firmly rooted in the soil of historical utterances, Bevir's model, built on hermeneutic meanings that can be traced to particular individuals' past thoughts, and Foucault and Deleuze's impassioned reflections on the conditions of possibility for future thinking, trace two divergent paths for scholarship. Their distinct choices challenge me to consider how faithful I need be to past thoughts, to past thinkers, and to past systems of thought. As I will argue near the end of this essay, consideration of the conditions of possibility of particular past discourses is a powerful way for scholars to engage in constructive philosophy. If executed with sensitivity, archaeological projects can accomplish two vastly different yet equally legitimate goals. On the one hand, analyses of the conditions of possibility of historical discourse entail extensive description of historical utterances gleaned from historical documents. While a thorough explanation of the historical meanings of these utterances may not follow, the very description of the discourses in question nonetheless contributes to the historical record and therefore facilitates use by more historically minded scholars in the field. On the other hand, archaeological analyses open up the option of comparing historical conditions of possibility (historical "outsides") with those of the present.

My intuition is that such comparisons hold greater promise for generating new modes of philosophical speculation than do comparisons of decontextualized ideas or doctrines. The latter half of this essay will explicate the meaning of “outsides” and the promise of “generating new modes of philosophical speculation,” with particular reference to Deleuze’s work on Foucault.

Setting Up the Problem: What Is Historical within the History of Ideas?

To begin, let us consider some of the provocative assertions that Mark Bevir makes in his book, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*. As a self-professed historian of ideas, Bevir confines himself to the ideas, or the meanings, that historians can recover by analyzing “relics left over from the past.” For the purposes of the analysis in question, Bevir’s restricts the “relics” that he will consider to “utterances.”³

According to Bevir, in order for an idea to be a “historical meaning” and therefore for it to be a legitimate object for historians, it must either be a hermeneutic meaning or an abstraction agglomerated from a collection of hermeneutic meanings.⁴ These meanings derive from the “weak intention” of the individual. Bevir calls his theory one of “weak intentionalism” because it recognizes as its object the meaning that an utterance has for either an author or a reader without necessarily prioritizing the author’s intention.⁵ Because all meanings in history must derive from the weak intention of either the speaker (to be understood) or the listener (to understand the intention of the speaker), all historical meanings (meanings that actually occur in the past) must be hermeneutic meanings.⁶ This argument follows from a long analysis in which Bevir both defends his weak form of intentionalism and reduces what he calls linguistic and semantic meanings to hermeneutic meanings.⁷ Unless these semantic and linguistic meanings are instances of hermeneutic meanings, unless they can be somehow shown to have appeared in the thoughts of actual, historical people, then they cannot be objects of history.

But what are linguistic and semantic meanings? The linguistic meaning of an utterance “comes from the concept[s] to which it conventionally refers.”⁸ A linguistic meaning of an utterance can be realized by aligning all of the possible, conventional meanings of the phrases that constitute the utterance. Such a meaning does not necessarily reflect the intended meaning of the speaker, who could have spoken mistakenly, for example, nor does it necessarily reflect the interpretation of the listener, who could well have interpreted the utterance in a way that conflicts with conventional linguistic usage. For Bevir, analyses that consider the set of linguistic conventions that govern the meaning of a set

of words at a given time,⁹ or analyses that trace the circle of signification within which a given utterance gains its meaning, exclusively engage linguistic meanings. These linguistic meanings, while compelling, do not necessarily belong to the discipline of history. That is to say, as long as a linguistic meaning does not also correspond to the intended meaning of an actual speaker or the interpreted meaning of an actual listener, it is not a historical meaning.

The same is true for semantic meanings, which “come . . . from what would have to be the case for [the utterance] to be true,” or “from the truth conditions by which we assign it a truth-value.”¹⁰ To access the semantic meaning of a statement would be to explore the epistemological conditions supporting that utterance. Semantic meanings are squarely situated within the field of Foucault’s work, namely his explorations into the conditions of possibility under which a system of knowledge, or a “game of truth,” can function. For example, any rules that Foucault claims to have discovered about how statements within the discipline of General Grammar had to be composed in the eighteenth century in order to be considered true¹¹ would only be *historical meanings* if they could be shown to be rules that eighteenth century grammarians expressed, or meanings that their eighteenth century peers understood them to have expressed. Bevir maintains by contrast that when historians study hermeneutic meanings, namely historical meanings, they “do not want to know about truth conditions or linguistic conventions.”¹²

Implied in his critique is the question of whether meanings can exist in history without being connected to the intentionality of an agent. Analyses that search for social forces, linguistic forces, or even systems of knowledge do not isolate objects that actually exist anywhere in the past, unless one is speaking about these forces as they appear in the writings by a specific historical author, or as interpreted by a specific historical reader. Bevir, without acknowledging it in these terms, is disturbed by the murky ontological status of language and truth conditions.

In fact, his most compelling criticism of Foucault concerns this very point. In response to Foucault’s postulation of *epistemes* and historical *a priori*, Bevir asks how it is possible to conceive of meanings that both exist in historical time and are nevertheless separate from individuals.¹³ For Bevir, either a meaning exists within human thoughts, or it exists independently of human thoughts. If the meaning exists in the latter sense, then it resembles a Platonic form, an abstract entity with real and independent existence. Any defense of Platonic forms is bound to fail at explaining how an abstract entity, like an *episteme*, can exist for some time and then disappear.¹⁴

Bevir's anxiety about those homeless abstractions that travel independently of human agents leads us to ask ontological questions of Foucaultian method. But rather than offer a piecemeal defense of Foucault, let us rather turn to his texts and the commentary thereon by his colleague Deleuze in order to expose those moments in which Foucault does work with historical actualities. This short excursus will eventually lead me back to the ontological question that Bevir raises, but only after I have considered how Foucault's broader intellectual goals relate to his postulation of historical *a priori* and *epistemes*.

Archaeology and Its Historical Object: Discourse

What is the object of Foucault's "archaeological" projects, projects exemplified by *The Order of Things* and theorized in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*? Simply put, the object is "discourse," which is constructed out of "statements." While Foucault is pluralistic in his definition of discourse, we can generally use the term to refer to a "group of verbal performances" that is characterized by some definable regularity.¹⁵

While people may want to debate the existence of describable relationships between discourses, or even question the seemingly anthropomorphic agency that some attribute to discourse, discourses themselves are undoubtedly historically existent. Foucault's explanations of discourses as verbal performances, as events, and as positivities highlight their actuality as phenomena that have appeared in the past. In Foucault's essay "What is Enlightenment?" he explicitly speaks of instances of discourse as historical events.¹⁶ Deleuze further emphasizes the historical reality of statements (as components of discourse). In his words, "everything in them is real and all [of their] reality is manifestly present."¹⁷ Statements provide us with the "positivity of the dictum."¹⁸ According to Foucault and Deleuze, discourse, as the object of archaeological analysis, is unequivocally a historical existent. Yet a far more slippery question still remains unanswered: are the relationships that Foucault draws between historical utterances, those regularities that he discovers, historical in the sense that Bevir would like them to be?

One particularly telling moment in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* finds Foucault distancing archaeological analyses from hermeneutics.¹⁹ Discourse poses the question of what conditions caused or allowed for its appearance as an event in time. It asks us to describe its rules and all of the regularities that it manifests as a recognizable collection of utterances. Discourse does not, on the contrary, act as a "sign of something else."²⁰ Discourse cannot act as a "hermeneutic meaning," to use Bevir's term, because it does not refer back to

the intention of either its speaker or those who interpret it. The archaeologist, therefore, does not assess the hermeneutic meaning of utterances.

Foucault insists that the archaeologist is not interested in the creative subject or the *oeuvre* of such a subject. Thus the archaeologist eschews any attempt to recover the subject's intended meaning. Foucault chooses not to investigate the psychology or anthropology of the creative process of the individual.²¹ Neither does he choose to burden himself with understanding how an individual's subconscious contributes to utterances or how universal human needs or tendencies manifest themselves in utterances. Foucault's hypothesis, deceiving in its simplicity and startling in its implications, is that discourse obeys its own rules.²²

Discourse, as a historical actuality, interests Foucault because of its susceptibility to analyses that expose its regularities. I will return to the question of why Foucault would be interested in such regularities. For the moment, however, I would like to explore in further detail the consequences of Foucault's dissatisfaction with analyses that treat utterances as opportunities for recovering the intentional meanings of creative subjects.

Turning Our Backs on the Recovery of Ideas

Foucault's criticism of such projects signals his departure from the discipline of the History of Ideas. Time and again, Foucault lashes out at those historians who credit discourse with continuity and intelligibility.²³ For example, one particularly problematic principle used by historians is the analytic of the "author." By imagining that a unity pervades all of the utterances of a given author, whether those utterances are found in formal works, sketches, letters, or written fragments, historians of ideas erect an ideal of coherence in which these utterances must participate. Historians then appeal to the additional principles of evolution, maturation, or influence in order to preserve a coherent narrative starring the author and her intentions.²⁴ For Foucault, the myth of the author, not to mention the myth of the evolutionary coherence of ideas, inhibits historians from appreciating discourse as discourse. That is, these misconceptions prevent historians from recognizing discourse as a field of rules and regularities.

But treating discourse as source material for rules and regularities has its limitations. A few paraphrases of mission statements voiced by prominent historians of ideas, past and present, will help to clarify the kinds of projects that Foucault abandons by turning to the rules and regularities of discourse. Arthur Lovejoy, in lectures from 1933, prescribes a search for the surpris-

ingly rare “unit-ideas” hidden within past thoughts and expressions, with his famous example being that of the “Great Chain of Being.”²⁵ Quentin Skinner, who like Foucault criticizes the false attribution of consistency, coherence, and comprehensiveness to the overall thought of an author, nevertheless proposes a hermeneutic of past utterances that focuses on clarifying the intended meaning of the author.²⁶ He expresses confidence that the recovery of past ideas can give us access to the “variety of moral assumptions and political commitments” to which past utterances attest. This variety, he claims, teaches us about “the distinction between what is necessary and what is the product merely of our own contingent assumptions.”²⁷

Martin Jay, in his essay “Two Cheers for Paraphrase: The Confessions of a Synoptic Intellectual Historian,” remarks that the historian who skillfully paraphrases the crucial arguments and ideas of past authors facilitates a dialogue between past and present voices.²⁸ Peter Eli Gordon states in a 2004 edition of *Modern Intellectual History* that “a chief assignment for intellectual historians is to make thought legible within a broader narrative plane.”²⁹

All of these statements imply a firm conviction in the inherent worth of the *content* of past ideas. The historian of ideas answers to the noble task of preserving the ideas of the past in a coherent and understandable manner. This is not to say that the aforementioned authors all maintain a naive belief that past ideas are universally applicable or even universally comprehensible in contemporary times. Skinner, for example, convincingly argues against the project of looking to the past for answers to universal questions.³⁰ Yet, even for Skinner (at least in the essay cited above), it is still the *content* of historically particular answers that occupies the historian of ideas.³¹

Foucault, Intentionality, and Theorizing Thinking

I have established that Foucault envisions “archaeology” as the description of the regularities of discourse, regularities that can take the form of common objects, common modes of enunciation (including common subject positions), common concepts, and common themes or theories. His call to focus on discourse as an event is connected with his disavowal of all hermeneutic projects that attempt to capture the intentional meanings behind utterances. I have also observed how Foucault’s break with “hermeneutic meanings” necessitates abandoning the recovery of past ideas, a project so essential to the discipline of the History of Ideas. But why would Foucault be so passionate about the promise of describing discursive regularities?

In the entry on Foucault in a 1980s edition of the *Dictionnaire des philosophes*, an entry co-written by Foucault and his personal assistant François Ewald, he is described as working in the tradition of Immanuel Kant, in so much as both figures devote themselves to a critical history of thought.³² Such a critical history entails probing the conditions which allow for thinking to create, realize, or actualize itself as knowledge. Deleuze, playing off of the same theme, states it thus: “The question: ‘What does thinking signify? What do we call thinking?’ is the arrow first fired by Heidegger and then again by Foucault.”³³ Taking seriously these two characterizations of Foucault’s work (not intending, of course, to reduce his entire corpus to a coherent unity), I suggest that the regularities of discourse constitute one avenue by which Foucault can pursue the question of the conditions for thinking.

How then does Foucault’s decision to dispense with the explanatory tool of intentionality relate to his broader pursuit of the conditions for true thinking—the conditions that allow thinking to become “knowing”? Deleuze emphasizes that Foucault’s dissatisfaction with the idea of intentionality constitutes a conflict with phenomenology.³⁴ Phenomenology, in this context, signifies the belief that consciousness gains significance in the world by directing itself towards external things.³⁵ Here, Deleuze takes a daring step, implying that when Foucault refuses to attribute the creation of discourse to an intentional subject,³⁶ Foucault is casting doubt on the intentional quality of consciousness more broadly. A question of historiography (what can a past utterance tell us?) becomes a metaphysical one (can the concept of “consciousness” account for “meaning”?). Deleuze reads into Foucault the rejection of the hypothesis that consciousness and its direct experience of things in the world can act as a ground for knowledge.

There are passages within Foucault’s writings that begin to justify Deleuze’s interpretation. For example, in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” Foucault remarks that history and the genealogical method can help to refute various absolute beliefs. One such belief is that the nature of consciousness is to be always identical to itself.³⁷ Foucault’s apprehensiveness about the term “consciousness” stems from the term’s tendency to name something universal and unchanging. But just as knowledge systems can be shown, through historical research, to be historically constructed, so too can the very experience of consciousness be shown, according to Nietzsche, to be historically contingent. If consciousness itself is historically contingent, then it cannot be expected to provide a ground for universal and unchanging knowledge.

Language complicates both the view that intentionality originates in consciousness and the view that consciousness is responsible for knowl-

edge. Deleuze reminds us that each age has its “own way of putting language together.”³⁸ This way of arranging language, particularly in the case of arranging language that can speak “truth” about the world, is the historical *a priori*. And, to emphasize the point made earlier, this *a priori* is “exterior” to inner consciousness.³⁹

Foucault and Deleuze are by no means unique in locating meanings outside of grounding, intentional agents. Those historians associated since the late 1940s with the French journal *Annales* and with *L'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* have worked on uncovering those “impersonal forces which fashioned men and their destinies.”⁴⁰ Fernand Braudel, for example, wrote about the importance of attending to the geophysical and climate circumstances that can determine the experiences of individuals over and against the actor-heroes and dramatic events that historians tend to prioritize.⁴¹ The structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss isolate how sentences, or sets of symbols, function according to rules altogether unknown to the conscious agent. Whatever Foucault's affinities to these influential movements, he does not share their search for long-term historical causality or anonymous structures that dictate how we think and act.⁴²

Thinking a New Future

What, then, is the purpose of “archaeology”? I propose, following Deleuze, that Foucault is concerned with those meanings, regularities, and rules that can be found on the plane of discourse because he senses that exploring these regularities will empower us to think a *new* future. Posing the question of what the necessary conditions for thinking were in the past is actually a project in pursuit of the conditions for thinking in the present and in the future. In his essay “What is Enlightenment?” we thus find a call to “separate out from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing or thinking what we are, do, or think.”⁴³

A number of obscure passages from Deleuze's *Foucault* orient Foucault's works towards this somewhat ill-defined goal of future thought. These passages address the role of “the outside” in Foucault's writings, a term that never receives a definitive explanation in Foucault's works but nevertheless haunts many of his essays. “The outside,” I would argue, always must be read in relation to a second term. Foucault and Deleuze therefore seem to conceive, at different moments, of an outside of language, an outside of consciousness, and an outside of the subject. To generalize, however, the outside always signifies the *con-*

ditions of possibility for whatever it is outside of. But this outside is itself never capable of being articulated. Once the outside has been described, defined, or rarified, then it has necessarily become the object of a particular set of discursive practices, a particular set of truth-games, and a particular set of power relations. Once described, the outside becomes the inside of another outside. It has become an object of knowledge and therefore a component of a discursive event that itself must have historically contingent conditions of possibility. We might say, as does Deleuze, that the outside is an “immanent cause”—a cause that is “realized, integrated and distinguished in its effect.”⁴⁴ The outside can never be shown to be temporally prior to its effect because it only functions as a condition of possibility of a historically *actual* discursive event. Still, in that it is a *condition* of possibility, we might want to call it, following Deleuze, an *immanent cause*.⁴⁵

For Deleuze, the outside is always “an opening to a future.”⁴⁶ The point here is that the very theorization of conditions of possibility—the theorization of the outside of a given historical utterance—is a way of accessing new thinking. As explained above, the outside, in itself, has no preconceived form.⁴⁷ Therefore to think (and here I believe Deleuze means thinking in the sense of a philosopher thinking something *new*) is to reach a space where things are not yet divided into speakable truths.⁴⁸ For Deleuze, to think is “to fold, to double the outside with a coextensive inside.”⁴⁹ The outside—the conditions of possibility of a given utterance—can itself be theorized. By describing these conditions, we fold them into a new inside, an inside that itself has new conditions of possibility, a new outside. To summarize, Deleuze credits Foucault with coming up with a method for inciting new thought. Reflecting on conditions of possibility, themselves accessed through the archaeological method of describing the regularities of discourse, can point the way to new modes of creative thinking.

Evaluating Foucault and Deleuze

If we recall, Bevir is concerned about how there could actually be something that is both historically actual and independent of the intentional thoughts of individuals. Deleuze obliquely addresses this question by making a distinction between epistemology and phenomenology. The objects of Foucault’s analysis, what Deleuze calls the “articulable” (namely discourse and its constituent components), are objects of an epistemology.⁵⁰ This means that the regularities of discourse are not independently existent, observable things that we perceive. We do not experience the regularities of discourse by meeting them in the

world. They are not objects ready-made for our perceptions. Rather, the regularities of discourse are analytical categories. They are models for explaining how knowledge, how understanding, and how thinking can occur.

In a way, this answers Bevir's question. How can a non-hermeneutic meaning be a historical meaning? A non-hermeneutic meaning, such as the discursive regularities that Foucault describes, cannot be experienced by individuals in history. Discursive regularities are not realities of a phenomenology. But, as an analytic category, a collection of discursive regularities, such as an *episteme*, can still emerge from historical actualities. One might want to call them "immanent causes" since they emerge simultaneously with their effect (discourse). Foucault's own body of work shows that the "archaeologist" can *describe* these rules in their particularity without relying on an intentional agent to have produced them. But does that mean that these rules exist in the sense of exerting control over what can or cannot be thought by intentional agents?

Foucault's speculation that language, and discursive rules more particularly, can shape our capacity to think while still being multiple, prone to discontinuity, and irreducible to any intentional subject, actually matches my own experience remarkably well. I would therefore like to suggest a set of anecdotal evidence that will hopefully provoke some reflection on how reasonable and even familiar Foucault's claims actually are regarding the existence of discursive regularities free of *intentional* agents. While this evidence can hardly ground an argument for the legitimacy of "archaeology" as a discipline befitting historians, it will hopefully help to clarify the palatable force of discursive regularities in our lives.

The following two examples speak to the way in which language "speaks itself." In each of these examples, utterances occur—utterances that are historically actual. Yet, in neither case does it make sense to say that the utterances communicate an intended meaning or a "hermeneutic meaning." Still, both examples display the tendency of discourse—collections of utterances that share some describable regularities—to proliferate.

In the first set of experiences, one notices oneself speaking, perhaps out loud or to oneself, repeating phrases from a movie, a newscast or even a conversation one overheard; one might be mouthing lyrics from a song that one does not even recognize. The content of these utterances hardly expresses one's intention, not even a subconscious intention. In fact, one might find that there was no conscious intention to speak even in the first place. Often, particularly in the case of a song "stuck in one's head," or in the case of a vulgar phrase that one overheard and then unconsciously repeats, one is embarrassed or even annoyed that one could have spoken this phrase out loud. But, nonetheless, an

utterance, often even a complete and coherent sentence, is spoken. Discourse proliferates.

Perhaps, to cite an example familiar to many students, one notices oneself speaking in a seminar without knowing what one intends to express. Or one notices that one has written a sentence on one's word-processor without understanding what the sentence means or where the idea implied by the words came from. But yet, a collection of words, a set of phrases, or a pattern of syntax seems to "write itself." In fact, one sometimes must repeat what one has uttered or written over again in one's own mind in order to try to understand its meaning or to try to recognize where the words could have come from. Again, discourse, describable in its regularities but irreducible to the intentions of the speaker, proliferates.

Foucault and Deleuze, by emphasizing the non-reducibility of discourse and its regularities to the consciousness of individuals, provoke profound reflection about the degree to which our exposure to discourse and its accompanying regularities do shape what we think and what we say. Their writings do not attempt to assert anonymous discourse as the true *actor* whenever we think or speak something. But they do help us acknowledge that it is not sufficient to posit an intentional subject as the true actor.

Conclusion: What Is Our Obligation to the Recovery of Ideas?

The goals of Foucault's work, in the narrow way that I have interpreted them in this paper, do not need to be evaluated based on their capacity to fit into the discipline of History. Rather, his descriptions of the conditions of possibility of past thinking answer to the call of generating *new* thinking: not merely new thoughts or new ideas, but rather new modes of contemplation, new strategies for organizing the non-theorized, new encounters with the outside of our current games of truth.

But my question still remains. Am I, as a potential scholar of religion, comfortable aligning myself with Foucault and Deleuze's project? Might I not have good reason to choose Bevir's "hermeneutic meanings" over Foucault's "discursive regularities" and "conditions of possibility"? Because of its profound influence on the way that I think about my own tenuous and ever-shifting position as a confused student of Buddhism, I often imagine my future work emulating Foucault's archaeological project. With that said, I remain concerned about the ethical implications of jumping into an archaeological investigation of foreign discursive practices, such as in my case, the practices of nineteenth-century Tibetan Buddhists.

Tibetan Buddhism poses a particularly severe, though likely common, problem for scholars of religion. Tibetan literary culture (or cultures) is such that there is an immeasurable amount of extant material to read, translate, paraphrase, interpret, organize, and catalogue, dating back over one thousand years. Moreover, much of the indigenous Buddhist output must be considered in relation to the immense canons of Buddhist literature inherited from India.⁵¹ But the field of Tibetology, like the field of Buddhist Studies, is still in its infancy. Therefore, the field demands careful philological work that can help to clarify what scholars are looking at when they read a given text. The field also calls for the patient work of historians of ideas, who can contribute by recovering coherent ideas from the multitude of past utterances of Tibetans, many of which contain a seemingly infinite sea of abbreviations and references that must be traversed should the content of the utterances be understood.

In such a context, I sometimes feel that an archaeological project is somewhat misplaced. If we truly respect the manifest brilliance of Tibetan literary cultures, then would we not best honor that ingenuity by recovering as many of its ideas and practices as possible, doing so in the most faithful way that we can as scholars? In such moments, I feel that more work should be done clarifying the past thought of Tibetans before I, or others, put Tibetan thought to use in clearing away openings to “a new future,” as Deleuze might have us do. But ideas embedded in Tibetan texts cannot speak for themselves without some mode of theoretical intervention, even on the philological level of comparing manuscript traditions or through the translation of Tibetan technical terminology into English. If a contemporary theoretical practice, rife with its own discursive conditions, is already necessary in order to squeeze hermeneutic and therefore historical meanings out of historical sources, then why not engage the equally contemporary practice of archaeology? I say this because I anticipate that the best way to put Tibetan ideas, practices, and modes of thinking into conversation with our own will be to deconstruct their respective conditions of possibility. I have observed a growing excitement among professors and peers to find ways to critically and constructively engage Buddhist ideas and practices. The common impulse is to ask how these ideas and practices relate to our contemporary lives, how they might inform or correct our contemporary conceptions, and how our contemporary conceptions might, in turn, inform or correct them.⁵² It is these very projects that I believe could most benefit from an archaeological approach.

As I suggested at the outset, archaeological projects can be particularly helpful because they have the potential to simultaneously expand the historical record *and* contribute to reshaping modes of speculative thought.⁵³ By care-

fully documenting past discourse, archaeological scholarship can contribute to the field of religious history by excavating verifiably historical objects—the actual past utterances of historical personages. And when exploring the regularities of the discourses in question, one need not employ Foucault's more troubled concepts, such as the historical *a priori*, the *episteme*, or even “the outside.” I, for one, find Foucault's writing to be brilliantly suggestive and poetic, if at times abstruse. But we should all recognize that his vocabulary has caused remarkable confusion. For that reason, one need not import his style in order to take up some of his questions. I sense that the careful distinction between one's paraphrases of actual discourse (historical utterances) and one's speculative descriptions of discursive regularities, coupled with a bit of modesty about the comprehensiveness of the conditions of possibility that one delineates, will eliminate much of the confusion that arises about the historical actuality of non-hermeneutic meanings.

In fact, I believe that the ethical question of whether or not scholars have a primary obligation to the recovery of ideas can be turned upon itself. Given the overwhelming abundance of scholarship produced in our times, do we not feel some commitment to our peers and to our successors to be as efficient as possible in our writing? My concern is that the recovery of hermeneutic meanings alone will increase the required reading of future graduate students without necessarily helping us understand why these meanings are worthwhile for academics to study. Why not begin to struggle with ways to both provide some historical groundwork for future scholars *and* critically engage foreign ideas? Perhaps the bold promise that such projects can realize new ways of thinking may animate the study of religion with historical rigor and an equally rigorous hope.

NOTES

1 Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 75.

2 A detailed discussion of hermeneutic meanings follows in the essay. Bevir also uses the vague term “individual viewpoint” to stand in for “hermeneutic meaning” (*ibid.*, 76-77). An utterance is, quite simply, the event of something being said in the past. Broadly speaking, Bevir focuses on the meaning communicated by what was said, while Foucault searches for the historical and discursive conditions that allowed for such an event of speech to arise.

- 3 Ibid., 31-32. Bevir does not explicitly argue against the usefulness of other kinds of "relics left over from the past." My supposition is that he simply wants to focus on the most ubiquitous kind of historical source material for the History of Ideas.
- 4 Ibid., 76-77.
- 5 Ibid., 54.
- 6 Ibid., 76.
- 7 To summarize a complex but persuasive argument, Bevir shows how traditional critiques of intentionality address linguistic and semantic, but never hermeneutic, meanings.
- 8 Ibid., 56.
- 9 I am thinking here of Quentin Skinner's proposal for evaluating historical utterances by choosing, from all possible meanings, that one which best accords with the linguistic conventions of its time. See Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*, ed. James Tully (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988). Repr. in Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics Volume 1: Regarding Method*, ed. Quentin Skinner (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- 10 Bevir, 35, 55.
- 11 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 78-124.
- 12 Bevir, 51.
- 13 "One must identify a magical language-x with an equally magical meaning-x existing in history, as do hermeneutic meanings, but existing independently of particular individuals, as do structural meanings. Although there are brave souls who seek to defend something akin to language-x, their endeavors seem doomed to fail" (Bevir, 60).
- 14 Bevir, 60-61. The implication, of course, is that all abstract, independent, real entities must be permanent.
- 15 For a variety of definitions, qualifications, and assessments of discourse, see Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 48, 49, 55, 80, 107, and 117. For an explanation of the "statement," see Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 107, or 106-17 more generally. Also helpful (and simultaneously mystifying) is Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 1-22.
- 16 Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 315-16.
- 17 Deleuze, 3.
- 18 Ibid., 15.

- 19 Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 138.
- 20 Ibid., 138.
- 21 Ibid., 139.
- 22 Ibid., 169.
- 23 Ibid., 149. These attacks appear most notably in *the Archaeology of Knowledge* and his essays “The Discourse on Language,” “Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History,” and “What is the Author?”
- 24 Michel Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998), 215.
- 25 Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 3, 7-15.
- 26 Skinner, *Meaning and Context*, 38, 64.
- 27 Ibid., 67.
- 28 Martin Jay, *Fin de Siècle and Other Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 60.
- 29 Peter Eli Gordon, “Continental Divide: Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger at Davos, 1929—An Allegory of Intellectual History,” *Modern Intellectual History* 1.2 (2004): 247.
- 30 “There is in consequence simply no hope of seeking the point of studying the history of ideas in the attempt to learn directly from the classic authors by focusing on their attempted answers to supposedly timeless questions” (Skinner, *Meaning and Context*, 65).
- 31 I am a bit uncomfortable making too large a generalization about Skinner’s approach based on this essay, given his later interest in the history of normative vocabularies and changing rhetoric. See, for example, “Retrospect: Studying Rhetoric and Conceptual Change” in Skinner, *Visions of Politics*.
- 32 Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 459.
- 33 Deleuze, 116. Ironically, Foucault suggests that Deleuze’s *The Logic of Sense* should carry the subtitle “What is Thinking?” Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 354.
- 34 Deleuze, 108.
- 35 Ibid., 108.
- 36 Refer back to Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 138, for an articulation of this view.
- 37 Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 379.
- 38 Deleuze, 56.

39 Ibid., 57.

40 Stuart Clark, "The *Annales* Historians," in *The Return of Grand Theory in Human Sciences*, ed. Quentin Skinner (New York & Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 180.

41 Ibid., 180-185.

42 See, for example, Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 369, on the necessity to capture the singularity of events, in contrast to the broad evolutionary history of Braudel. Or see Foucault's dialogue about structuralism in the concluding chapter of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

43 Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 315-16.

44 Deleuze, 37.

45 I tend to think that the term "immanent cause," while provocative in the sense that it challenges us to think about how a cause can, or cannot, precede its effect, is nevertheless somewhat inappropriate because it necessitates some slippage between what is a "cause" and what is a supporting "condition." Distinguishing between causes and conditions and the ranking of their relative importance is considered by some to be a defining task of historical inquiry and therefore demands particularly careful terminological specificity. See, for example, Thomas Haskell, *Objectivity Is Not Neutrality: Explanatory Schemes in History* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 20.

46 Deleuze, 89.

47 Ibid., 87.

48 Ibid., 87. Nor are they yet divided up into "visibilities," a term that Deleuze uses but that is beyond the scope of this essay.

49 Ibid., 118.

50 Ibid., 50. Deleuze again discusses "the visible" at length, but I will not address this component of his reading.

51 Though somewhat varying in size and scope, Tibetan canons have over one hundred volumes of discourses attributed to the Buddha and over two hundred volumes of canonical treatises (primarily by Indian masters).

52 For a provocative example of historical recovery and critical engagement with Buddhist ideas, see Paul J. Griffiths, *On Being Buddha: The Classical Doctrine of Buddhahood* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994). Griffiths sets up a theoretical model in the service of reconstructing, and then evaluating, religious doctrine based on assessing the propositional value of doctrinal "sentences."

53 This suggestion is in the spirit of Foucault's refusal to accept the "blackmail" of the Enlightenment, by which one must be either "for" or "against" the Enlightenment. Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 312-13.

THE CORRUPT QUEEN AND THE IDEAL WIFE

Reimagining the Role of the Female in Vālmīkī's
Rāmāyana

Harshita K. Mruthinti

Contemporary South Asian subaltern discourse views Vālmīkī's *Rāmāyana*, the epic Sanskrit narrative describing the life of prince Rāma of Ayodhyā, as an androcentric tale that supports prevailing patriarchal social norms while marginalizing feminine agency within the boundaries of its text.¹ Furthermore, this Sanskrit version of the epic seems to uphold a hegemonic discourse rejected by its more fluid vernacular counterparts, which often contest traditional preconceptions of gender and authority.² Robert Goldman, in an attempt to call into question these arguably rigid subaltern assumptions about the Sanskrit version of the narrative, points to "leakages from the supposedly hermetic value system of Vālmīkī that provide narrative space within the epic story...as well as, an opportunity to read against

the grain,' as it were and to try thereby to recover some of the voices that the dominant discourse pushes to the margin."³

Here, I will employ Goldman's attempt to read against traditional conceptions of Vālmiki's narrative in order to examine the portrayal of the female and the possibility of female legitimacy in this text. Specifically, I will use this reading strategy to rescue the two seemingly distinct characters of Kaikeyī and Sītā from the polar female spectrum of corrupt queen and ideal wife, consequently allowing us to reimagine both women as wronged heroines who exert authoritative voice within the confines of the *Rāmāyana's* supposedly patriarchal framework. Furthermore, by reading against the grain, I will question whether Vālmiki's epic should remain within a traditionally androcentric sphere, as a text written by a man for men, or whether characters such as Kaikeyī and Sītā allow for the subversive valorization of the female, specifically by transcending the narrow caricatures of corrupt queen and ideal wife.

Before tackling the possible presence of female authority in the *Rāmāyana*, it is important to contextualize these two women within their greater narrative framework. In the story, Daśaratha, the king of Ayodhyā, has three wives, his second and favorite being Kaikeyī. Upon realizing his failing health, Daśaratha decides to coronate Rāma, the son of the eldest wife Kauśalya, as king of Ayodhyā. After hearing of Rāma's upcoming coronation, Kaikeyī, instigated by her maidservant Mantharā, becomes enraged. She uses two boons, previously given to her by Daśaratha, to banish Rāma into forest exile for fourteen years and to demand that her own son, Bharata, be installed on the throne. Rāma goes to the forest with his wife Sītā and brother Lakṣmana, and it is there that the evil ten-headed demon Rāvana kidnaps Sītā after deciding that he wants to take her as his own wife. Rāma and Lakṣmana, with the help of an army of monkeys, find Sītā in the distant land of Lanka and wage a war against the evil demon king, ultimately defeating him.

After Rāvana's death, Rāma forces Sītā to undergo a trial by fire to prove her chastity during her year-long period of capture.⁴ She passes the test unharmed, and the couple returns to Ayodhyā; soon, however, the people of the kingdom begin expressing their concern over Sītā's chastity during her imprisonment in Lanka under Rāvana's lustful gaze. Rāma, after hearing such maligning gossip, immediately decides to banish Sītā to the far-off hermitage of Vālmiki himself.

In order to obey his brother's command, Lakṣmana takes a pregnant Sītā to Vālmiki's *āśram*. Lakṣmana refuses to tell Sītā the complete reason for her banishment, but he does reveal that Rāma's decision rests on his fear of public

scandal. Sītā, although shocked by her banishment, agrees to Rāma's decree and remains in Vālmiki's *āśram*, where she gives birth to her twin sons Lava and Kuśa. In time, Rāma revokes his wife's banishment and asks her to come back to Ayodhyā; Sītā goes to Rāma's court for final time, only to end her life and return to the earth from which she was born.

Sītā and Kaikeyī: Traditional Conceptions of the Ideal Wife and the Corrupt Queen

At first glance, Vālmiki seems to construct a polar female pair through the characters of Sītā and Kaikeyī. The former represents the ideal wife, bound by *strīdharma*, or a woman's duty to her husband. Sītā's exemplary character immobilizes her in a mythic realm as a model virtuous female, a prevailing normative ideal still popularly upheld in India today. In support of such assumptions on the emulative righteousness of Sītā's character, Sally Sutherland describes a survey conducted in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh by one thousand men and women in which Sītā was chosen as the ideal female role model among twenty-four famous female goddesses and literary characters.⁵ As seen by the results of this survey, the lay Hindu practitioner deifies Sītā as the perfect wife, one whose unwavering reverence towards her husband clearly warrants emulation.

The popular characterization of Sītā as an ideal wifely role model finds grounding early on in Vālmiki's text. In the *Ayodhyākānda*, the second book of the *Rāmāyana*, Sītā remains steadfast in her wifely duties by insisting on following her husband to the forest, although Kaikeyī only demands Rāma's banishment, and not Sītā's. In an attempt to justify her own self-prescribed exile, Sītā tells Rāma,

A man's father, his mother, brother, son, or daughter-in-law all experience the effects of their own past deeds and suffer an individual fate. But a wife, and she alone, bull among men, must share her husband's fate. Therefore I, too, have been ordered to life in the forest. It is not her father or mother, not her son or friends or herself, but her husband, and he alone, who gives a woman permanent refuge in this world and after death.⁶

Here, we have a clear example of *strīdharma* as prescribed by the ancient Sanskrit treatise, the *Laws of Manu*, which states: "A virtuous wife should constantly serve her husband like a god, even if he behaves badly, freely indulges his lust, and is devoid of any good qualities."⁷ In accordance with the traditional patriarchal notion in the *Laws of Manu* that a wife's obligations should

remain centered around her husband, Sītā cannot imagine a life without Rāma, and therefore dutifully accepts his fate as her own by following him to the forest. Her unfaltering adherence to *strīdharmā* seen in this early episode of the *Rāmāyana* places her on a mythic pedestal of ideal femininity, one supported by the continuing reverence of her contemporary devotees on the ground.

Arguably, the construction of a paradigmatic female figure within the *Rāmāyana* necessitates an antithetical counterpart, and Vālmīki's narrative seemingly constructs Sītā's polar opposite through the character of Kaikeyī. Rather than adhering to normative patriarchal prescriptions on correct feminine behavior, Kaikeyī spurns a wife's obligation of abiding by her husband's wishes in order to fulfill her own desires. Influenced by the evil suggestions of her hunch-backed maidservant, Mantharā, Kaikeyī decides to use her two boons, previously awarded by the king, for her son's benefit. Due to the fact that Kaikeyī avoids her *strīdharmic* obligations, Daśaratha's downfall occurs as a result of his wife's actions, consequently depicting the queen as the paradigmatic antithesis to Sītā's virtuous wifely character.

Expressions of Female Authority within the *Rāmāyana's* Patriarchal Rubric

With an understanding of their traditional polar characterizations within the text, we will now turn to the issue of agency and examine the ways in which both women in this supposedly dichotomous pair manage to express authoritative female voice while upholding the patriarchal paradigm of Vālmīki's narrative. In the more obvious example of Daśaratha's second wife, Kaikeyī clearly wields a great degree of power within the narrative, specifically with regard to her relationship with her husband and the infamous scene revealing her intentions for the use of the two boons. When Daśaratha enters Kaikeyī's bedchamber to tell her of the plans for Rāma's coronation, he finds her dramatically collapsed on the ground. According to the text, "the guileless old man saw her on the floor, that guileful young wife of his, who meant more to him than life itself."⁸ Although their physical positions—Daśaratha looking from above at his wife lying on the ground—would indicate otherwise, from the onset of this scene, Vālmīki paints the king as a helpless, timid husband, overshadowed by the cunning authority of his wily wife, consequently depicting her as the agentive actor of the pair.

Kaikeyī further establishes her authority over her husband by asking Daśaratha to give her his word before revealing her intentions for the use of the two boons. In response to Kaikeyī's request, "the mighty king, hopeless under

[that] woman's power," expresses his immense affection for his wife and agrees to give her whatever she asks.⁹ The queen then reveals her deceptive plans for Rāma's banishment and Bharata's coronation. Daśaratha, although stricken by grief, must adhere to his promise and therefore grants her request. In her analysis of this scene, Sutherland observes that "Kaikeyī has effectively used her one means to power, her sexual hold over the king, to accomplish her purpose."¹⁰ Whether or not we accept Sutherland's analysis of the queen's sexually-based agency, we can see that Kaikeyī wields her position of authority as Daśaratha's most beloved wife to her advantage. Initially, she *subversively* wields her influence over the king as his favorite wife to ensure his word, but after gaining his confidence, she *defiantly* reveals the extreme nature of her demands.

Furthermore, Kaikeyī justifies her intentions by telling the king, "You must stand by your obligation. For people who understand the meaning of righteousness hold truth to be its essence. Now, I am simply appealing to truth and exhorting you to do what is right."¹¹ Through these words Kaikeyī achieves agency over her husband by not only ensnaring the king's command through her persuasive authority but also by ingeniously turning Daśaratha's virtuous adherence to *dharma* against him.¹²

If Kaikeyī's cunning use of authority gives her an influential voice within the text, how does the supposedly deferential Sītā manage to find a similarly agentive platform from which to speak? It seems that Sītā's portrayal as a model subservient wife may not accurately reflect her full textual construction. Although Sītā remains subdued by Rāma, particularly in line with the orthodox patriarchal perspective reflected in the *Laws of Manu*, she still manages to exert authority in several episodes of the narrative. Here, I will examine three of these episodes—her debate over accompanying Rāma to the forest, her authority in the issue of the golden deer, and her trial by fire—as scenarios that exemplify Sītā's agentive voice within the text.

In the first example, with respect to the issue of exile, Sītā, rather than adhering to her husband's desire for her to stay in Ayodhyā during his period of banishment, calls Rāma's logic into question. Although Rāma explains that "a woman must show her husband obedience and earnestly strive to please and benefit him," Sītā remains noncompliant on the issue of exile and insists upon going to the forest against her husband's wishes.¹³ Furthermore, Sītā uses the very patriarchal rhetoric that supposedly binds her to a position beneath Rāma to prove her case, thereby granting her legitimate voice. She tells him, "by the order of our elders I must go with you Rāma. I would die here and now if parted from you...A woman whose husband has left her cannot go on living."^{14,15} By employing what Goldman refers to as a "passive mode of feminine

persuasion,” Sītā finds an authoritative platform to counter Rāma’s wishes, consequently deconstructing her image as the subservient counterpart to her powerful husband.¹⁶

The second example of Sītā’s agency involves the situation of the golden deer. After seeing a beautiful golden deer in the forest, Sītā demands that Rāma capture it for her, even though Laksmāna warns that it may be a demon in disguise. Later, when the demon Mārīca, in the guise of the deer, cries out mimicking the voice of Rāma, Sītā insists that Laksmāna immediately attend to his brother’s calls. Laksmāna, entrusted by Rāma to stay at the hut and protect Sītā, initially refuses to abide by his sister-in-law’s wishes. Sītā then harshly rebukes him for his lack of cooperation: “Ignoble, cruel man, disgrace to your House! How pitiful this attempt of yours...You treacherously follow Rāma to the forest, the two of you alone: You are either in the employ of Bharata or secretly plotting to get me.”¹⁷ In this way, Sītā clearly expresses authoritative power over her brother-in-law, as well as her husband, particularly by forcing Laksmāna to ignore his promise and abandon her to find Rāma.

The third example of Sītā’s authoritative voice can be seen in the controversy over her purity. As Rāma forces her to undergo a trial by fire, he selfishly renounces his wife:

What illustrious man of good family would take back a woman who had lived in another’s house even though he longs to? How can one who has pretensions towards a great family take you back, when you sat upon Rāvāna’s lap and have been looked upon by his lustful eyes? The reason I won you back was to restore my fame. I have no attachment to you. Leave here as you wish!¹⁸

Sītā counters her husband’s cruel words by asking him, “Why do you talk to me like that, oh hero, like a common man talking to a common woman?... You, lion among men, by giving way to wrath and passing premature judgment on a woman, have acted like a worthless man.”¹⁹ After rebuking Rāma in this manner, Sītā calls upon Agni, the god of fire, to protect her, and ultimately passes through the fire unharmed.

As seen in this episode, Sītā assumes an authoritative voice and belittles her husband’s virtue. Similar to the persuasive technique used by Kaikeyī, she turns Rāma’s obsession with correct moral action against him by calling into question his ethical justification for her trial by fire. Furthermore, Sītā not only criticizes Rāma’s moral righteousness but also undermines his claims to masculinity through her harsh words.

Sītā also employs such persuasive techniques in the previous two episodes. In the debate over mutual exile, she mocks Rāma for attempting to abandon her by calling him “a woman with a body of a man.”²⁰ According to Goldman, Sītā “explicitly characterizes Rāma’s hesitation to take her with him as evidence of a distinctly feminine timidity...She has placed Rāma in a defensive posture with regard to his own courage and manliness and his ability to protect his wife.”²¹ Here we must note that Sītā problematically seems to reinforce the androcentric tone of the narrative by belittling Rāma on the basis of his claims to normative masculinity; however, we may justify Sītā’s critique as a rhetorical strategy that intends to sway her husband specifically by turning his own androcentric norms against him.

Similar to the defensive position of Rāma in this debate, Lakshmana is also subject to Sītā’s argumentative and authoritative voice. In the episode of the golden deer, she forces Lakshmana to abandon her against Rāma’s wishes by wildly speculating on his immoral intentions to gain his brother’s throne and take her as his own wife. By belittling their masculinity and undermining their ethical legitimacy, Sītā subversively establishes her own authoritative platform when arguing with her male counterparts, similar to the one constructed by Kaikeyī.²² Perhaps, in a patriarchal text obsessed with the maintenance of *dharma*, employing persuasive techniques based on appropriate *dharmaic* behavior may be the only way for both Sītā and Kaikeyī to find equal footing with the men who surround them.

Although Vālmiki seems to allow for female agency within his narrative by giving Sītā and Kaikeyī a legitimate platform from which to speak, we must further examine the role of gender in constructing these authoritative female characters before casting Vālmiki’s text in a female-friendly light. If we correlate authority with masculinity, Sītā seems to abandon the supposed weaknesses of the feminine gender to adopt a powerful voice during her three agentive episodes, thereby diminishing the possibility for specifically *female* agency. Along such a line of analysis, Goldman characterizes the role of gender in Sītā’s influential position when confronting Rāma by stating that she “assumes a ‘masculine’ stance in outspokenly rebuking and criticizing her husband.”²³ Similarly, Sutherland links masculinity with Kaikeyī’s authority, arguing that

“Kaikeyī may have been introduced to us as a naive and vacillating woman, but once she accepts Mantharā’s plan and sets it into motion, that is to say, once she too has become a ‘phallic’ woman, she proves to be uncompromising, even adamant in her unrelenting demands.”²⁴

However, here I argue that the psychoanalytic coloring of these two women's influential positions within their respective debates as gendered-male denies Sītā and Kaikeyī the possibility for expressing their own *female* legitimacy. Rather than casting their authority within the confines of masculinity, in the manner of Goldman and Sutherland, I believe that Sītā and Kaikeyī's assertion of authority by virtue of their *wifely* roles constitutes a subtle and powerful move: they employ prevailing patriarchal familial norms in a way that subverts the very framework in which these gender norms exist.

As a result, Kaikeyī uses her persuasive authority as her husband's favorite wife to ensure her son's enthronement, and Sītā accompanies Rāma to the forest by turning her traditional role as a dutiful wife to her advantage. According to the *Laws of Manu*, men must revere and pacify women in order to ensure household happiness: "fathers, brothers, husbands, and brother-in-law who wish for great good fortune should revere these women and adorn them... where women of the family are miserable, the family is soon destroyed, but it always thrives where women are not miserable."²⁵ It seems that Kaikeyī and Sītā use this *Dharmaśāstric* connection between female happiness and familial prosperity to their advantage by persuasively demanding that their husbands fulfill their own desires. Seen in this way, Vālmiki's narrative makes room for distinctly female voice and authority through a wifely model without overstepping the overarching orthodox patriarchal rubric reflected in Manu's ancient law treatise.²⁶

Vālmiki's Paradox: Ambivalent Attitudes towards Female Agency

Although Vālmiki may not deny the possibility for female agency within his text, he paradoxically displays ambivalence towards female use of such authoritative power. His ambivalence finds precedence within orthodox patriarchy, which, as expressed in the *Laws of Manu*, inconsistently describes the necessity for female reverence while insisting that a wife treat her husband as divine.²⁷ Vālmiki adopts such conflicting notions towards his female characters by giving them authoritative voice within his narrative while nevertheless painting their downfall as a result of their selfish demands. With respect to Kaikeyī, although her self-motivated requests to Daśaratha ensure Rāma's exile, they manage to destroy her husband and sully her reputation in the process. In his translation of the *Ayodhyākanda*, Sheldon Pollock states that Vālmiki "meant Kaikeyī to serve largely as a negative exemplar...[she] then would be intended as an illustration of what happens when a woman seeks to act autonomously: she destroys the foundation of her life, her husband."²⁸ If we accept Pollock's

interpretation, then we can see that although Vālmiki allows Kaikeyī to express her authoritative voice, he punishes the queen for her autonomy by denying her the possibility for virtuous wifely behavior blaming her for Daśarathā's demise.

Vālmiki also reveals ambivalence towards Sītā's authority, particularly surrounding the issue of the golden deer. After Sītā harshly accuses Lakṣmana for casting an ill-intentioned eye on her, he scorns her, saying that "inappropriate words from a woman come as nothing new. This is the nature of woman the whole world over: Women care nothing for righteousness, they are flighty, sharp-tongued, and divisive."²⁹ Sītā arguably instigates Lakṣmana's harsh critique on womanhood through her illegitimate accusations, which in turn elucidate Vālmiki's conflicting attitudes towards the supposedly virtuous heroine of his text. Moreover, by exerting her influence and forcing Lakṣmana to abandon her, Sītā pushes herself into a vulnerable position when later confronting Rāvana and consequently sets the stage for her capture. Therefore, while Vālmiki may give Sītā agentive voice within his narrative, he clearly reveals the drawbacks of feminine authority by castigating womanhood through Lakṣmana's diatribe and by allowing Sītā to be kidnapped by an evil ten-headed demon as a result of her obstinate demands.

Ultimately, our examination of the *Rāmāyana's* ambivalence towards its primary female characters elucidates Vālmiki's paradox: the author gives his heroines authoritative voice within his text while simultaneously limiting blatant glorification of such authority by depicting their downfall.

Reimagining the Dichotomous Pair: The Subversive Valorization of Female Voice

In light of Vālmiki's paradox, we must now question whether the *Rāmāyana* consistently upholds ambivalent brahminical notions of the female, or if an alternative reading strategy deconstructs such rigid depictions of this epic text. Here, I will argue that a closer examination of both Kaikeyī and Sītā reveals the possibility for counter-hegemonic feminine valorization, even in light of Vālmiki's overarching uncertainty towards the female characters within his narrative. In order to support this reimagining of the *Rāmāyana*, I will attempt to highlight specific instances involving Kaikeyī and Sītā that demonstrate the author's support of these women, particularly as females wronged by their husbands, and consequently reveal a subversive valorization of femininity within the gender-ambivalent framework of this text.

With respect to Kaikeyī, the inclusion of the character of Mantharā, the evil, hunch-backed maidservant, deconstructs the queen's supposedly ill-intentioned nature. Initially, upon hearing of Rāma's coronation, Kaikeyī expresses approval by surprisingly stating, "I draw no distinction between Rāma and Bharata, and so I am perfectly content that the king should consecrate Rāma as king."³⁰ However, Kaikeyī's contentment quickly gives way to anger as Mantharā reveals her concern over Rāma's treatment of his brother Bharata after his coronation. Mantharā instigates the queen by telling her, "surely once Rāma secures unchallenged kingship he will have Bharata sent off to some other country—if not to the other world!...You must therefore devise some way of making your son the king and banishing his enemy this very day."³¹ Mantharā then advises Kaikeyī to use her previously promised boons to ensure Rāma's exile and Bharata's coronation, a plan to which the queen readily agrees.

Seen in this light, Kaikeyī's supposed misuse of her two boons actually springs from Mantharā's ill intentions rather than from her own selfish desires. Therefore, while we may commonly imagine Daśarathā's second queen as the villainess of the story, the author attempts to retain her virtuousness through the inclusion of an evil, hunchbacked instigator. Furthermore, Vālmiki obscures the traditional dualistic construction of point-counterpoint through the addition of Mantharā within the story, thereby allowing us to view Kaikeyī in less extreme terms. A reanalysis of Kaikeyī's supposedly malevolent character deconstructs her image as antithetical to a traditional wifely model and consequently obscures her polarization with Sitā's ideal nature.

While the presence of Mantharā may push Kaikeyī to more moderate grounds, the issue surrounding the queen's bride price clearly reveals a necessity to reimagine her role within the narrative. Sutherland, in an attempt to repaint Kaikeyī as a "hidden feminist heroine of ancient India," raises the issue of bride price as justification for the queen's seemingly extreme use of the two boons.³² Part of Kaikeyī's bride price, as negotiated by her father, is the assurance that her own son will succeed to the throne, a practice known as *rājyasulka*.³³ Although the eldest prince Rāma should traditionally inherit the throne, the previous negotiation of Kaikeyī's bride price makes Bharata the rightful heir. Therefore, it seems that Daśarathā's impulse to coronate Rāma as king breaks his promise to Kaikeyī's father, consequently validating the queen's employment of the two boons to ensure Bharata's enthronement.³⁴

Rāma himself, before departing for the forest, acknowledges the *rājyasulka* in an attempt to convince Bharata to take up the throne. He tells Bharata, "Long ago, dear brother, when our father was about to marry your mother, he made a bride price pledge to your grandfather—the ultimate price, the

kingship.”³⁵ In light of Daśaratha’s promise for Bharata’s kingship, we can re-imagine Kaikeyī as a wife wronged by her husband’s forgetfulness. According to Sutherland, “Queen Kaikeyī was, in truth, the injured party, betrayed by a husband who failed to keep his promise to her and her family.”³⁶ Moreover, the victimization of Kaikeyī due to Daśaratha’s failed vow arguably casts her as the text’s hidden heroine, particularly by making her supposedly villainous depiction unwarranted.

It is important to note, however, that Vālmīki seems to deemphasize the issue of *rājyasulka*, particularly because it calls into question Daśaratha’s seemingly virtuous kingship.³⁷ The text itself mandates honesty in kingship by stating that “the actions of a king must always be truthful and benevolent. The kingdom will thereby be true, the world firmly established on truth.”³⁸ In light of this textual self-prescription towards honesty, Vālmīki must hide the issue of bride price under Kaikeyī’s supposedly ill-intentioned use of her two boons in order to preserve Daśaratha’s kingly integrity.³⁹ However, while the *rājyasulka* may work as an aberrant narrative tool within the dominant thematic construction of virtuous kingly figures in the story, its inclusion recasts Kaikeyī’s supposedly evil intentions in a softer light and may even subversively valorize her image as a wife wrongly denied what was promised to her.

After Kaikeyī’s influential use of her two boons, her presence in the narrative fades into the background. Sītā, however, remains a primary female character throughout the epic and therefore functions as the central example of feminine valorization within this text. In particular, the episode of her final return to Ayodhyā at the conclusion of the narrative contributes to her empowered image. If we recall the final scenes of the *Uttarakānda*, Rāma decides to conduct a Vedic horse sacrifice as validation of his kingly rule. The twins, Lava and Kuśa, attend the sacrifice and recite the story of Rāma’s life as composed by Vālmīki. Rāma, after recalling his wife’s suffering when hearing the recitation, immediately decides to accept Sītā back into his household, regardless of the possibility of slanderous comments from his subjects. He sends a message to Vālmīki’s *āśram* stating, “If Sītā is free from unchaste conduct, then let her come here, escorted by sage Vālmīki and prove her purity.”⁴⁰ She agrees to Rāma’s request and returns to his court, where Vālmīki attests to her purity himself. Sītā, the picture of grief, then says, “Since I have never thought of any man but Rāma, let the Goddess Mādhavi [the Earth] split open before me.”⁴¹ After Sītā speaks these words, the ground opens and, as a final testimony of her purity, she abandons her husband to return to the earth from which she was born.

Before examining the defiant nature of Sītā's self-immolation, we must first question the motivations behind Rāma's arguably unfounded banishment of Sītā into a second exile. In the narrative, Rāma justifies his actions by telling his brothers,

In my own innermost being I know she is pure. Hence I brought her back to Ayodhya with me. Yet, there is public scandal concerning her. He who is thus subjected to public scandal in this world goes down to the lower worlds so long as the scandal lasts[...]For fear of scandal I can even give up my life and all of you, my dear brothers; what to speak of Sītā? Hence, do as I tell you and do not even counsel me against it.⁴²

Here, Rāma expresses his purely self-motivated concerns, as he is even willing to trade his beloved wife to retain an image of righteous kingship. According to Goldman, "in making the personally devastating decision to banish Sītā, Rāma is, on this level at least, only acting out, vaingloriously perhaps, his vision of the perfect king, who sacrifices all for the sake of *dharmā* and the stern demands of righteous kingship."⁴³ However, while Goldman's justification remains plausible, considering Rāma's obstinate adherence to *dharmā*, it does not reconcile with the fact that he has already forced Sītā to publicly prove her purity; she undergoes a fire purity test before returning to Ayodhyā, which in theory should be testimony enough to Rāma of his wife's internal sanctity.

Furthermore, in light of Rāma's image as a "compassionate savior" within the text, Goldman goes on to argue that even if Sītā was guilty of impure acts during her period of imprisonment, "the soteriological logic of the text should have provided the means for her rehabilitation."⁴⁴ However, although Rāma fully knows of her purity, he decides to banish her despite such knowledge. Therefore, Rāma acts in an unjustifiable, and perhaps even irrational, manner by rejecting his own supposedly compassionate nature and rashly banishing his wife.

Rāma's hasty actions point to an inherent fear of female influence, implanted in the eldest prince after his father's downfall at the hands of Kaikeyī. Rāma, after witnessing the effects of Kaikeyī's seemingly unwifely demands, resolves never to repeat his father's mistake of allowing a woman to dictate his actions and weaken his character.⁴⁵ Rāma even states, "Whoever forsakes righteousness [*dharmā*] and statecraft [*artha*] and follows the urgings of desire [*kāma*], will soon come to grief, just like Daśaratha."⁴⁶ Therefore, in light of his fear of becoming Daśaratha, Rāma's wariness of Kaikeyī transfers onto Sītā, particularly as the issue of her chastity arises. With full knowledge of her purity, Rāma

forces his wife to undergo a trial by fire, which she triumphantly passes. However, as the slanderous gossip continues, Rāma irrationally resolves to force her into exile to prevent him from truly becoming his father's son: a weak husband subject to the demands of his controlling wife. It seems that if we were to examine their internal relationship, Rāma clearly loves his wife and fully believes in her purity. But if we step outside to an external, public sphere, Rāma perceives Sitā as Kaikeyī's counterpart—yet another woman who threatens to tarnish the reputation of a virtuous king. Therefore, without justification or rationale, Rāma cruelly forces Sitā to relive the life of a forest-dweller after fourteen years of such an existence, particularly as she remains a public threat to his virtuous kingly image.

With an understanding of Rāma's personal motivations underlying his unjust treatment towards Sitā, we may now examine her position within the final episode of the story. Twice rejected by her husband and subject to banishment a second time due to Rāma's self-motivated concerns over maintaining his public image in the face of an unjustifiable scandal, Sitā transforms into the poetically wronged heroine of Vālmiki's text. While she acquiesces to Rāma's trial by fire after suffering a year-long period of capture in the hands of an evil demon king, and even agrees to reside in Vālmiki's hermitage although pregnant with twin sons, her unwavering resolve to uphold an image of an ideal *strīdharmic* wife finally crumbles in the final episode of the *Uttarakānda*; she rejects her husband outright as an ultimate figure of authority by immolating herself as a testimony of her purity.

While the previously examined episodes of conflict involving Sitā reveal her *passive* means of counter-resistance to male authority, this final triumphant scene constructs her as an empowered woman, who *actively* displays her virtuousness through her violent suicidal act. Sutherland characterizes Sitā's self-immolation as passive-aggressive. According to Sutherland's analysis, in an Indian context that discourages external modes of expressing anger, Sitā's inward act of suicide remains the socially acceptable means of expressing her resentment towards her husband.⁴⁷ However, Sutherland's analysis of Sitā's suicide as *passive* due to its inward consequences downplays the agentive nature of Sitā's self-destructive response to Rāma's final request. The very public exhibition of Sitā's immolation, staged in front of Rāma and his entire court, reveals the outward characteristics of her self-denying deed, as she *actively* takes her life in order to verify her purity.

It is through Sitā's outward display of aggression that we find the prime example of the valorization of the female as an autonomous, empowered agent in the *Rāmāyana*. Rather than ending his narrative on more idyllic

terms by allowing his meek heroine to overlook her husband's unjust treatment towards her and subserviently return to Rāma's side, Vālmiki valorizes Sītā as a defiant woman who, in the final moments of the story, decides to ignore Rāma's wishes and take her fate into her own hands. In support of Vālmiki's valorization, Pratap Kumar describes the author's portrayal of Sītā as a woman of independence and self-respect. According to Kumar's analysis, Sītā stands, not as a typical wife, but as a paradigmatic female who expresses her own free will despite the possibility of societal humiliation.⁴⁸

Paralleling Sītā's portrayal as a woman of free will, Vālmiki also empowers her in the final scene of the narrative by exercising literary self-inclusiveness, as the writer himself appears in Rāma's court in order to validate Sītā's purity. When presenting Sītā to her husband in the final scene, Vālmiki declares:

Here, O Rāma, is Sītā who is devoted to her marital vows and whose conduct is perfectly righteous...I speak truth. I do not remember having uttered falsehood in my life. I have practiced austerities for a very long time: I swear by them that Sita is pure.⁴⁹

Vālmiki believes in his heroine's purity, and therefore implicitly favors her plight over and above the concerns of the supposedly righteous king who institutes her banishment. While the author maintains an orthodox patriarchal notion of male superiority throughout the majority of his text, his final support of the heroine of his narrative may overturn such previously established patriarchal tendencies, especially as he depicts Rāma's actions as unjust and irrational. Therefore, we not only find Vālmiki valorizing Sītā's perspective within the narrative but also uplifting her plight at the expense of the text's central male character. Kumar describes Vālmiki's obvious preference for Sītā in this final scene:

The prominence of Sītā's role is gradually heightened with its culminating point in the *Uttarakānda*, the last episode of the *Rāmāyana*. Sītā's character really rules the imagination of the author of the *Rāmāyana*. It is as though the author is obsessed with her character. She is the center of everything.⁵⁰

Stated in these terms, Kumar's analysis transforms the *Rāmāyana* from a male-centered text in support of *Dharmaśāstric* norms of patriarchy to a gynocentric narrative in which the central concern is the suffering of the female protagonist.

However, we must be wary of crediting Vālmiki with nascent feminism; instead, we can view his valorizing attempts of Sītā's suffering as a testimony of

the lack of categorical rigidity present within this narrative. As readers, we may have a tendency to approach Vālmiki's narrative with preconceived epithets of the characters he constructs: Rāma the righteous king, Kaikeyī the self-interested villainess, and Sītā the virtuous wife.⁵¹ However, examining the text closely deconstructs such preconceptions by revealing a rich imaginative world within the narrative, one that fully engages in the messy complexities of everyday life. Moreover, abandoning our previous assumptions and reading against the grain allows us to reimagine the characters within Vālmiki's text. With this new perspective we can see, for example, that the issue of *rājyasulka* softens Kaikeyī's supposedly villainous nature, Sītā's self-centered and argumentative demands towards her husband and brother-in-law recreate her image as a subservient, ideal wife, and Rāma's unjust decree of Sītā's banishment in an attempt to preserve his societal image casts doubts on his supposedly virtuous kingship.

Ultimately, Vālmiki's epic narrative upholds traditional patriarchal norms while allowing for autonomous female voice and agency; as a result, the text reveals the potential for both masculine and feminine spheres of authority in its imaginative world and allows for the fluid interaction between two seemingly distinct gendered realms. Furthermore, the characters of Sītā and Kaikeyī provide for such a possibility. Rather than imaging these two females as dichotomous counterparts along a spectrum of wifely versus *adharmic* female behavior, we must cast aside this restrictive polar paradigm and realize that the complexity of their respective situations, along with their authoritative female voices, presents them with the opportunity to express agency and free will within the narrative. Moreover, while Vālmiki remains wary of fully empowering his female characters, he still manages to give them a platform from which to speak; such female authority points to strains of hegemonic resistance within his text and consequently supports the possibility for a subversive resignification of the feminine, allowing Sītā and Kaikeyī to be seen as exemplars of female agency in a male-dominated world.

NOTES

- 1 Although traditionally the *Rāmāyana* has been attributed to Vālmiki, the text seems to be the work of several authors, and may have been subject to a series of redactions. Therefore, although we will refer to Vālmiki as the sole author of the text for the purposes of this paper, we must remember that several individuals may have contributed to this epic work.

- 2 Robert Goldman, "Resisting Rāma: Dharmic Debates on Gender and Hierarchy and the Work of the Vālmiki *Rāmāyana*," in *The Rāmāyana Revisited*, ed. Mandakranta Bose (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 19-20. While an examination of vernacular accounts of the *Rāmāyana* remains outside of the scope of this paper, it is important to note that regional variations of this epic may exemplify resistance to traditional patriarchal constructions of this text. For further research on these sources, please refer to Paula Richman's *Many Rāmāyanas: The Diversity of Narrative Tradition in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).
- 3 Goldman, 20.
- 4 Within the context of ancient Indian epics, a trial by fire, or *agni parīksa*, connotes a purity test in which a woman passes through fire in order to prove her internal chastity. For further discussion of the trial by fire within the *Rāmāyana*, please refer to Linda Hess, "Rejecting Sīta: Indian Responses to the Ideal Man's Cruel Treatment of His Ideal Wife," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67, no.1 (1999): 1-32.
- 5 Sally Sutherland, "Sita and Draupadi: Aggressive Behavior and Female Role-Models in the Sanskrit Epics," *Journal of American Oriental Society* 109 Ap-Je (1989): 63.
- 6 VR II.34.27 in *The Rāmāyana of Vālmiki II Ayodhyākānda*, trans. Sheldon Pollock (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).
- 7 *Manu* 5.154 in *The Laws of Manu*, trans. Wendy Doniger (London: Penguin Books, 1991). *The Laws of Manu*, also known as the *Dharmaśāstras*, is an ancient Sanskrit treatise that prescribes correct moral behavior, particularly for *brāhmins* and kings. Here, it is important to note that the *Rāmāyana* may not directly borrow its conceptual ideas from the *Laws of Manu*, a possibility which seems to influence our discussion of the sources of *strīdharma*. However, we can see that the *Rāmāyana*'s prescriptions for correct wifely behavior fall within the orthodox brahminical paradigm of patriarchy, clearly expressed by the *Laws of Manu*. Wendy Doniger, in her introduction to the *Laws of Manu*, notes that "by the early centuries of the Common Era, Manu had become, and remained the standard source of authority in the orthodox tradition" (xviii). In light of the presence of similar notions of *strīdharma* found in *Laws of Manu* and the *Rāmāyana*, we can see that although Vālmiki may not specifically cite Manu, his epic still upholds the ideal brahminical and patriarchal paradigm Manu prescribes.
- 8 VR II.10.3.
- 9 VR II.10.16.
- 10 Sally Sutherland, "Seduction, Counter Seduction, and Sexual Role Models: Bedroom Politics and the Indian Epic," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 20 (1992): 249. While the discussion of Kaikeyī's sexual means of persuasion remains outside of the focus of this paper, it is important to note that the queen uses her position as Daśaratha's favorite wife to her advantage. Sutherland claims that "Kaikeyī's disruption of Daśaratha's plan for succession is accomplished through a form of counter-seduction, that is to say a denial of sexual favors, a type of seduction rare in the Sanskrit epics." For a further examination of Kaikeyī's use of sexual authority, please refer to Sutherland's article "Seduction, Counter Seduction, and Sexual Role Models."

11 VR II.12.2-3.

12 It is important to note that the male characters of this text, Daśaratha in this case, maintain a rigid adherence to *dharma*, specifically focusing on their duties as righteous monarchs. However, Daśaratha ultimately fails to adhere to correct kingly behavior by subjecting himself to his wife's demands, an issue that I will later discuss as underlying Rāma's unjust treatment of his own wife. For a further examination of Daśaratha's character, please see Sheldon Pollock's translation of the *Ayodhyākānda*, specifically his discussion of kingship (58-63).

13 VR II.21.21.

14 VR II.26.3-5.

15 Interestingly, Rāma uses Sītā's exact logic during a previous debate with his mother, Kauśalya, in an attempt to convince the queen to remain by her husband's side rather than accompany Rāma to the forest. Therefore, Rāma's refusal of Sītā's request conflicts with his previous justification given to Kauśalya to prevent her from abandoning her husband. A further discussion of this contradiction can be found in Robert Goldman's article "Resisting Rāma: Dharmic Debates on Gender and Hierarchy in the Work of the Vālmiki's *Rāmāyana*," in *The Rāmāyana Revisited*, ed. Mandakranta Bose (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 19-46.

16 Goldman, 32.

17 VR III.43.20,22 in *The Rāmāyana of Vālmiki III Aranyakānda*, trans. Sheldon Pollock (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

18 Sutherland, "Sītā and Draupadī," 76.

19 Hess, 6.

20 VR II.27.3.

21 Goldman, 31.

22 It is important to note that while Kaikeyī seems to employ an active persuasive strategy, Sītā's subversive attempts reveal her passive means of resistance. However, as I will soon discuss in the end of this paper, Sītā retains the ability for active autonomy, specifically exemplified by her final suicidal act.

23 Ibid.

24 Sutherland, "Seduction, Counter Seduction, and Sexual Role Models," 249.

25 *Manu* 3.55.

26 In light of Sītā's employment of her wifely position to express feminine authority, we may question whether such an analysis remains applicable to her interactions with her brother-in-law. However, because the *Laws of Manu* mandate that *all* men must revere the women of their family, the possibility of Sītā exerting control over Lakṣmana remains.

27 *Manu* 3.55 and 5.154.

28 Pollock, *Ayodhyākānda*, 32.

29 VR III.43.27.

30 VR II.7.30.

31 VR II.8.18,27.

32 Sutherland, "Seduction, Counter Seduction, and Sexual Role Models," 243-44.

33 Pollock, *Ayodhyākānda*, 27.

34 Sutherland, "Seduction, Counter Seduction, and Sexual Role Models," 243-44.

35 VR II.99.3.

36 Sutherland, "Seduction, Counter Seduction, and Sexual Role Models," 244.

37 Pollock, *Ayodhyākānda*, 29.

38 VR II.101.9-10.

39 Pollock, *Ayodhyākānda*, 29.

40 *The Concise Rāmāyana of Vālmiki*, trans. Swami Venkatesanda (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 402.

41 Sutherland, "Draupadi and Sitā," 77.

42 *The Concise Rāmāyana of Vālmiki*, 376.

43 Goldman, 38.

44 *Ibid*, 39.

45 Sutherland, "Draupadi and Sitā," 77.

46 VR II.47.13.

47 Sutherland, "Draupadi and Sitā," 78-9.

48 Pratap Kumar, "Sitā in the Last Episode of the *Rāmāyana*: Contrasting Paradigms from Both Bhavabhūti and Vālmiki," *Journal for the Study of Religion* (March 1992): 61.

49 *The Concise Rāmāyana of Vālmiki*, 402.

50 Kumar, 57.

51 In support of such preconceived notions, particularly referring to Sitā's role as an ideal wife, please refer to Sutherland's study of male and female devotees from Uttar Pradesh in "Sitā and Draupadi," 63.

THE VIOLENCE OF DEVOTION

Bhakti, Jains, and the *Periyapurāṇam* in Telling Early Medieval Tamil History (7th to 12th c.)¹

Steven M. Vose

The *Periyapurāṇam*, a twelfth-century Tamil hagiography from South India, recounts episodes from the lives of the sixty-three Śaiva poet-saints (*nāyaṇmārs*), who embody the highest ideals of devotion (*bhakti*) to Śiva.² A major theme in this work by Cēkkiḷār, a Cōḷa court minister to King Kulōtuṅga II (r. 1130-50), is the expression of devotion to Śiva through violent acts. Two of the earliest and most important poet-saints, Appar (ca. 570-670) and Campantar (ca. 638-54), feature scathing invectives against Jains in many of their hymns (*tamiḷ*), collected in the tenth-century *Tēvāram*. These hymns are still popular today and were an important part of Śaiva temple worship and court poetry in the twelfth century. Appar, as seen in his poetry and Cēkkiḷār's hagiography, was a Jain monk who *reconverted* to the Śaivism of his family after being stricken with a severe stomach ailment that only Śiva could cure. Likewise, a key episode in Campantar's life is the conver-

sion of the Pāṇṭīyan king of southernmost India and the resulting impalement of 8,000 Jain monks on stakes as punishment for losing in debate with him.

This essay will examine the role and importance of these anti-Jain polemics and acts of violence to the Tamil Śaiva tradition and to the modern telling of the history of early medieval Tamilnadu. I contend that opposition to Jainism was a central part of the process of identity building for Tamil Śaivas, especially in the royal courts. These Tamil Śaivas sought to establish their tradition as an intimate, natural and unique part of Tamilnadu by portraying the Jains as un-Tamil others. Cēkkiḷār's work presents us with not only a hagiography of devotees who go to great extremes in their single-minded devotion to Śiva, but also a particular way of telling the history of Tamilnadu from the seventh to the twelfth century as the story of establishing Śaivism as *the* religion of Tamilnadu.

A lasting legacy of the *Periyapurāṇam* is that modern scholars have tended to read it as an actual history of the period that accounts for the elimination of Jainism, not only from an influential place in the royal courts but also as a substantial Tamil community, contrary to other literary, archaeological and inscriptional evidence. Another problem with the modern reading of the *Periyapurāṇam*, significant to the study of Jainism, is that it has defined who the pre-modern Jains in Tamilnadu were: an exclusive group of ascetic mendicants beholden to a foreign ideology with suspect influence in royal courts. This was aided by the scholarly belief that lay Jains engaged in religious practices “borrowed” from the temple worship of Śaiva devotees, which amounted to a degeneration of “true” Jainism and therefore not important to the study of that tradition.

This paper is divided into three sections. First I will look at Anne E. Monius's analysis of the *Periyapurāṇam* as a court text. Here, I argue that the context of the *Periyapurāṇam* was such that it glorified acts of violence to show that Śaivism—unlike Jainism—was “in tune” with the goals of Cōḷa kingship. Further, it offered a path to liberation (*mokṣa*) for the king that did not demand that he ultimately needed to renounce kingship to achieve it.

Next, I look at some strategies for creating a Śaiva identity that cast itself as deeply and uniquely Tamil, in direct or indirect opposition to Jainism. First, I argue that the *Tēvāram* hymns tap into the naturalism of Caṅkam poetics, the classical Tamil literature. Likewise, Cēkkiḷār's use of long, ornate accounts of the Tamil countryside in his hagiography indirectly opposed the Jain ideology of transitoriness that inspires worldly renunciation. Secondly, I show that the *nāyaṅmārs* associated Jainism with spiritual and physical sickness, disease and general unhealthiness, illustrated through the stories of Appar's own reconver-

sion and Campantar's conversion of the Pāṇṭiyan king. Such associations further portrayed Jainism as antithetical to Tamil kingship, and more saliently as wasted ascetic effort that denied the Tamil love of the natural world and established the belief that salvation was available only through Śiva's grace. Thirdly, I examine Campantar's charge that Jains did not know the Tamil language, the most direct attack against Jains that cast them as un-Tamil others. Such subtle and overt forms of casting Jains as others were central to the process of creating a Śaiva identity that was intimately Tamil. Fourth, I examine Cēkkiḷār's narrative of Appar's reconversion and Campantar's fateful debate with the Jains, and suggest that these could be read as metaphors for the development of the tradition.

In the final section, I contend with the standard historiography of early medieval Tamilnadu that gives primacy to the *Periyapurāṇam*'s account of the Jains, which fails to regard the text's context as a highly important part of the story it told. By introducing literary, inscriptional, archaeological and art historical evidence of a continuous—if dwindling—Jain presence in Tamilnadu throughout the seventh to twelfth centuries and beyond, and evidence that Jains developed a bhakti tradition in ways that a simple borrowing hypothesis cannot account for, I argue that the context and purpose of the *Periyapurāṇam* must be taken into consideration to bridge the discrepancy between evidence and historiography. The violence in the text, then, is best seen as a court polemic and not as a reliable historical source. I draw from Richard H. Davis a new model for thinking about the position of Jainism in medieval Tamilnadu.

A major part of scholars' tendency to read historical accuracy into the *Periyapurāṇam* rests in the practice of writing "core narrative" histories of dominant traditions, which tends not to account for the impact of minority or marginal groups. I visit this idea throughout the third section and conclude with some thoughts about how to conceive of religious traditions in South Asia to yield more complexity and a fuller understanding of the processes by which religious traditions interact and, thus, can be defined.

Violence in the *Periyapurāṇam*

The *Periyapurāṇam* was written at a time when Śaivism was already the predominant tradition in Tamilnadu. Monius states that about a third of the sixty-three *nāyaṇmārs* use violence as a major trope in expounding their love (*aṅṇu*) of Śiva. She discusses the various takes scholars of Tamil Śaivism have on the religious meaning of the violence in the *Periyapurāṇam*. One camp sees the violence of the poet-saints as a "metaphor for the single-minded intensity

of devotion demanded by Śiva.”³ Hudson, for example, argues that violence has a purifying effect, such that offending body parts or people can be purified through their respective removal or slaughter, though it is unclear whether non-Śaivas so benefit from being slaughtered. What is most pleasing to Śiva is not the violence itself but the intensity of devotion that causes one to act in such ways.⁴ Violence and bloodshed are displays of devotion that disregard even the most important social conventions. The other camp sees the violence of the Tamil poets as part of the Tamil literary tradition. The connection between love and violence was an essential part of the identity of the hero in the classical Caṅkam literature of the first three centuries CE.⁵ In this model, Tamil culture is made manifest in the milieu of nascent bhakti literature.

Monius raises some apt objections to both of these models. In critiquing the first model of bhakti-born violence, she asks why it is not a more prevalent theme in devotional hagiographies throughout India. The second model leaves her puzzled because the period in which this poetry flourished was one of relative peace and calm under the rule of the Cōḷa dynasty, with extensive patronage of Śaiva monastic orders (*maṭam*). In a rare twelfth-century commentary on Cēkkiḷār’s work, there is a sense that such “harsh action” is admirable for its reflection of devotion, though distant from the “gentle” expressions of devotion more common to the average Śaiva.⁶ Noting that most Śaiva devotees were probably not overtly violent, my focus here is on the place such rhetoric had in twelfth-century Tamilnadu.

Monius, quoting from Vamadeva, states that the *nāyaṅmārs*’ use of violent love (*vaṅṅaṅpu*) “project[s] [the] kingly role of the ancient and mediaeval Tamil country’ onto the lives and deeds of the nayanmar.”⁷ Many of the poet-saints who tapped into the classical literary tradition to express the extent of their religious devotion with violent imagery cast themselves as not just religious but also political heroes who upheld Tamil religion—Śaivism—from foreign others with their own blood and devotion. Vamadeva outlines a typology of “violent love” found in Śaiva literature about these poet-saints, including the *Periyapurāṇam*. She identifies killing or maiming oneself, one’s relatives and one’s non-relatives as six distinct categories of violent expression. All of these function equally as expressions of heroic devotion and seem equally free of any moral or karmic burden. However, the will to inflict violence on others seems quite different from inflicting suffering or violence on oneself or one’s family members as an expression of single-minded devotion, since there is little sense that extra-familial violence should evoke personal suffering or breach *varṇāśrama dharma*,⁸ especially in the context of a king defending his land.

Contextualizing Violence: The *Periyapurāṇam* and the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*

Monius points out that the violence depicted in the *Periyapurāṇam* is more emphasized and elaborate than previous accounts of the same incidents from earlier times, and accounts for it by “taking seriously” the assertion made by the fourteenth-century Śaiva philosopher, Umāpati, that the purpose of the *Periyapurāṇam* was to “lure king Anapāya Cōla away from his addiction to [the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*].”⁹ The *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* is a Jain text, written in the ninth century and generally regarded by Tamils of all faiths as one of the “Five Great Epics” of Tamil literature.¹⁰ The glorification of violence in the *Periyapurāṇam* was made for the purpose of gaining exclusive royal patronage for Śaivism by supplanting the Jain text.

In her consideration of how the *Periyapurāṇam* is a response to the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, Monius compares the graphic violent imagery of Cēkkiḷār to the way the Jain author, Tiruttakkatēvar, uses overly graphic imagery of sex and battlefield violence to evoke disgust (*bibhatsā*) for worldly life. Ryan argues that the purpose of the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* is to “stretch and rupture” the classical poetic mode (*rasa*) of (erotic) love (*śṛṅgāra*) to display the physical excesses of worldly life that lead to the main character’s renunciation.¹¹ The work actually evokes several other *rasas*, namely disgust (*bibhatsā*), heroism (*vīra*) and, with the main character’s renunciation, quiescence (*śānta*). It is also a farce or satire of love, a genre seen in plays by the seventh-century Pallava king Mahendravarman I.¹² Monius argues persuasively that the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*’s ridicule of love in a religious context could easily be read as a polemic against bhakti, which is predicated on love for a transcendent, though immanent, lord who grants salvation through grace (*aruḷ*).¹³

The *Periyapurāṇam* uses the same meter and several other literary devices first used by the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*. Importantly, both the Jain epic and the *Periyapurāṇam* begin with a rich evocation of the Tamil countryside, the grandeur of the royal city and the virtue of the king. Monius suggests that the purpose of the text is to

recover the idea of love...from the wastebin of sarcasm constructed so subtly by Tiruttakkatēvar...by imagining new expressions of love through the cultivation of a new kind of *rasa* aesthetic: love mixed with *vīra*, the “heroic”. In so reconstituting the literary notion of loving devotion, Cēkkiḷār champions a new definition of love, of *aṅṅpu*, of *bhakti* for the lord that befits a king (such as his royal patron...) who must act decisively in the world.¹⁴

This mixture of love and heroism grants a place in the Śaiva tradition for the killing of non-relatives as a mark of kingly religious duty; at once displaying his level of devotion and his benevolence—the king is simultaneously an ideal devotee and incarnation of Śiva himself. Inscriptional evidence suggests there was a precedent of the king being identified with Śiva as early as the seventh century.¹⁵ Associating the king with Śiva was a powerful way to demonstrate Śaivism's investment in the wellbeing and prosperity of Tamilnadu.

The *Periyapurāṇam* derives its use of martial heroic imagery directly from the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*. Austerities (*tapas*) were outward acts of service and devotion to evoke Śiva's liberating grace, while the ascetic austerities of the Jain mendicants focused on selfish liberation.¹⁶ This is not merely an admonition that Jainism was not somehow "community-focused," but rather that its soteriological path was antithetical to the kingly duty to protect the kingdom. The main character of the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* had to renounce his kingship to fully participate in the Jain religious life, which is not necessary for a Śaiva.¹⁷

The theology of Śiva in the *Periyapurāṇam* is likewise rather martial and devoid of erotic imagery, which is conspicuous because erotic imagery is ubiquitous in other Śaiva traditions. Cēkkiḷār draws on four major episodes from Purāṇic¹⁸ mythology to demonstrate Śiva's warrior characteristics. He does not include episodes of Śiva acting out of erotic passion or in defense of others so taken by erotic emotion. Śiva is a paternal figure who grants liberation to his devotees, the *nāyaṇmārs*, protecting them from anyone who would come between the devotee and his or her worship of Śiva.¹⁹ For example, the first story told is of Śiva using Viṣṇu in his Buddha incarnation (*avatāra*) to lure demons away from worshipping him so he can rid the universe of their destructiveness by killing them (save for three who remain steadfast Śaivas).²⁰ Through such selective use of Purāṇic imagery Cēkkiḷār created a theology of Śiva who models martial violence against non-Śaivas as a paradigmatic way to protect the world. As Monius concludes, a theology of Śiva devoid of erotic imagery is a new mode of Śaiva devotionism—influenced by the Jain *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*.²¹

In sum, analyzing the *Periyapurāṇam* in light of the text it sought to supplant gives insight into the revived antagonism toward Jains in the twelfth century that was apparent in the seventh-century *Tēvāram* poetry of Appar and Campantar. Violence against Jains became a central element in establishing Śaivism's Tamil identity: Jains are reconstituted as others who are fundamentally out of step with the worldly obligations of the king. Additionally, Jains are subtly construed as un-Tamil because their soteriological path was not compatible with the obligations of kingship.

Anti-Jain Polemics and Tamil Identity in the *Tēvāram* and *Periyapurāṇam*

To be clear, the *Periyapurāṇam* recounts stories of violence against Jains recorded centuries after the original *nāyaṇmārs'* era. The *Tēvāram* hymns were well known by the twelfth century; images of the sixty-three poet-saints were worshipped in Śiva temples throughout Tamilnadu. However, the poems composed by the first three *nāyaṇmārs*, Appar, Campantar, and Cuntarar, were not compiled into the *Tēvāram* proper until the tenth century by Nampi Āṅṅār Nampī.²² His own verses on the lives of the *nāyaṇmārs* expand on the gore and violence, and tell for the first time the full story of Campantar's debate and the massacre of the Jains; the *Periyapurāṇam* amplified this violence further for literary and hagiographical effect. Here I examine some identity-building strategies found in the *Tēvāram* that are featured prominently in the *Periyapurāṇam* and are either directly anti-Jain or establish a worldview that is incompatible with Jain ideals.

Indira V. Peterson sees these polemics in the tradition of competition between Vedic-Brahmaṇic religion and the *śramaṇa* (anti-Brahmaṇic; Jain, Buddhist, etc.) traditions, stemming from the Gupta dynasty (fourth-sixth century CE). She argues that the "negative representation of the Jains was an important part of a process of self-definition and consolidation of power for the Tamil Śaiva sect," as part of a larger project to fashion "a communal identity for Tamils, based on the celebration of Śaiva sectarian ideals and the exclusion of non-Śaiva ones." The *Tēvāram* and *Periyapurāṇam*, like many bhakti texts, "are notable for the readiness with which they reveal their affiliation with *particular places, local events, and regional society and culture.*"²³ The *Tēvāram* poets and Cēkkiḷār were deeply interested in localizing Śaivism to gain exclusivity, and accomplished this by casting Jains and Buddhists as alien, degenerative forces within Tamilnadu.

These two seventh-century *nāyaṇmārs* criticized Buddhist monks with rather banal remarks about their ochre robes and their false doctrines. Their most creative and concentrated invective, however, was levied against Jain mendicants. Jains are physically and ritually dirty, shameless (i.e. go naked or wear mats), convert by deception, eat standing up, and are *camaṇars* (Skt., *śramaṇa*; 'striver'), referring to their 'useless' self-mortifying ascetic practices.²⁴ While the Śaivas' chief doctrinal concern was the *śramaṇas'* failure to accord Śiva his proper place as Sadāśiva, the preeminent being, the thrust of their invectives concern the Jains' social acceptability and engagement with the Tamil culture.²⁵ Buddhists seem somewhat socially acceptable to the *nāyaṇmārs* despite their

heretical views. The Jains, however, are wholly unacceptable for reasons I will discuss in the following section.

Naturalism, Wellbeing, and Language: Casting Jains as Others

An important and rather overlooked aspect of the *Tēvāram* is its affirmation of the Tamil landscape and nature. The early Caṅkam literature, according to Yocum and Flood, expressed the range of poetic emotional evocations (*rasas*) in terms of the landscape and corresponding flowers, crops and animals. For example, the various experiences of love—intimacy, longing, and separation—are associated with mountains and flowers, the seashore and fishermen, the desert and desert flowers.²⁶ Over half of the 696 hymns (*tamil*, also *pattu*, ‘decad’) by Appar and Campantar are about the images in the various temples to which they traveled and most include extensive discussion of the landscape. They simultaneously characterized the landscape surrounding the temple as part of the religious encounter with Śiva.²⁷

This naturalism functions as an indirect polemic in that Jain asceticism is deemed antithetical to the love of nature and the sensory world, which Śaivas affirmed as Śiva’s manifestation and creation. The manifestation of Śiva in the Tamil landscape casts Jainism as uninterested in Tamilnadu. Jain ascetic practice was useless self-mortification that denied Śiva’s primacy by denying the beauty of the Tamil landscape. It strikes me that this strong naturalism, so heavily rooted in classical Tamil poetics, served to connect the Śaivas both with the sophisticated court poetry and to create an imagined Tamilnadu unified by Śaivism. Śaivas characterized the Jain ascetic ethos as world denying, making it rhetorically impossible for Jains to be as intimately involved with Tamilnadu’s wellbeing.²⁸

Sickness is also a common theme of the characterizations of the Jains. Appar’s stomach ailment is central to his reconversion to Śaivism, and Śiva’s miraculous cure punctuates many of his poems that discuss Jain hygienic habits of not bathing or cleaning their teeth. A key story in the *Periyapurāṇam* that characterizes Jains as sickly, unhealthful people is Campantar’s restoring the hunchbacked Pāṇṭiya Jain king to health, completing his conversion to Śaivism. Most importantly, viewed in a Brāhmaṇic culture of ritual purity that includes bathing as a prerequisite to engaging in rituals, not bathing is an extreme act of cultural and religious defiance.²⁹

One of Campantar’s most common charges against the Jains is that they did not know “good Tamil” and defamed Sanskrit by “loudly declaiming in the corrupt Prakrit tongue.”³⁰ As a Brāhmaṇ, Campantar may have been keen to

make a strong association between Sanskrit and Tamil. This linguistic association effectively solidified the alliance between Vedic-Brāhmaṇic and Tamil cultures at the expense of the Jains who were made the immanent others.³¹

Appar, Campantar and the Agenda of the *Periyapurāṇam*

I do not wish to challenge the historicity of these two figures, but rather view the roughly five centuries that separate their lives and Cēkkiḷār's hagiography as enough time to mythologize the events of their lives. The *Periyapurāṇam* drew on their lives as a major component for establishing the Tamil Śaiva ethos. Reading their lives as part of the creation myth of the tradition itself would shed new light on the early attitudes of Śaivas toward Jains. To wit, Appar's life exemplifies reconversion from Jainism back to 'original' Śaivism; Campantar's story of authorizing the impaling of 8,000 Jain ascetics upon converting the Pāṇṭiyan king stresses that Jains were un-Tamil others to be eradicated from royal court and countryside alike.

Appar: The Reconverted Śaiva

There are actually three conversions central to Appar's life—two of his own and one of the Pallava king, Mahendravarman I (c. 571-630), the earliest temple patron from whom we have an inscription. Rabe argues that the inscriptions show Mahendravarman self-identified with Śiva in the temples he commissioned. In sometimes bawdy and challenging language, the king does such things as associate his control of the Kaveri River with Śiva bringing the Gaṅgā (Ganges River) to earth, and declares that his faith in Śiva assures the lord's presence at a particular nearby mountain. In his strongest language, the king declares that he should be known as *liṅgin*, meaning one who possesses or is "modified by Śiva's...icon."³² While not mentioned by name in the *Periyapurāṇam* or *Tēvāram*, he is traditionally understood to be the king who subjected Appar to various tortures on behalf of the Jains in his court, only to be converted by Appar's miracles, effectively becoming the first Śaiva *bhakta* king.

Appar was born into a Śaiva family and converted to Jainism, becoming the head of his order.³³ Afflicted with a stomach ailment that Jain medicine could not cure he turned to his sister, who was distraught over his apostasy. She recommended that he seek out Śiva. He was cured by the ash and mantra of Śiva (*nāmaḥ Śivāya*), effecting his reconversion. Śiva intentionally afflicted Appar to bring him back to his family's faith; other versions claim he was afflicted by

Śiva due to his sister's constant worry. Many of Appar's hymns in the *Tēvāram* feature a lament for having been part of the "base, deluded" Jain tradition.³⁴

The Jains of Appar's order saw his desertion as a serious breach that could not go unpunished. Here the popular tradition claims Mahendravarman I was the Jain king who agreed to execute him, subjecting him to several torturous execution methods. Appar emerged from each attempt unscathed due to his single-minded devotion to Śiva. Frustrated—and trampled by an elephant—the Jains gave up. Mahendravarman was so moved by the miraculous events that he too converted to Śaivism. His first act of devotion was to destroy the "pagodas of the Jains and buil[d] a temple for Lord Śiva."³⁵ The first *nāyanmār* converted the Pallava king, effectively claiming that political realignment began at the outset of the tradition. It also established an ideal of Śaiva kingship based on temple patronage and included destruction of Jain religious sites. Appar's life in the broader context of the *Tēvāram* hymns' disparagement and othering of Jains created a model for Tamils to "re-"convert to Śaivism: Jainism need not be a lifelong affliction.

Campantar's Debate

The debate that transpired in Madurai, the Pāṇṭīyan capital, suggests that arguing doctrinal differences was less important to Cēkkiḷār's account of the competition between Śaivas and Jains than Campantar's ability to influence kings and effect widespread conversion of Tamil people to Śaivism. Rather than a debate in the typical sense—a composed comparison of the logic of tenets and positions—the very fecundity of the traditions was compared through supernatural means: miracles and magic.³⁶ Cēkkiḷār seems less interested in showing the twelfth-century Tamil Śaiva court that Śaivism was somehow a more rational, sensible or logical tradition than Jainism, but rather that Śaivism was *real*, in opposition to the Jains, who despite their influence in the courts of Campantar's day, practiced a false and ineffectual religion.

The Jain monks in the Pāṇṭīyan court try to dispose of Campantar through "black magic" before the debate begins by burning down the building in which he was sleeping. Campantar responds with a hymn that transfers the fire to the king in the form of an intense fever. The Jain efforts to alleviate the fever only make it worse. Finally, the queen and chief minister, both Pallava Śaivas, bring Campantar before the king to "bestow his grace" and ameliorate the fever.³⁷ Campantar's personal power as a devotee outmatched the Jains'.

The debate then proceeded from personal to doctrinal power. Thrown into fire and then water, the Śaiva scriptures proved durable, withstanding both

unscathed. The Jain texts did not fare as well, which effectively established the superiority of the Śaiva doctrine. Finally, popular tradition maintains that the king was a hunchback and was cured by the sight and touch of the child saint—as a conduit of Śiva’s power. However, it is unclear from either the *Tēvāram* or *Periyapurāṇam* that this was so, only that the king “rose tall” upon his conversion. His conversion effected the conversion of his subjects; the queen tells Campantar in an earlier episode that his subjects had followed him after his conversion to Jainism, following the maxim that “as the king is, so too his subjects.”³⁸ The number of Jains impaled is traditionally said to be 8,000, though there is no number specified in the *Periyapurāṇam*. The lack of any inscriptions or other record of such a massacre seems conspicuous, and so it is more likely that the number became set at mythic proportions as the story of Campantar’s debate grew in mythological stature. Hudson mentions that murals of this scene are still common in Śiva temples in South India.

Phyllis Granoff discusses the roles of divine intervention, divine sanction, and black magic in Vedānta debates recounted in hagiographies. She shows that the relative abilities of the humans exchanging doctrinal positions rarely prove conclusive, and that frequently debaters resort to supernatural means to gain the edge. The result is a victory won on both the human and supra-mundane levels, establishing the power of the tradition as a whole.³⁹ For all intents and purposes, Campantar’s job is to establish the reality of Śiva and demonstrate the superior power of the bhakta who acts with the powers accumulated through devotion to him. Further, “black magic” plays a central role in this debate. The relative ineffectiveness of the Jains’ sorcery against Campantar’s proves the overall superiority of the Śaiva path. The king’s restoration to full health confirms that the debate was won honestly. The king’s first act as a Śaiva is to display his own *vaṅṅaṅpu* by ordering the impaling of the 8,000 Jain monks.

One question remains: why is Campantar so strongly opposed to the Jains? Other *nāyaṅmārs* do not seem as concerned with destroying the Jains and focus instead on cultivating devotion to Śiva without concern for the *śramaṇa* traditions. In seeking to answer this question, C.V. Narayana Ayyar examines Campantar’s repeated claims that the Jains condemn the Vedas and Vedic ritual.⁴⁰ If we read his life as a metaphor for the tradition, his Brahmin identity combined with his status as a devotee would be a metaphor for the Brāhmaṇic alliance with “respectable cultivating groups”—the Vellalas—that rose to power with the Pallavas in the Kaveri River delta.⁴¹ Campantar’s story would give mythological legitimacy to the Cōlas’ continued effort to consolidate power across Tamilnadu in Cēkkiḷār’s time. Cēkkiḷār’s hagiography appropriated the

Tēvāram ideologies and images for the purpose of having an authoritative source for the “segmentary state” in which the Cōlas would maintain power in Tamilnadu by granting relative autonomy to localities while maintaining a “religious hegemony.”⁴² The widespread worship of the poet-saints in the form of temple images in the twelfth century suggests that the *Periyapurāṇam* accessed immense popular power in establishing that legitimacy.⁴³

Telling the History of Early Medieval Tamilnadu

Richard H. Davis points to a “standard narrative” from which many modern scholars draw and concomitantly reify in discussing the development of bhakti traditions in Tamil history, which is typically understood to be the same as the history of the Tamil Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava traditions.⁴⁴ I will present it here briefly and then discuss some issues to be taken up with this standard model.

Glenn Yocum presents a concise version of the standard historiography: Tamil bhakti emerged from indigenous Tamil religious traditions that became a widespread single tradition through the incorporation of Sanskritic cultural elements. Beginning with the early Caṅkam literature and religion of the first centuries CE, which he characterizes as “pre-Āryan,” he notices an “increasing of ‘Āryanization’ of Tamil literature and religion,” meaning an increasing influence of northern Indian culture and traditions that were brought in with the southern migration of Buddhism and Jainism. The “religio-cultural forces” of Jainism and Buddhism, he argues, dominated Tamil literature in the fourth through seventh centuries. Two epics, which he characterizes as “late Caṅkam texts, punctuate this period: the Jain *Cilappatikāram* and the Buddhist *Maṇimēkalai*. The actual authorship of the *Cilappatikāram* is uncertain, but is thought to be Jain because a Jain nun plays a key role in it. The text discusses many religious traditions, however, and does not feature any final conversion story or sectarian moralization. Yocum calls these centuries a “dark period” for South Indian political power, marked by the unstable rule of the Kalabhras who patronized Buddhism and Jainism. This accounts for the resulting antagonism the bhakti poets show toward the *śramaṇa* traditions.⁴⁵

The bhakti works of the seventh through ninth centuries indicate to Yocum a “revival, a reassertion of distinctively Tamil elements that may have been suppressed during a period of Jain and Buddhist cultural hegemony.” He is careful to note that the revival does not mean a reproduction of the “*status quo ante*,” but rather a syncretism of indigenous Tamil deities and rituals with Brahmanical gods from the north, namely Śiva and Viṣṇu.⁴⁶ The religious expression of the devotional poets however, is distinctly Tamil. He further claims that the

lyric poetry of the Tamil bhaktas is accessible to the population at large: “[t]he language is fairly simple and direct, accessible to ordinary people.” Since almost half of the poet-saints of the *Periyapurānam* were non-Brahmin, he sees this movement as an emergence of indigenous Tamil traditions within Brahmanical theism. Finally, he states that “unlike the monastic tendencies of Jainism and Buddhism[, b]hakti was compatible with the everyday tasks of the common villager,” meaning that one needs only devotion and not the intellectual, monastic life to have access to liberation.⁴⁷ Other sources are more overt in characterizing Buddhism and especially Jainism as world-denying, pessimistic traditions and argue that they were fundamentally out of step with the Tamil ethos characterized by the naturalism of the Caṅkam poetry, and that they denied salvation to their laity.⁴⁸ However, to accept such assertions that Śaivism was simply a reemergence of the indigenous Tamil identity suppressed by the Buddhists and Jains is to accept uncritically the specific strategic claims made by the Śaivas and to reify a notion of a “natural” regional identity that exists beyond historical vicissitudes.⁴⁹

Burton Stein presented what Davis called the “most satisfying version of the standard narrative.”⁵⁰ Therein, Stein creates a model of a “Kalabhra interregnum” in which this Jain-patronizing warrior clan from the Tamil highlands attempted to dominate the plains people, abusing the local Brāhmaṇ population. The Pallavas, also Jains, were a competing dynasty that sought to create a “Brāhmaṇ-peasant alliance” by forcibly settling Brāhmaṇs among the high status Vellala peasants. Jainism presented a way for ruling parties to gain access to “Āryan” status without identifying with the peasant population, which was increasingly following a syncretic Brāhmaṇic-indigenous tradition as a result of this “alliance”. Local deities, such as Murukaṇ, were incorporated into the Brahmanic pantheons of Śiva and Viṣṇu. When the Pallavas rose to power, their devotional, temple-based religious system displaced Jainism and Buddhism, and even superseded the high Brāhmaṇic sacrifice rituals (*yajña*).⁵¹ Stein writes elsewhere that the “bhakti ideology and devotional forms reinforced the constitution of communities through worship.”⁵² The Pallavas used Śaivism to further their political goal of unifying Tamilnadu under their control by incorporating it under one religious tradition.

By way of a cursory critique of this model, I must point out three things. The first is the characterization of the fourth through seventh centuries as a time when the *śramaṇa* traditions gained access to Tamilnadu on the back of a malevolent empire. Art historical evidence shows that Jainism and Buddhism had been present in the farthest reaches of South India, in the Pāṇṭiya region, since the second century BCE. Secondly, whatever ascendancy or hegemony

was gained by these traditions in the “dark” Kalabhra period, it must be qualified that these traditions remained part of the supposedly exclusively Brāhmaṇic succeeding dynasties, if in a less exclusive capacity. Further, three centuries is a long time to suppress popular traditions completely, without some contact between traditions. Finally, there is no space for devotionalism to have arisen in Jainism (or Buddhism); he assumes that no Jainism exists outside the mendicant orders tied to royal courts. It is also presumed that the poet-saints wrote popular poetry for a widespread Śaiva tradition participated in by royalty and laity alike, while any Jain devotional tradition was simply borrowed from Tamil Hindu bhakti as a later accretion, and hence would not factor importantly in this discussion.

Challenging the “Standard Narrative”

Davis argues that the *Periyapurāṇam* establishes its own very specific history of Tamilnadu in the early medieval period that characterizes the Tamil Śaiva polemic against Jains from the seventh through ninth centuries as a time of Śaiva revival against supposedly foreign Jain influences. As we saw, this characterization has remained a powerful frame of reference that modern scholars have used in writing the social, political and religious history of medieval Tamilnadu, which other evidence suggests is oversimplified. Surely any tradition, especially a minority tradition with a substantially smaller contingency than the dominant one, could not stand up to widespread persecution for long, let alone for over five centuries. Leslie C. Orr argues that the issue with this historiography is that the discrete categories of “Hindu” and “Jain” create a polarized view of the conflict between these groups, and limits the possibility of seeing the religious landscape of this period in more nuanced ways.⁵³ By examining archaeological, literary and inscriptional evidence, the ways that the Jain community may have conceptualized their Jain-ness can be brought to light, most importantly for this essay by examining the long history of the Jains’ own bhakti traditions.

Some 530 Jain inscriptions have been found in Tamilnadu; 350 of these date from the eighth to thirteenth centuries. The earliest are concentrated in the Pāṇṭiyan south, but after the tenth century they are predominantly in the north.⁵⁴ Additionally, Vēluppiḷḷai notes that the Jain communities appear to have been comprised of three elite caste groups, Brāhmaṇs, traders, and cultivators, and hailed from Kāñcipuram in the north to the Cōḷa capital Thanjavur, and to Madurai further south.⁵⁵ As Orr shows, the inscriptions continue through the thirteenth century, though diminishing substantially after the

ninth, and bespeak of a community of religious leaders that patronized temples. Rather than sharply defining themselves as Digambara⁵⁶ Jain or Śaiva, the people in the inscriptions note the institutions—Jain *pallis* or Śaiva *maṭhas*—that supported them. They do not delineate whether they are laypersons or mendicants. Additionally, the Jain inscriptions were mainly found with Jina or *yakṣi*⁵⁷ images, indicating image worship was a well-established part of the tradition. The “religious women” and men of her inquiry are neither wandering ascetics nor exactly laypeople, blurring the definitions of each category for this historical period.⁵⁸

Archaeological evidence shows that freestanding temples began to be built in the fifth or early sixth century in Madhya Pradesh and slowly migrated southward.⁵⁹ Desai examines inscriptions and archaeological evidence to show that *yakṣis* were worshipped alongside Jina images in Tamilnadu as early as the second century CE. Goddesses appeared in temples around 550 CE, suggesting that a finely tuned, fully aware lay Jain tradition that engaged in temple worship (forbidden to mendicants) was thriving there. The Tamil cults uniquely incorporated the goddesses Ambikā—associated with the Jina Nēminātha—and Siddhāyikā—associated with Mahāvīra—while the most popular Jain goddess in other regions is Padmāvatī, associated with Parśva.⁶⁰ This suggests that Jain devotionism developed on its own in Tamilnadu.

Robert Zydenbos shows that a complex mythology arose around each Jina’s associated deities, predicated on the original story of Mahāvīra’s birth in which Indra leads the whole pantheon to bathe the newborn Jina, establishing the gods as the protectors of Jainism.⁶¹ Guardian deities were worshipped for more mundane, earthly benefits, rather than as part of the soteriological path exemplified by the Jinās. Scholars have construed the inclusion of deities to be a compromise with or borrowing from Hinduism as a strategy to draw people to Jainism—a popular accretion or degeneration of an originally pure tradition.⁶²

Orr argues that Jain bhakti forces us to cast new light on medieval Jainism in Tamilnadu. Orr challenges the notion that Jain bhakti was simply an outgrowth or response to Hindu bhakti, termed the “borrowing hypothesis.”⁶³ A.L. Basham gives us an example of this notion:

The chief gods of the Hindu pantheon found their way into Jaina temples in subordinate positions, and though there was no real compromise with theism the sect easily fitted into the Hindu order, its members forming distinct castes.⁶⁴

The challenge we must raise to this hypothesis is that it maintains the aforementioned polarized view of traditions, in this case “ascetic Jainism” versus “devotional Hinduism,” which fails to consider that these traditions may have been highly permeable religious systems that engaged a pervasive religiosity. Such a polarized view assumes that all goddesses are Hindu goddesses, missing the more complex pattern of goddess traditions that developed. Additionally, it assumes a fundamental separation between lay and mendicant Jain communities that simply cannot hold up since mendicants advise laity on commissioning images and take part in their consecration. Moreover, a viable mendicant community would have relied on lay Jain families for new initiates.

John E. Cort works from Orr’s apt challenge to conceive of new ways to distinguish and conceptualize the various traditions. He critiques the borrowing model by stating that “when a scholar argues that because a practice...has been borrowed from another tradition its role in the borrowing tradition is therefore of negligible importance, the scholar is making a fundamental error of judging the data by standards inappropriate to any form of objective scholarship.”⁶⁵ Examining the process by which such borrowings occur is an important dimension of scholarship denied by such reasoning. As an alternative, Cort argues that any tradition that has used the term *bhakti* contributes to the definition of the term. *Bhakti* is both tradition-specific and “Indian-wide, Indian-specific discourse.”⁶⁶ He also notes the *Paūmacariya* (Skt., *Padmacarita*, the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*) shows image worship was well established in the Jain community by the fifth century CE, effectively establishing that Jain communities would have engaged in *bhakti*-style image worship and probably would not have appeared markedly different from Śaiva temple worship. Though he is careful not to equate image worship with *bhakti* per se, the Śaiva *bhakti* at interest in this essay is also characterized in large part by temple image worship. In this light, we see that the *Periyapurāṇam* levels its attack against the mendicant community exclusively, not because they were the only Jains in Tamilnadu, but rather because they embodied the Jain ideology of ascetic values antithetical to Tamil Śaivism. Appar and Campantar criticize only the mendicants of the Jain community, and while Cēkkiḷār is interested in telling the history of how Tamilnadu became Śaiva (again) by disabusing itself of the Jains, his opponents are only those Jains who were found in the royal courts—mendicants.

If we accept Cort’s assertion that *bhakti* has been part of the Jain tradition from its earliest formation, then the reading of the *Civakacintāmaṇi* that Monius offers seems at first problematic. Does Tiruttakkaṭṭēvar’s critique of love as a motivating factor of religious practice show a fundamental divide within the Jain tradition between ascetic mendicants and a laity that engages in a Jain

bhakti tradition? Monius' reading requires us to push at the concept of love further still.⁶⁷ Cort asserts that bhakti has been a major factor for inspiring asceticism.⁶⁸ We should then read the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* in light of Jain values of self-restraint, controlled passions and ascetic ideals as a criticism of the kind of love inspired by worldly, sensory experiences and emotional excesses that characterize the *Tēvāram* bhaktas. Love in the broadest context of bhakti should be understood as a central motivating factor inspiring adherence to the values of each particular tradition. Love for a deity because of its ability to bestow salvation motivates one to be a devotee in the Hindu traditions. Similarly, love for the Jain soteriology and its exemplars (the Jinas) inspire asceticism as a distinctly Jain devotional form. The notion that bhakti was merely an accretion to Jainism as an effort to counter the attack leveled by the Śaiva (and Vaiṣṇava) bhaktas must be rejected.

Finally, Davis sets up a new model for conceptualizing the Jain experience in medieval Tamilnadu in light of the evidence presented here. Instead of a Hindu "revival," we see a new type of devotional religion, combining Tamil image worship to local deities with the Brāhmaṇic pantheon, values and authority. Such a view contends that changes in the religious landscape of Tamilnadu took place over a long stretch of time, allowing for the sustained, productive presence of Jainism through the sixteenth century as evidence strongly suggests.⁶⁹ It also allows us to see how Tamil Śaivism was engaged with the Jains, eliminating the notion that Jains were un-Tamil others who had no impact on the culture around them. We must then see the Śaiva anti-Jain polemics of the *Tēvāram* and *Periyapurāṇam* in a more politicized context. Such a model will allow the complexities of interaction between religious traditions to enrich our view of the religions of India and resist the tendency to essentialize and polarize traditions.

Conclusion: The Politics of Devotion and the Writing of History

This essay casts a critical reflection on the use of the *Periyapurāṇam* as an historical source for the rise of Śaiva devotionalism in medieval Tamilnadu. It begs that the context of the twelfth century be examined more closely to understand why the *nāyaṇmārs* were important to invoke at the height of Cōla South India. As hagiography, we see that the emphasis on *vaṇṇaṇpu* ("violent love") is strong, evident in about a third of the *nāyaṇmārs*' stories. In the context of the remainder of the work, we see an overall strategy of claiming Śaivism as the religion of Tamilnadu. The stories of Appar and Campantar cast the Jains as the ideal other, a central strategy in establishing the Tamil-ness of Śaivism.

We see in several places that the *Periyapurāṇam* drew upon the worldview of the *Tēvāram*, which was exactly the opposite of the Jain ethos, to cast Jains as un-Tamil others. Jain ascetic values demonstrated their disinterest in Tamilnadu. Further, Jains were considered diseased, unhealthy people, not the kinds with whom royal figures would want to associate. Jain soteriology was likewise antithetical to kingship, requiring renunciation for salvation. Finally, Jains did not know Sanskrit or Tamil. By critiquing and acting against the Jains, they wanted to demonstrate, in Peterson's words, that⁷⁰

[t]he language, aesthetic, and the cultural practices of the Tamil Śaivas are the natural flowering and consummation of a Tamil culture that includes and encompasses Vedic religion. The only way to participate in this synthetic culture, to be Tamil in the fullest sense, is to practice Śiva *bhakti*. The Jains...are inimical to Tamil culture itself.

All of these efforts seem most powerful and persuasive when viewed in the context of ongoing competition between Śaivas and Jains for royal patronage in the twelfth century, rather than a history of Tamils freeing themselves from the now-vanquished Jains. It may be more fruitful to see these polemics in this more limited, politicized context, while examining further the evidence for lay religious life that freely moved between these traditions. The simple Jain-Śaiva dichotomy of the *Periyapurāṇam* does not appear to be descriptive of medieval religiosity in light of other evidence. The efflorescence of Śaiva culture evidenced in the numerous temples scattered across the countryside bespeak of a long, glacial change whereby the devotional Śaivism became established and intimately associated with being Tamil.⁷¹

The worldview of the *Tēvāram* poet-saints was engaged at the height of the Cōla dynasty in Cēkkiḷār's hagiography. Accepting Stein's theory that the Cōlas sought to create a segmentary state linked by Śaivism, we see a clear political agenda for the *Periyapurāṇam*.⁷² Cēkkiḷār's strategy included casting Jains as un-Tamil, nefarious others in order to establish the Tamil authenticity of the Śaiva tradition. A major tactic in this part of his strategy was to invoke the lives of the deified poet-saints who struggled against the Jains centuries before. The problem with reading this agenda as an objective history is that the Jains remained an important and influential part of Tamilnadu into the sixteenth century, evidenced by their continued contributions to learned society and continued temple construction.⁷³ The commentary on the *Periyapurāṇam* suggests that the anti-Jain polemic was more focused in the political arena than on a plan for eradicating Jainism from the Tamil countryside.

That scholars have tended until recently to ignore the lay traditions, especially of the deep past, is predicated not on limited information but on a notion that the further we go into the past the more a religious tradition should resemble its canonical texts, specifically its earliest ones. Jains, as Nandi points out, did not distinguish themselves greatly from Brāhmaṇical culture—maintaining a caste system, sacred thread and even fire sacrifice rites, doing *pūjā*-like rituals in temples—nor did they strictly follow the prescriptions of their own religious texts when they created monasteries.⁷⁴ The messiness of lay religious life seems to have made scholars speak of lay practices as impure or degenerative forms of religion, measured against the ideals established in canonical texts. Notions of pure religion and privileging canonical texts still determine how many scholars write about religious traditions. In challenging the Hindu-Jain dichotomy, we must also challenge other such dichotomies as the lay-mendicant, and elite-popular distinctions I have used herein. Any polarized pairing breaks down on analysis; the distinction between Hindu and Jain breaks down by examining lay and popular practices, which has been particularly useful herein to problematize the standard narrative of medieval Tamil history.

In his most inspiring critique of the very conception by which we think of religious traditions as separate entities, Cort calls for a definition of Jainism that includes all modes of religious expression done by those who call themselves Jain, effectively eliminating the notion that a religious tradition is a reified ideological core made manifest. Instead, by according a place to the cumulative practices throughout time, we arrive at a more complete understanding of religion as a phenomenon. This aids our discussion of the Śaiva encounter with the Jains by according the *Periyapurāṇam* its proper place in the Śaiva tradition and the historiography of early medieval Tamilnadu. We must contextualize its purpose as a twelfth century, highly politicized hagiography, not as an accurate historical account of the declining population of Tamil Jains due to the emancipation of Tamil culture in the form of Śaivism. Rather, it is a contribution to Śaiva ideology that was of particular importance for self-definition that drew upon several mythologized narratives of Śaiva poet-saints. This view does not preclude our gaining historical insights from the text, but rather prevents it from telling a normative account of Tamil history that contradicts remaining evidence. Finally, it forces us to challenge our own predisposition to read history into such texts, and read out of them the possible strategies and agendas that the text served at the time of its composition. The *Periyapurāṇam* as religious text is important in revealing how twelfth-century Śaiva Tamils imagined and recapitulated the ascendancy of Tamil Śaivism from the time

of the *Tēvāram nāyaṅmārs*. It cannot, however, reliably inform us about the entirety of medieval Tamilnadu.

NOTES

- 1 I would like to thank Professor Anne Monius and James McHugh of Harvard University for their input and suggestions on earlier drafts of this essay.
- 2 In this essay *bhakti* would translate as love, devotion, devotional, or devotionalism; a *bhakta* is a devotee. The term indexes the mode of religious expression developed in the centuries under investigation herein. Hereafter I will use “bhakti” (without italics) instead of an English equivalent to reference the devotional style of religious expression central to the essay. For a concise account of the rise of devotionalism in South India, see Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). “Śaiva” and “Śaivism” refer to the devotees and worship of the Hindu god Śiva, respectively.
- 3 Anne E. Monius, “Love, Violence and the Aesthetics of Disgust: Śaivas and Jains in Medieval South India,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32 (2004): 122.
- 4 Dennis D. Hudson, “Violent and Fanatical Devotion Among the Nāyanārs: A Study in the Periya Purānam of Cēkkilār,” in *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees: Essays on the Guardians of Popular Hinduism*, ed. Alf Hiltebeitel, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 373-75, 388, 390-91.
- 5 Glenn Yocam, *Hymns to the Dancing Śiva* (Columbia, MO: South Asia Books, 1982), 33.
- 6 Monius, “Love, Violence,” 124-25.
- 7 Monius, “Love Violence,” 122. Quoted from: Chanraleka Vamadeva, *The Concept of Vaṅṅaṅṅu, ‘Violent Love’, in Tamil Śaivism, with Special Reference to Periyapurānam*. Uppsala Studies in the History of Religions 1 (Uppsala: Uppsala University, Religious Studies, 1995), 12.
- 8 The standards of *varṇāśrama* (“caste and stage-of-life”) *dharmā*—prescribed roles of familial, ritual and social conduct for the three “twice-born” classes [*brāhman*, *ksatriya* and *vaiśya*], dependent upon one’s class and stage in life—are designated in the *Manusmṛti*. While I am reluctant to ascribe too much importance to a text’s ability to direct behavior, especially for a whole society, the standards laid forth in this text are more or less *brāhmanical* ideals that were valued, if not strictly adhered to as “laws” per se. For a translation of this text, see *The Laws of Manu*, trans. Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith (London: Penguin Books, 1991).
- 9 Monius, “Love, Violence.” See also James Ryan, “The Local and the Traditional in the *Civakacintāmaṇi*,” in *Approaches to Jaina Studies: Philosophy, Logic, Rituals and Symbols*, ed. N.K. Wagle and Olle Qvarnström (Toronto: University of Toronto Centre for South Asian Studies, 1999), 360.

- 10 James Ryan, "Erotic Excess and Sexual Danger in the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*," in *Open Boundaries: Jain Communities and Cultures in Indian History*, ed. John E. Cort (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 67.
- 11 Ryan, "Erotic Excess," 79. Monius, "Love, Violence," 130-31.
- 12 Michael D. Rabe, "Royal Temple Dedications," in *Religions of India in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
- 13 Monius, "Love, Violence," 133.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 139-40.
- 15 Rabe, "Royal Temple Dedications."
- 16 *Ibid.*, 155.
- 17 Hudson, "Violent and Fanatical Devotion," 397.
- 18 The Purāṇas are a body of mythological texts dealing with the *devas*, gods, of the Hindu pantheon.
- 19 Monius, "Love, Violence." Anne E. Monius, "Śiva as Heroic Father: Theology and Hagiography in Medieval South India," *Harvard Theological Review* 97 (2004): 165-197.
- 20 Monius, "Śiva as Heroic Father," 186-88.
- 21 Monius, "Love, Violence."
- 22 It is interesting to note that Nampī Āṇṭār Nampī said he "recovered" an older written collection of the *Tēvāram* hymns that had been stored away in a temple; the ones that we have today were saved from white ants. See: M.A. Dorai Rangaswamy, *The Religion and Philosophy of Tēvāram*, 2nd. Ed. (Madras: University of Madras, 1990 [1958]), 21.
- 23 Indira V. Peterson, "Śramaṇas Against the Tamil Way: Jains as Others in Tamil Śaiva Literature," in *Open Boundaries* (see note 10), 164-65 (emphasis mine).
- 24 Indira V. Peterson, *Poems to Śiva: The Hymns of the Tamil Saints* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989).
- 25 Peterson, "Śramaṇas Against the Tamil Way," 171.
- 26 Yocam, *Hymns. Flood, An Introduction*, 129-31.
- 27 Peterson, *Poems to Śiva*, Part II, Ch.3. Peterson, "Śramaṇas." Flood, 168.
- 28 I am not implying here that the purpose of natural imagery in the *Tēvāram* was solely to be a polemic, but rather that the overall strategy of establishing a Śaiva worldview was in direct opposition to Jain doctrines, which further strengthened their claims for Śaivism and against Jainism as the Tamil religion.
- 29 Peterson, "Śramaṇas," 171.

- 30 Peterson, *Poems*, 278. "Prakrit" is a catch-all term for middle Indic languages, such as Pāli, Ardha-Māgadhī, etc. in which the earliest Jain texts are composed.
- 31 C.V. Narayana Ayyar, *Origin and Early History of Śaivism in South India* (Madras: University of Madras Press, 1936).
- 32 Rabe, 237-39. Desai mentions an inscription that attests to Mahendravarman being a Jain early in his life, though Nagaswamy claims no such inscription has been found. See P.B. Desai, *Jainism in South India and Some Jaina Epigraphs* (Sholapur: Jaina Saṁskṛti Saṁrakshaka Sangha, 1957); and R. Nagaswamy, "Jaina Art and Architecture Under the Pallavas," in *Aspects of Jaina Art and Architecture*, ed. U.P. Shah and M.A. Dhaky (Amedabad: Navajivan, 1975).
- 33 For the hagiographical account of Appar's life I am drawing mainly from T.N. Ramachandran, trans., *St. Sekkizhar's Periya Puranam*, Part I, (Thanjavur [Tanjore]: Tamil University, 1990). Additional information is drawn from Peterson, *Poems*, and Richard H. Davis, "The Story of the Disappearing Jains: Retelling the Śaiva-Jain Encounter in Medieval South India," *Open Boundaries*, 213-224 (see note 10).
- 34 Peterson, *Poems*, 283-96.
- 35 Ramachandran, *St. Sekkizhar's Periya Puranam*, xci.
- 36 The basis of this account is drawn mainly from G. Vanmikanathan, *Periya Puranam: A Tamil Classic on the great Saiva Saints of South India by Sekkizhar*, Condensed English Version (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1985), 229-262. Additional information is drawn from Peterson's summary in *Poems to Śiva*.
- 37 Hudson.
- 38 Vanmikanathan, *Periya Puranam*, 229.
- 39 Phyllis Granoff, "Scholars and Wonder-Workers: Some Remarks on the Role of the Supernatural in Philosophical Contests in Vedanta Hagiographies," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105 (1985): 459-467.
- 40 *Origin and Early History of Śaivism*.
- 41 Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), 72.
- 42 Stein, *Peasant State and Society*, 341-43. Peterson, "Śramaṇas Against the Tamil Way," 178.
- 43 Monius, "Love, Violence."
- 44 Davis, "The Story," 215. "Vaiṣṇava" refers, like Śaivism, to the worship of the god Viṣṇu.
- 45 Yocam, *Hymns*, 35-40, 191. For further information on the *Cilappatikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai*, see Anne E. Monius, *Imagining a Place for Buddhism: Literary Culture and Religious Community in Tamil-speaking South India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

46 Yocam, *Hymns*, 37.

47 Ibid., 38. Anne Monius (personal communication) seems to suggest otherwise, that there are many levels at which the *Tēvāram* poetry can be appreciated, and non-educated people may not have understood these hymns.

48 Leslie C. Orr, "Jain and Hindu 'Religious Women' in Early Medieval Tamilnadu," in *Open Boundaries* (see note 10), 187-88. Jains maintain that after the death of the most recent Jina, Mahāvīra, and his direct disciples, no person would be able to attain liberation (*mokṣa*), due to the impurity of the Era.

49 Many of the older sources I reviewed strongly held this bias. For examples, see Narayana Ayyar; A.L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India: A Survey of the Indian Subcontinent Before the Coming of the Muslims* (New York: Grove Press, 1954); K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Culture and History of the Tamils* (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1964); Hellmuth von Glasenapp, *Jainism: An Indian Religion of Salvation*, trans. Shridhar B. Shrotri (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999 [1925]).

50 Davis, 215.

51 Stein, *Peasant State and Society*, 76-86.

52 Burton Stein, "The Politicized Temples of Southern India," in *The Sacred Centre as the Focus of Political Interest*, ed. Hans Bakker (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1992).

53 Leslie C. Orr, "Jain Worship in Medieval Tamilnadu," in *Approaches to Jaina Studies: Philosophy, Logic, Rituals and Symbols 250-274*, ed. N.K. Wagle and Olle Qvarnström (Toronto: University of Toronto Centre for South Asian Studies, 1999).

54 Orr, "Jain and Hindu Religious Women." E. Ekambaranathan, *Jainism in Tamilnadu: Art and Archaeology* (Mississauga, Ontario: Jain Humanities Press, 1996).

55 Ālvāppiḷḷai Vēluppiḷḷai, "Jainism in Tamiḷ Inscriptions," in *Jainism and Early Buddhism: Essays in Honor of Padmanabh S. Jaini*, ed. Olle Qvarnström (Fremont, California: Asian Humanities Press, 2003).

56 The Jain tradition is split into two major divisions, the Śvetāmbara, whose mendicants wear white and include women as fully-ordained nuns (*sādhvī*), and the Digāmbara, whose monks go naked and, for this reason, excludes women as fully ordained nuns. For an introduction to the Jain traditions, see Paul Dundas, *The Jains*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002 [1992]).

57 *Yakṣas* (masc.) and *yakṣīs* (fem.) are semi-divine, immortal nature spirits commonly seen in Jain and Buddhist art and architecture. They are closely related with the still common worship of autochthonous deities, and tend to be seen as signs of luck, fortune, and earthly well-being. See John E. Cort, *Jains in the World: Religious Values and Ideology in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 94-95.

58 Orr, "Jain and Hindu Religious Women."

- 59 Roy C. Craven, *Indian Art: A Concise History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1976).
J.C. Harle, *The Art and Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).
- 60 See Paul Dundas, *The Jains*, 2nd ed. Mahāvīra, Parśva, and Neminātha are the three most recent Jinas, or founders of Jainism. There are twenty-four such founders in each World Age (*Kalpa*). Mahāvīra, the final Jina, was a slightly older contemporary of the Buddha. His traditional Śvetāmbara dating is 599-527 BCE, though the scholarly consensus places his death at 425 BCE (Śākyamuni Buddha's death is generally accepted as happening sometime around 400 BCE). Parśva's historicity is in question, but is generally thought to have lived in the 8th or 7th century BCE. Mahāvīra's parents were apparently devotees of his and Mahāvīra renounced in his lineage. See Dundas, *The Jains*, 24ff.
- 61 Robert J. Zydenbos, "The Jaina Goddess Padmavati," in *Contacts Between Cultures*, Vol. 2: South Asia, ed. K.I. Koppedraier (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992).
- 62 Desai, *Jainism in South India*. Dundas, *The Jains*.
- 63 Orr, "Jain Worship in Medieval Tamilnadu," 251.
- 64 Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, 293.
- 65 John E. Cort, "Bhakti in the Early Jain Tradition: Understanding Devotional Religion in South Asia," *History of Religions* 42 (2002): 60.
- 66 Ibid., 62.
- 67 Monius, "Love, Violence."
68. Cort, "Bhakti," 66.
- 69 Orr, "Jain and Hindu Religious Women."
- 70 Peterson, "Śramaṇas Against The Tamil Way," 172.
- 71 Davis, "The Story of the Disappearing Jains."
- 72 Stein, *Peasant State and Society*.
- 73 Orr, "Jain and Hindu Religious Women."
- 74 Ramendra Nath Nandi, *Social Roots of Religion in Ancient India* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi & Co., 1986), 130-37.

GENETIC LOTTERY 1984

New Creations and the Future of Faith¹

Joseph D. Moser Jr.

In the course of life, there are certain moments that fundamentally change the ways in which we view our world and our place within it—moments that come in the midst of the mundane activities that define the rituals of our daily lives, moments that demand a response that refuses to wait, moments that place a claim on our very person, our identity as an individual, and even on our conception of what it means to be a member of this species, *homo sapiens*.

They are moments in which the entire conceptual scheme through which we understand ourselves, the universe, and humanity suddenly and without warning bursts into flame, and we are left groping amongst the dust and the ashes, searching desperately for something with which to begin anew, searching amidst the rubble of shattered beliefs, broken convictions, and torn dreams for something that will emanate from the destruction to breathe forth new hope and new life.

These phoenix moments in life, moments that lie beyond explanation, can result from experiences of extreme violence or of profound beauty. They are

events for which there is no larger purpose, no divine plan, no “reason,” events which have simply, and inexplicably, happened and to which we must respond.

My life and work this past fall was dominated by two such phoenix moments. The first was the reading of Susan J. Brison’s new book, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*.² In this daring, cogent, and fully accessible work, Brison attempts to discuss her own experience of recovery from an intense personal trauma. While taking a walk one morning in south-eastern France on a country road in a small village, Susan Brison, now a professor at Dartmouth College, found herself attacked from behind, brutally beaten, raped, strangled, dragged into a ravine, and left for dead.

Written twelve years later, Brison’s book chronicles her attempt and her successive failure to make sense of what happened to her. She talks about the ways in which violence *undoes* a person, how it rends the very fabric of identity which defines a person’s conception of self. She says that violence, and violent acts, introduce nonsensical entities into the series of our lives.³

In a very real sense, violence disrupts the continuity of an individual. It *undoes* a person. It represents the end of the person who lived in the time “before” and the forced creation of a new identity that can live on. We can see this break in the choice of some Jewish holocaust survivors to take new names after the shattering of their old identities.⁴ There is a sense in experiences of violence in which we outlive ourselves.⁵

But I said that there were two phoenix moments that I experienced this past fall. This first one was conceptual. The other was visceral. And it was this second moment that once again reduced my capacity to comprehend the world to ashes. My work brought me back to a subject matter to which I knew I would eventually return, to the study of the history and reality of human horror. This happened in the context of my inquiry and research into the Rwandan genocide of 1994 and my subsequent return to a calling I have long felt to help us respond to the evil, the horror, and the events of human atrocity that have dominated the past century. In seeing once again an unquestionable display of human brutality upon the soil of a tiny nation abandoned by the world, a moment in history wherein somewhere in the neighborhood of two million people took to the streets to massacre a million of their neighbors and friends on the basis of rampant racism, my sense of humanity began once again to crumble.

You see, I think we are all guilty, myself included, of building up images of humanity in which goodness and justice eventually triumph—images which disintegrate in the face of this kind of violence that introduces nonsensical events into our minds and lives, images that fall short because they fail to truly

constitute the human being. To put it rather bluntly, I think that we need to admit that this triumph of justice and goodness is not in any way guaranteed, and, at times, I question even its likelihood.

Let's think about it for a moment. At the close of a century, what does this species have to claim for itself? Yes, profound technological advances, amazing medical discoveries, the production and spread of learning, and, in certain places, equality.

But at what cost? Runaway materialism, systematic subjugation of entire peoples for economic power, and violence the like of which our world has *never* before seen. If we were to do the unthinkable, to put humanity on trial, I am not convinced that it could be defended.

This past century has produced the horrors of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Auschwitz, Birkenau, The Great War, World War II, Rwanda, the Congo, The Great Purge, The Great March, Bosnia, The Stolen Generation, Korea, Vietnam....

There are times when I pass Emerson Hall at Harvard University, which bears the inscription "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" and find myself wholly unable to respond. We sit today at the close of a century that has in every sense *undone* us. We need to be able to grieve. And we need to support one another in our attempts to live on, to begin the arduous process of recovery. Charlotte Delbo writes, "I died in Auschwitz, but no one knows it."⁶ At the very least, let us begin by admitting that at least a part of that which was within us—as individuals, as a species, as a religious movement—has died at the hands of this violence.

It is time that we recognize that we as a species are still reeling in the aftermath of tragic violence and living with a deep and abiding trauma. For it is impossible to go back to live in the same ways we once did. Our movement as it lived, our species as it lived in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, no longer exists. It has been undone; the threads that had woven it together have been raveled. And it is time that we assume the responsibility we have as religious people and as Unitarian Universalists to respond to the need to create a new identity, a need which has been forced upon us at the close of a century of unparalleled violence.

I believe that in our history as Unitarian Universalists we have been too quick to put aside decisively the darker faculties of reality. Yes, our outlook ultimately rests on a hopeful love, and yes, it is this vision of an accepting, open, loving, embracing, hopeful faith that we have to offer the world. Yet we have been too quick to assume that this perspective we have to offer constitutes

the sole foundation of what it means to be human. We have been too quick to assume that the loving presence lies as *the* core faculty of the human.

I do not believe that we can any longer hold to the illusion that the universe is fundamentally benevolent, or that love is the core fabric upon which our reality is based. And yet, neither do I believe that we can return to the vision propagated by so many of the churches in protest of which our movement first began—that humanity, and indeed even the cosmos, is fundamentally depraved.

Neither a Calvinist doctrine of total depravity, nor an Unitarian focus on the intellectual search for a unified divine or the unity of a liberating truth, nor an Universalist belief in the primacy of benevolent divine love remain appropriate today to make sense of our reality at the close of the twentieth century and the advent of the twenty-first.

It is time to realize as members of a faith *born of merger*, born from rich traditions which have guided us, that we must be a faith sensitive to a reality unknown to those Unitarians and Universalists who came before us. It is time to realize as *Unitarian Universalists* that at the core of this universe we inhabit lies neither a supreme love nor a reality of self-interested depravity, but a profound *neutrality* and a cosmic moral nothingness.

It is no longer sufficient to appeal simply to a pervading hope underlying the universe, or to attempt to draw upon a mysterious presence of love in the manner of our ancestors. We can no longer leave our movement to rest upon a naive expectation in the eventual triumph of a metaphysical human goodness as a part of some divine plan, or as a part of a belief that, whatever happens, this goodness of the human spirit will prevail. Quite simply, this hope, this appeal to an underlying goodness—to which we sometimes give the name “humanity,” “life,” or “spirit”—has not worked. In fact, the belief in fundamental human goodness has radically failed to prevent the realization of the context in which we now live, one born of one hundred years of horrors beyond description.

We must accept that there is no “reason,” no “answer,” to the *why* of the advent of violence, and that indeed all attempts to provide such larger explanations will fail. I believe that the greatest injustice committed by humanity, by philosophers, by theologians, by ministers, and by religious traditions is the attempt to “explain away” this incomprehensible violence by labeling it as “evil.” It is not something that can be bracketed off and then put asunder with words of condemnation, for it is by nature something that undoes us, that rends our identity, that ruptures the ability of individuals, of our species, of our religion to carry on unaffected and unbroken. Only when we finally begin to accept

this truth will we begin to pull together the pieces of a shattered world into something that could become, once again, our home.

But this is a process that must occur slowly, and with great care. And while we will once again emerge into a vision of a hope beyond hope, one born of beauty, I am afraid of what will happen when we spend too much time in a naiveté that fails to recognize that life, in all of its permutations, is by its nature both a creative *and* a destructive force.

In this process of recovery I would urge us, ironically, to turn to another source of our undoing, but this time to one that might provide us with some of the tools for which we are searching. For there is another reality in which we also live, one with which we are, perhaps, a great deal more familiar: beauty. As much as we live in a world filled with violence, we also live in a world permeated with a beauty so profound that we once again find ourselves unable to respond.

Where and when we encounter this profound beauty varies—I encounter it in the loving expression of the tormented soul I behold in Vincent Van Gogh's self-portrait, the overwhelming waves of penetrating music that flow over and through me when I sing pieces like Randall Thompson's *Alleluia*, or the sense of inexplicable connection and grounding I sometimes feel when I sit and allow myself simply to be in and with nature. In each instance I am met with a beauty so profound that it renders me unable to respond. It also *undoes* me in every way. It entreats me to find a way to work these expressions—be they born of an image, a song, or a feeling—into my identity when I cannot even comprehend what lies before me. For these too are events which lie beyond sense. And they too necessitate a remaking of the self.

But realizations of beauty occur in a radically different manner than violence. Because the moments we spend in beauty are moments spawned of a creative force, moments which have the possibility to facilitate the weaving of new threads into an ever-growing, ever-enriching tapestry of all of existence. For to be undone in beauty is also to be given new joys, new hopes, new dreams with which to move forward. It is to receive the bounty of a creative spirit, of a creative life, and to gain new perspectives that redefine our very identities in ever greater ways. It is in beauty that we once again find the hope that lies in the human heart, a hope that lies side by side with those capacities for self-interest and violence. We *are* a complex animal.

Perhaps this attention to beauty might begin in our decision to look at the people around us and across this earth. For when we can see the beauty in each other we just might be able to take the first steps into this new century, steps toward a vision of justice that we will forge in moments when we encounter

each other fully, when we truly see the inexplicable beauty that speaks from and in the face of the other. And when we see this beauty there-shining, we just might begin to see how it radiates in and through us as well. If, in fact, we must be ever undone by one another, let it no longer be in the trauma of our violence, but in the yearning hope that emanates from our ability to see the sublime in our midst, in us and through us, calling us to a life that we might one day even see as divine. We must live ever seeking new creative forces in the face of an undeniable force of destruction. To be human is to live as the phoenix, rising ever again, trying ever again, recreating oneself ever again.

To address the past century is not a choice; it is a reality thrust upon us, one which we cannot escape or hope to neutralize, but it is one we must work through to accept, and then from the abyss, in the aftermath, to recreate a world that is honorable. If indeed the arc of the universe is long, and if indeed it bends toward justice, it bends in that direction because of our concerted work and devotion. This is the greatest act of religious courage we might know. It is also the most miraculous. For the only way the arc of the universe will bend toward justice is with the strength of our conviction and the strength of our bodies actively working to bend that arc toward a vision of justice that is beautiful enough to overwhelm us, beautiful enough to undo us, and beautiful enough to allow ourselves, and our identity as individuals, as a species, and as a movement, to be remade in the process.

I do not believe that on a cosmic level it can ever be proved convincingly that there is a “right” choice in human decision making, that there is a pre-ordained plan, or that the “good” carries with it a warrant of divine approval while “evil” carries a cosmic condemnation. Both exist in our perceptions. Both exist in *our* realities. And it is in the context of both forces, and many others, that we find this existence which we hold for a brief moment. Susan Brison writes at the close of her book, “None of us is *supposed* to be alive. We’re all here by chance and only for a little while. The wonder is that we’ve managed, once again, to winter through, and that our hearts, in spite of everything, survive.”⁷ We *are* here but by chance.

A friend of mine has a shirt with the words “Genetic Lottery, 1984” written across the front, and on the back, the word “winner.” As the shirt declares, he won the genetic lottery in 1984; I won it in 1979. Each of us here today has won it at one time or another. We are here but by chance. And we are victims of violence but by chance. But the fact remains that for us as members of this complex species called human beings, as inheritors of a violence of a scale before unknown, that for us who are here “only for a little while,” somehow, in the midst of everything, “our hearts survive.”⁸ Even in the face of debilitating

violence, tragedy, and sorrow, even groping amid the ashes, we still have the capacity to rise, to rise with one another's help, to rise in beauty to create and exhibit new forms of love. *This* is perhaps the greatest mystery of all. *This* is what I call the miraculous: that in the face of a cosmic nothingness, when it no longer makes sense to talk about the world as having a moral fabric, when we very well could, without fear of everlasting punishment, choose a pure attitude of unadulterated self-interest, we instead choose to see the beauty which surrounds and embraces us; we choose to see the beauty in each other's faces and in this world. We *choose* to hope. We *choose* to love. And in so doing, we *choose justice*.

And if this makes us a walking conundrum—having made a choice without grounding—well, so be it. After all, it is the only kind of choice we can ever make. And perhaps this ironic choice is just what our broken world, its broken people, and its broken creatures need. Perhaps this hope that emerges from hopelessness, this hope that we as religious people have chosen to manifest in love, beauty, and justice, perhaps this hope is *just* what is so desperately needed.

It is my hope that my comments here will encourage consideration, and perhaps disagreement, but most of all conversation. For it is a conversation that desperately needs to occur in our nation's churches, in our movement, in our scholarship, and in our society. And it is in conversation that our ability to hope may be maintained, that we may help each other to move beyond the reality we inhabit and to envision a changed future.

We must realize that if indeed our very selves are constructed in our relationships, conversations, and encounters with one another, then it is precisely these relationships, conversations, and encounters that we must intentionally nurture. Ours is a democratic faith—this is a principle which we as Unitarian Universalists have chosen to uphold—a democracy wherein all of our voices must be heard, deserve to be heard, and have something to offer. Indeed if we are to respond to the violence in which we must to live our lives, if we are to begin the process of healing, the processes of “remaking” ourselves, our movement, *and* our species, we must, as Brison maintains, “hold on fiercely to each other.”⁹ We must have the courage to ever maintain a hopeful gaze born of experiences of beauty. We must be able to trust that our hearts do, in fact, “in spite of everything, survive.”¹⁰

Amen, and Blessed Be.

NOTES

- 1 This sermon was first delivered before the First and Second Church in Boston and on 88.9 WERS Emerson College Radio on 10 April 2005 at the 11AM service under the name *New Creations, or Genetic Lottery 1984*. It was one of the final sermons delivered before the congregation voted on 8 May 2005 to revert to its historic name, the Society of the First Church in Boston, under which it continues to operate as an Unitarian Universalist congregation.
- 2 Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
- 3 *Ibid.*, 103.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 47.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 9.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 38.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 123.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*, 122.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 123.

CONTRIBUTORS

Brenna Moore received her B.A. from Colorado College and her MDiv from Harvard Divinity School. She is now a doctoral student at the Divinity School, studying the history of modern Christian thought with particular attention to the development of Roman Catholic theology in western Europe. Her work attempts to employ diverse methodologies in order to understand how Christian ideas both emerged from and changed history in the modern period.

Mari Jyväsjärvi is a doctoral student of South Asian religions at Harvard's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. She received her MTS degree from Harvard Divinity School in 2002. Her research interests center on the history of monastic and ascetic traditions, more particularly the gendering of renunciation and ascetic practice in Indian Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism.

Carl Hughes will graduate with an MTS degree in June 2006. He began his academic work studying religion, philosophy, and French at St. Olaf College and has further developed these interests at HDS, specializing in modern Christian theology, philosophy of religion, and 20th century continental thought. He will pursue research, scholarship, and a doctoral degree in this area.

Joshua Schapiro attended Columbia University as an undergraduate in the study of religion. He developed his interests in Buddhism as an MTS student, and is now a doctoral student in Tibetan Buddhism at Harvard's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. He is particularly interested in nineteenth century Tibetan Buddhist intellectual history and the intellectual practices in eastern Tibet.

Harshita K. Mruthinti studied religion at Emory University and will graduate from HDS with an MTS degree at the end of the spring semester. She became interested in her current field, Hinduism and the study of gender, through undergraduate coursework and participation in Indian classical dance. Her future plans include doctoral work focusing on issues of gender in the goddess tradition of South India.

Currently working toward his MTS, **Steven M. Vose** has become interested in the medieval religious landscapes in the contemporary Jain and Hindu imaginations and the development of devotional practices in Indian religions. He began studying Jainism as an undergraduate at St. Lawrence University and plans to pursue the study of South Asian religions with research interests in Gujarati-speaking Jains in western India, pilgrimage, and lay-mendicant interaction.

Joseph D. Moser Jr. is an MDiv student, pursuing both Unitarian Universalist ordination and future doctoral work in ethics. His interest in ethics is shaped by a practical commitment to acknowledge the presence of real suffering in the world on one hand and a theoretical set of questions about metaphysical and ontological claims on the other.