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Showing What Is Not: The Use of Illusion in Classical Sanskrit Rāma Plays

The very essence of theatre is the acceptance by the audience of visual illusion, the illusion that they are watching an actual event as it happens, while knowing perfectly well that they are not.[1] Illusion, and the delusion it may or may not induce, has lain at the heart of the Rāma narrative from its earliest form: if Sītā had not been deluded by a *rākṣasa* counterfeiting a marvellous deer and uttering a dying cry for help, causing Rāma and then Lakṣmaṇa to leave her unprotected in the hostile forest, and if she had not then been deluded by a counterfeit mendicant, enabling Rāvaṇa to abduct her safely, the story as it is told in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*—and in most subsequent retellings—could never have happened. Other illusions however (the counterfeit head of Rāma produced by Vidyujjihva to demoralize Sītā, and the counterfeit Sītā apparently killed by Indrajit) have no lasting effect on the plot, for the victims are soon disabused by their friends.[2] Authors of classical Sanskrit dramas (*nāṭya*s) based on the Rāma story exploit this concept in the form of abundant additional illusions but with equally little effect on the traditional basic narrative. In this they are conforming to the one principle transcending all boundaries within and between the differing genres in which the Rāma story is presented, the need not to deviate too blatantly from the well-known, well-loved, traditional plotline. Sītā must be abducted; Rāvaṇa must be overcome. This basic requirement is absolute.

Each classical dramatist accepted a second absolute, the requirement for novelty, and met it with his own increasingly fanciful elaboration of a narrative loaded with illusions and counterfeits; but since novelty was paramount, the

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[1]   In this article it is not my intention to add to the number of admirable studies of classical Sanskrit poetics or dramaturgy, but to concentrate instead on the largely unexplored topic of narrative and its impact on the development of the Rāma tradition.

[2]   *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (henceforth in footnotes abbreviated as *VRm*) 6.22–24; 6.68–71 (critically edited by G.H. Bhatt and U.P. Shah, 7 vols, Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1960–1975).

corollary was that no dramatist might reproduce a novel element in another's work without incorporating at least a minor change.

A further convention much employed in the *nāṭya* tradition was that acts of violence were often made to occur off-stage, to be subsequently reported verbally to the audience;[3] a stage production of the epic Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, pre-eminently a warrior tale based on repeated violence, would be in danger of degenerating into a boring monologue. Entertaining episodes involving short-lived counterfeits provided the most successful dramatists with welcome new visual episodes that nevertheless had virtually no effect on the progress of the narrative; after any brief period of delusion, the *status quo ante* was restored. The tyranny of the original plot, however embellished—or distorted—could not be overthrown. Logical anomalies could result from the tension of this inevitable clash between conformity and novelty.

1. *Kāvya*s

The requirements for conformity embellished by novelty also applied to the poets recreating the Rāma narrative, in whole or in part, throughout classical Sanskrit literature. *Kāvya* authors fulfilled these requirements by concentrating on poetic form and expression, producing emotive, linguistic or metrical elaboration. While drama is primarily a single-experience visual medium, such poetry is best appreciated by being heard or read repeatedly. New plot elements could not have the same impact—surprise—in the classical *kāvya*s as they did in the *nāṭya*s. Accordingly, the profusion of deceptions produced by illusions and counterfeit characters found in the *nāṭya* narrative schemes does not feature prominently in *kāvya*s, with two minor exceptions (illusions 11.1., 11.2.).[4] For example, Rāma Pāṇivāda composed both a *kāvya* (*Rāghavīya*) and a *nāṭya* (*Sītārāghava*); the *kāvya* follows the standard epic narrative closely (but see illusion 11.2.), whereas the *nāṭya* introduces several new counterfeit characters (illusions 1.3., 2.5., 5.1.).

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3   For exceptions to this practice see Bożena Śliwczyńska's article 'Death on the Stage in Sanskrit Classical Theatre: A Long-Sustained Misinterpretation', in *CEENIS. Current Research Series*, vol. 1, eds Danuta Stasik and Anna Trynkowska, Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2013, pp. 68–75.

4   For a list of illusions produced by these counterfeits, see the Appendix. Fuller references to the material on which this article is based can be found on the Oxford Research Archive (ORA) to be found at http://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:8df9647a-8002-45ff-b37e-7effb669768b.

The form Kālidāsa chose for his retelling, the *Raghuvaṃśa*, as early as the fourth or fifth century (almost certainly earlier than any of the Rāma *nāṭya*s) was that of the *kāvya*. Accomplished composer both of *kāvya*s and of *nāṭya*s on other subjects that he was, he may well have realized that the violent nature of the Rāma story made it unsuitable for the stage. He generally followed the narrative of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, but introduced a considerable amount of new material by extending it backwards and forwards by a number of generations. Genealogies of Rāma's ancestors were a standard part of the tradition,[5] but Kālidāsa accompanies the names of Dilīpa, Raghu and Aja, and of some of Rāma's successors, with elaborate and affecting stories.[6] The chief impact of the many colourful details with which he embellished his narrative was to soften the image of the warrior-heroes and give the epic a gentler, more romantic touch.

2. *Nāṭya*s

In Rāma dramas, the tone varies. Bhavabhūti, in one of his Rāma plays, the *Uttararāmacarita*, and Dhīranāga[7] even more inventively in his *Kundamālā*, are unusually perceptive in capturing Rāma's desolation at the sacrifice he has felt obliged to make by banishing Sītā. The device they choose to use is the concept of invisibility, and they employ it to great effect, producing poignant delusions in

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5 *VRm* 1.69 and 2.102. For additions to the Ikṣvāku genealogy, not identical to Kālidāsa's in the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Mahābhārata*, see Mary Brockington, 'Rāma Dāśarathi, the Absent Presence in the *Harivaṃśa*', in *Epics, Khilas, and Purāṇas: Continuities and Ruptures*, Proceedings of the Third Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas, September 2002, ed. Petteri Koskikallio, Zagreb: Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2005, pp. 299–302 and 312.

6 Kālidāsa, *Le Raghuvamça: la lignée des fils du soleil*, tr. Louis Renou, Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1928; also *Raghuvamsam: the Line of Raghu*, tr. Aditya Narayan Dhairyasheel Haksar, Gurgaon: Penguin Books India, 2016. A few later authors do refer to some of these incidents: Aja's grief at the death of Indumatī is mentioned in the *Pratimānāṭaka* (*The Statue: Bhāsa's Pratimā in English Translation*, tr. S.S. Janaki, Madras: Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, 1978, vol. 3, p. 36); it was also used, together with Dilīpa's decision to live in the forest to serve a cow in order to engender offspring, in Abhinanda's *Rāmacarita*; see Venkatarama Raghavan, *The Rāmāyaṇa in Classical Sanskrit and Prākrit Mahākāvya Literature*, Professor P.D. Gune Memorial Lectures 1977, Pune: Board of Extra-Mural Studies, University of Poona, 1985 (repr. Chennai, 2017), pp. 59–60, and Anthony Kennedy Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, 7 vols, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1972–1992, vol. 5, pp. 100–101.

7 This dramatist's name is variously transcribed as Dhīranāga/Vīranāga/Diṅnāga.

several characters and tender, delusive encounters between the sorrowing Rāma and his unrecognized wife (illusions 9.1., 9.2., 9.3.).

Most dramatists, however, peopled their narratives with counterfeit characters, producing an effect ranging from the startling, via the comic, to the farcically chaotic.

In Murāri's *Anargharāghava*, it is startling to find Rāma's exile contrived, not by his enemies, but by three of his closest allies or admirers, Jāmbavān, the Śabarī, and Hanumān (illusion 2.3.).

A comic note is struck in Subhaṭa's *Dūtāṅgada*, when Aṅgada is sent to Laṅkā with a defiant message from Rāma. He is confronted by a Sītā created on Rāvaṇa's instructions telling him that she is now Rāvaṇa's wife, and advising Rāma to return at once to Ayodhyā, for the city has been devastated by *rākṣasa*s and Bharata is dead. Aṅgada's delusion does not last long: the deception is revealed when news is brought that the real Sītā is attempting suicide, and the panic-stricken Rāvaṇa predictably (and necessarily, if the narrative is not to be wrecked) orders her guards to save her (illusion 6.2.).

As for Śaktibhadra's presentation of the abduction scene in his *Āścarya-cūḍāmaṇi*, where counterfeits abound to the extent that he has one Rāvaṇa, one Mārīca, one Śūrpaṇakhā, two Lakṣmaṇas, two Sītās, and three Rāmas (some of them real) all on stage at the same time, their conversations interlaced, it can be called nothing less than a fast-paced farce contrived with admirable skill, and we can only imagine the delight of the audience (illusion 4.4.).

To the theatre directors counterfeit characters present both a considerable challenge and also a great opportunity to exploit the comic potentialities of the situation. The illusions must be accurate enough to purport to convince the fictive victims, but not so accurate as to confuse the audience as to which is the false character and which the genuine; they must be carefully prepared before they can follow the appearance of counterfeits on stage.[8] The audience must realize that Rāma (the real Rāma) is not talking to Sītā but to Śūrpaṇakhā, but Rāma himself must not.

Most of the newly-invented illusions are detected quickly and any delusion they have produced is dissipated, often by the arrival of the person counterfeited (e.g. illusions 1.3., 4.3., 5.1., 6.3., 7.2.). Such scenes would allow a competent

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[8] For the method used to present the counterfeit characters of Śaktibhadra's *Āścarya-cūḍāmaṇi* in the continuing tradition see the translation of a Malayalam production manual in *The Wondrous Crest-Jewel in Performance*, ed. Clifford Reis Jones, tr. Venkatarama Raghavan, *With the Production Manual from the Tradition of Kūṭiyāṭṭam Drama*, tr. D. Leela A. Nambudrippad and Betty True Jones, Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies/Oxford University Press, 1984.

stage director to whet the audience's appetite by having the genuine character appear predictably at the back of the stage unnoticed by all … except the audience.

When the medium of a visual presentation is not live (a drama), but static (paintings or carvings), illusions are all the more difficult to convey. Śūrpaṇakhā's failure to use her shape-changing powers in the earliest verbal texts and appear as a beautiful human in her attempt to seduce Rāma (concentrating as they do on the humour of such a grotesque misalliance) has often been seen as an anomaly, rectified in many later versions in most verbal genres; when represented visually her identity may be explained either by simple context, by an inscription, or by showing her reversion to her original form when mutilated. However, the core episode of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* is so well-known that the image of Sītā in conversation with a mendicant is unlikely to cause any misunderstanding; examples are too many to list. Within Southeast Asia the episode where Rāvaṇa attempts but fails to demoralize Rāma by ordering a *rākṣasī* Benjakai to counterfeit the dead body of Sītā is also so well-loved and so widely disseminated in verbal texts that visual examples of it are common.[9]

The basic factor uniting all the illusions found in classical *nāṭya*s is the very fact that they appear in dramas: more particularly, that they have been created by dramatists, specifically for a medium—theatrical performance—dependent on visual illusions, and conventionally said to require a 'suspension of disbelief' on the part of the audience. In the classical Sanskrit tradition, this feature is regularly emphasized by a prefatory discussion between the director and the cast; indeed, the actor playing the so-called 'director' may himself be considered a counterfeit of the unseen person actually directing the performance. When the play introduced by such a preface begins, it can almost be regarded as a 'play-within-a-play', and the idea of theatre as illusion is reinforced in those *nāṭya*s that advance their narratives by means of a further-emboxed 'play-within-a-play'

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9   Mary Brockington, 'The Ladies' Monkey: Hanumān in Boston', *Journal Asiatique*, vol. 300, 2012, pp. 199–214 and 'From Kanauj to Laos: Development of the "Floating Maiden" Episode in the Southeast Asian Rāma Tradition', to appear in *Connecting Cultures: Rāmāyaṇa Retellings in South India and Southeast Asia*, Proceedings of an International Conference Held in Bangalore, 2017, ed. S. Settar and Parul Pandya Dhar (Mangalore: Manipal University Press). On the problems of representing invisibility in paintings see Mary Brockington, 'Drawing the Words', pp. 242, 255, 258, in M.B. and John Brockington, 'Mānaku's *Siege of Laṅkā* Series: Words and Pictures', *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 73, 2013, pp. 231–258.

watched by some of the characters;[10] at least the living audience—as opposed to the fictive one—have been forewarned not to be deluded into believing that they are watching the living Rāma, Sītā and Rāvaṇa (illusions 10.1., 10.2., 10.3.).

3. Rāma

The minimal effect all these fleeting illusions exert on the overall plot of the narrative is in stark contrast to their cumulative effect on the personality attributed to heroes and villains alike. In the *nāṭya*s, Rāma is repeatedly subjected to delusions of various kinds, repeatedly he is expected to despair at false reports, repeatedly he must be reassured that counterfeits are not genuine; his openness to being deluded continues in some *nāṭya*s even as the victors are approaching Ayodhyā, with Māyurāja piling effect upon effect in an effort to prolong and increase the tension felt by an audience who know perfectly well that the wily *rākṣasa*s are never going to succeed, but may well be exasperated by a hero who never learns to check the sources of his information (illusion 7.2.).

In many respects, the composers of Rāma *nāṭya*s stand outside the conventional understanding of the figure of Rāma developing from epic hero to supreme deity. They do not portray him with increasing reverence; their portrayal is more likely to arouse scorn and exasperation in his audience than the wonder and admiration evoked by the warrior of the epics, or the devotion evoked by the *bhakti* movement. Rāma is still seen as physically powerful, but so gullible and open to delusion and despair that he is consistently unable to make use of that power. In Śaktibhadra's *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi*, the Daṇḍaka sages are so worried about him that they give him a magic ring to protect him from counterfeit *rākṣasa*s; in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, it was *they* who had begged *him* to protect *them* from *rākṣasa*s.[11] This talisman will reveal the nature of any transformed *rākṣasa* who touches its wearer. To Sītā they similarly give a hair-jewel that will reveal the true nature of any transformed *rākṣasa* whom she touches; that the recognition token which she sends to Rāma via Hanumān is acknowledged to be that same protective device is a further example of the tyranny of the original plot-line (fortunately for her, this rash act, depriving herself of its protection, is not exploited).[12]

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10   The effect of the play-within-the-play in Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacarita*, the *mise en abyme*, is examined by Lyne Bansat-Boudon, 'L'épopée mise en scène: l'exemple de l'*Uttararāmacarita*', *Journal Asiatique*, vol. 288, 2000, pp. 83–111.

11   *VRm* 3.1.19–20; 3.5; 3.9.

12   Śaktibhadra, *The Wondrous Crest-Jewel*, 3.8–10, 34–39; 6.21; see illusion 4.4.

It goes without saying that, in order for Sītā to be rescued from captivity and Rāvaṇa killed, she must first be abducted. But when Rāma is to be presented as the world's supreme warrior, how can this happen without bringing forward the defeat of Rāvaṇa to the middle of the abduction and shortening the proposed narrative drastically and unacceptably? Such was the dilemma confronting the originator of the tale. For Rāma to leave Sītā alone at all, especially in such a dangerous setting, would be a dereliction of his duty to protect her; the counterfeit deer lures him and Lakṣmaṇa away, but is not gullibility almost as culpable? The composer or composers of the earliest, *kṣatriya*-oriented layers of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* text were little troubled by such concerns, but some limited criticisms are found, mostly in allusions in a few non-*Rāmāyaṇa* texts.[13]

The supreme example of Rāma's openness to delusion is his welcoming Rāvaṇa to his hermitage, and then confiding Sītā to the care of her abductor (illusions 4.1., 4.2., 4.3.). The author of the *Pratimānāṭaka* makes strenuous efforts to present Rāma's folly more seriously than before, as an act of great piety rather than as weak surrender to the demands of a petulant wife. Māyurāja takes several steps to soften any anticipated criticism of his conduct: he makes Rāvaṇa take the form of an ascetic known to Rāma (introducing a mild note of parody when, predictably, Lakṣmaṇa subsequently meets the true ascetic—too late, necessarily, to prevent the inevitable catastrophe); further, he makes Rāma leave, urged by Sītā herself, deluded by a fictive appeal for help from Lakṣmaṇa. This interesting inversion of the epic's abduction plot even gives Lakṣmaṇa the opportunity to

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13   However, at *Mahānāṭaka*, 4.179 (tr. Raja Kali Krishna Bahadur, 2 vols (in 1), Calcutta: N. Robertson and Co., 1840), Rāma is said to pursue Mārīca despite the manifest impossibility of a golden deer. Elsewhere he is criticized for being deluded: in a late, poorly attested allusion in the *Mahābhārata*, 2,583*1–2, inserted after 2.67.4, (critically edited by Vishnu S. Sukthankar and others, 19 vols, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933–1966), Yudhiṣṭhira is excused for his folly in returning for the second dicing encounter despite knowing that it would bring disaster, on the grounds that 'although a golden deer is impossible, yet Rāma was enticed by it'; such an allusion cannot be regarded as conferring wholehearted approval on either hero. Similar references can be found at *Śukasaptati*, 36 tale 6 (*Seventy Tales of the Parrot*, tr. Aditya Narayan Dhairyasheel Haksar, New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2000) and in Nārāyaṇa's *Hitopadeśa*, 1.64 (*'Friendly Advice' by Nārāyaṇa & 'King Vikrama's Adventures'*, tr. Judit Törzsök, Clay Sanskrit Library, New York: New York University Press and JJC Foundation, 2007). In Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacarita*, 5.106 (*Rāma's Last Act*, tr. Sheldon Pollock, Clay Sanskrit Library, New York: New York University Press and JJC Foundation, 2007), Rāma's as yet unrecognized son Lava also criticizes him for retreating three steps before Khara, an accusation exaggerated out of what was represented as skilful evasion at *VRm* 3.29.23cd.

criticize his older brother for leaving Sītā behind in the hermitage; it may indicate some influence from Jain reconstructions.

Māyurāja is not the only dramatist to give Lakṣmaṇa an enhanced position in the narrative. Virūpākṣadeva's brief, one-act *Unmattarāghava* focuses, as the title indicates, on the complete mental collapse suffered by the hero on discovering the loss of his wife; this episode is developed from the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, where, encouraged by Lakṣmaṇa, Rāma soon recovers his stability enough to embark upon the search. Virūpākṣadeva presents a state of delusion that is much more serious and crippling—potentially tragic rather than comic or even farcical —than any of the temporary deceptions produced by the *rākṣasa* counterfeits, and it leads to a more radical revision of the narrative. Lakṣmaṇa is made to take over Rāma's role as warrior-avenger and liberator: Lakṣmaṇa alone receives Jaṭāyus' report, Lakṣmaṇa kills Rāvaṇa, and Lakṣmaṇa returns to Daṇḍaka with Sītā on the *puṣpaka* chariot, all proclaimed by a heavenly voice in a single verse with scant details.[14] This stratagem fulfils the convention that *nāṭya*s are expected to have a happy ending, but such an ending could have been achieved almost equally well if the voice had prophesied Rāma's recovery and traditional victory, rather than shifting the emphasis to Lakṣmaṇa. Bringing out the pathos of Rāma's grief has had the consequence of diminishing his character as a warrior-hero.

The depiction of Rāma's character presented by his reaction to these illusions is not entirely one-dimensional. A more nuanced view appears in two early *nāṭya*s that still retain some traces of the *kṣatriya* ethic. In the *Rāghavābhyudaya*, Rāma realizes that accepting an offer from Rāvaṇa to exchange Sītā for peace— he does not know at that point that she is in reality a *rākṣasī*—will prevent him from carrying out his promise of sovereignty over Laṅkā to Vibhīṣaṇa, and hesitates (illusion 6.1.). In Māyurāja's *Udāttarāghava*, Rāma (admittedly urged on by Sītā) makes rescuing Lakṣmaṇa from his supposed danger more important than staying with her (illusion 4.3.); in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* it was not until he was confronted by Lakṣmaṇa's apparently dead body in the battle for Laṅkā that he came to realize that he valued his brother more highly than his wife.[15]

One aspect of Rāma's character in the traditional narrative that has aroused criticism has been his initial refusal to believe that Sītā could have remained chaste during her captivity. Śaktibhadra's treatment of this theme has made the loving husband seem not only more harsh but foolishly unperceptive. In his ver-

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14 Virūpākṣadeva, *Unmattarāghava*, see Juthika Ghosh, *Epic Sources of Sanskrit Literature*, Calcutta Sanskrit College Research Series XXIII, Calcutta: Sanskrit College, 1963, pp. 175–177.

15 *VRm* 6.39.

sion, Anasūyā's traditional gift of clothes or cosmetics is modified to a boon that restricts its effect to perpetual beauty, but only in the eyes of her husband; that Rāvaṇa nevertheless finds her beautiful enough to wish to abduct her is yet another anomaly resulting from the tyranny of the well-established plot. When Rāma sees her at the end of her captivity she still appears beautiful to him; he misinterprets this as proof of her infidelity and agrees to her entering fire as a punishment, rather than simply divorcing her on suspicion as in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. Sītā laments that the boon is no longer a blessing but a curse, having much earlier been puzzled that Rāma should not find it strange that her beauty had been untouched by the sufferings of thirteen years living in Daṇḍaka forest.[16]

By the early thirteenth century, efforts had been made to lighten this negative image of Rāma, but with little success. In Jayadeva's *Prasannarāghava*, a magic illusion enables Rāma to watch, indignant but helpless, as Sītā resists Rāvaṇa's murderous threats in the *aśokavana* (illusion 6.5.), but she still enters fire after her liberation.[17] In the first half of the seventeenth century, the paradoxes were resolved in a much more convoluted way. In his *Adbhutadarpaṇa*, Mahādeva has Rāma provided with a magic mirror that enables him to hear Rāvaṇa declare Sītā's chastity to be too great for him to overcome. Rāma nevertheless declares that Sītā will still have to provide proof, and subsequently believes that she has performed her fire ordeal voluntarily as a demonstration to satisfy the public; he is unaware that a counterfeit of himself, produced by Maya in conspiracy with Śūrpaṇakhā in a vain attempt to cause her to commit suicide, has deluded her into thinking that he has repudiated her (illusion 6.6.).

The other example of Rāma's severity towards Sītā, banishing her from Ayodhyā in order to preserve the integrity of his position as ruler, has evoked much criticism within the tradition and beyond. Rarely has the personal cost to Rāma, made clear from the inception in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, been given full weight. Bhavabhūti does make some reference to Rāma's sorrow in *Uttararāmacarita* act 7, but in Dhīranāga's *Kundamālā* act 4 we are presented with a Rāma whose impotent desolation arouses our full sympathy.[18]

16 Śaktibhadra, *The Wondrous Crest-Jewel*: 2.5; 7.16.

17 Jayadeva, *Prasannarāghava*, see Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, vol. 7, pp. 488–498.

18 Dhīranāga, *The Jasmine Garland (Kundamālā)*, tr. A.C. Woolner, Punjab University Oriental Publications XXVII, London: Oxford University Press, 1935.

4. Sītā

The epic human Sītā, stalwart and steadfast protector of her own virtue during her captivity in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, undergoes a transformation to match that of her husband. She too comes to be venerated and eventually seen as a goddess, and this view is also reflected in the dramas. Not merely to preserve her own sexual reputation, but crucially to protect the god Rāma from the pollution of tolerating an impure wife, her virtue must, at all costs, be seen to be safeguarded; but this protection comes at something of a cost to her personality. At the end of the tenth century Śaktibhadra's hair-jewel, revealing the true nature of any transformed *rākṣasa* whom she might touch (illusion 4.4.), does not rob her of all awareness of her situation or control over her actions; by the end of the seventeenth century, when the emphasis is even more firmly on preserving her purity by magical means, she is not merely deluded and misguided but completely passive. Bhagavantarāyamakhin makes Anasūyā's gift an apotropaic bark-cloth garment to guard her from Rāvaṇa's touch, removing from Sītā any lingering element of responsibility for herself;[19] the stalwart and steadfast resistance to Rāvaṇa's threats and blandishments she displays throughout the *Vālmīki Rām-āyaṇa* can no longer suffice to convince dramatists' audiences, or even, in a number of cases, to convince the now-divine Rāma himself. In Mahādeva's convoluted *Adbhutadarpaṇa*, Rāma's response to the magic mirror's assurance of Sītā's chastity is that she will still have to provide proof (illusion 6.6.); and there are other dramas where various magical means of protecting Sītā's virtue do not satisfy the sceptical Rāma. It seems that Vālmīki's vindication by fire was too good an episode to be jettisoned.

Śaktibhadra's complex and chaotic device of enticing Sītā to contribute to her own abduction by entering Rāvaṇa's chariot willingly (illusion 4.4.) is entertaining, and only mildly to be taken seriously;[20] she has been deluded by a counterfeit Rāma (Rāvaṇa, of course), but she finds Rāvaṇa's trick so convincing that

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19 Bhagavantarāyamakhin, *Rāghavābhyudaya*, ed. P.M. Padmanabha Sarma, Tanjore Sarasvati Mahal Series, CCVI, Thanjavur: Tanjore Maharaja Serfoji's Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1985, Act 4.

20 A later teller in the *Narasiṃha Purāṇa* recounts a simpler, non-farcical episode so similar that the two can hardly not be related. Sītā is told by the disguised Rāvaṇa that he has brought a message from Rāma that Bharata has arrived to take them all back to Ayodhyā; deceived, she enters his chariot (*Narasiṃha Purāṇa*, ed. Puspendra Kumar, Delhi: Nag, 1987, 49.81–86). The version appearing in the *Bṛhaddharma Purāṇa* differs only slightly in detail: Rāvaṇa attempts to lure her from hermitage by saying Kausalyā wishes to see her urgently (*Bṛhaddharma Purāṇa*, ed. Haraprasád Śástrí, Bibliotheca Indica, 6 fascicules, Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1888–1897, 19.49).

Śaktibhadra can present her as satisfied by her abductor's explanation of why she can see Rāma (the real one) apparently talking to herself (in fact Śūrpaṇakhā). These delusions do not last, but are resolved when the author skilfully uses the two magic motifs for which he has already carefully prepared the audience.

However, the episode of Sītā contributing to her own abduction is more than simply entertaining: it ensures that she enters the chariot untouched by her abductor, with no stain on her purity. Some Purāṇic redactors went to even greater lengths to promote a pious image of her as unpolluted and therefore unpolluting: from the *Kūrma Purāṇa* onwards Rāvaṇa is made to abduct, not the true Sītā, but a substitute created by Agni.[21] Paradoxically, given the fondness of the classical authors for counterfeits, I have found no instances of this motif in the classical *nāṭya*s.

In the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāvaṇa had twice attempted to break Sītā's resistance by convincing her that her husband had been killed in battle, first by showing her Rāma's counterfeit severed head and later by having her shown Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa lying motionless on the battlefield, ensnared by Indrajit's snake-arrows.[22] After an initial period of despair, Sītā had been reassured by one of her *rākṣasī* attendants. In the *nāṭya*s, further illusions torment her. In the *Hanumannāṭaka*, the illusion is not that Rāma is dead, but that he is victorious (illusion 6.4.): Rāvaṇa courts her in the counterfeit form of Rāma, carrying his own counterfeit ten heads, but Sītā is disabused by her virtue as a faithful wife and reassured in unoriginal fashion by a heavenly voice that she will suffer no further deceptions, for she will not see the real Rāma again until she sees the dead body of her captor.

Sītā's role becomes even more passive when she is counterfeited by Śūrpaṇakhā to satisfy the *rākṣasī*'s frustrated lust. In Dharmagupta's *Rāmāṅkanāṭikā*, when Śūrpaṇakhā's purpose is to delude Rāma into accepting

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21 *Kūrma Purāṇa*: 2.34.115–37 (tr. Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare, 2 vols, Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology, vols 20–21, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981–1982); *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*: 2.14 (ed. J.L. Shastri, 2 vols, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984–85, repr. 2004); *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*: 9.16.31–53 (Bambaī: Khemarāja Śrīkṛṣṇadāsa, ?1988; repr. of Bombay: Venkatesvara Press, 1889); *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa*, 42.30 (ed. Pushpendra Kumar, Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 1983).

22 *VRm* 6.22–24; 6.37–38. Heads of both Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa counterfeited: *Abhiṣekanāṭaka*, 5 (ed. and tr. V. Venkataram Shastri, Lahore: Motilal Banarsi Dass, 1930); *Hanumannāṭaka*, 2.368 (in *Select Specimens of the Theatre of the Hindus*, 2 vols, by Horace Hayman Wilson, London: Parbury, Allen, and Co., vol. 2, pp. 363–373, 1835); *Mahānāṭaka*, tr. Bahadur, 8.508. Vidyujjihva creates further illusions to delude *vānara*s: Mallinātha, *Raghuvīracarita*, see P.G. Lalye, *Mallinātha*, Makers of Indian Literature, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2002, p. 98.

her as his wife, the true Sītā is shown in an ineffectual light, inferior to the amorous *rākṣasī* when she is (fortunately for her) unable to fulfil the identity-test proposed by Lakṣmaṇa (illusion 3.). At about the same time, but for no apparent reason, Bhāskarabhaṭṭa presents her in a purely inconsequential illusory marvel: she strays into a region cursed by Durvāsas, where she turns into a gazelle, but is soon restored by Agastya.[23]

Stripped of all the strength of character that adorns the epic human woman, and robbed even of the opportunity to say 'No', in the dramatists' hands this divinity is irreproachable but often deluded, ineffectual, passive. Like her husband, Sītā is diminished.

5. *Rākṣasa*s

The diminution of Rāma's stature, perhaps surprisingly, does not lead to a corresponding rise in the stature of his arch-enemy. The tricks of Rāvaṇa and his henchmen fail—unless success is demanded by the traditional plot—and the failure is often comical and predictable, especially when it is Rāvaṇa himself that is deluded. Those tricks that must succeed may be even more devious, as when he contrives to be welcomed into the hermitage by Rāma himself, but the violent passion of the fearsome monster whose power could terrify the gods themselves is now presented as weak lovesickness. Mocked and subjected to delusions contrived by his inferiors, even the all-powerful *rākṣasa* king is diminished in stature by the classical dramatists.

*Rākṣasa*s had always been presented as *kāmarūpin*, able to change shape at will,[24] yet they are seen to make relatively little use of this troublesome power in early versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*; many scholars have expressed surprise that Vālmīki's Śūrpaṇakhā approaches Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa in her own form, not (as in many later versions) as a beauty, enticing by human standards. The authors of many *nāṭya*s, on the other hand, seized on the opportunity to exploit the *rākṣasa*s' shape-changing ability in ever more fanciful and complex ways, occasionally even putting it to use not to deceive their enemies, but to delude and comfort their own lovelorn king.

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23 Bhāskarabhaṭṭa, *Unmattarāghava*, see Ghosh, *Epic Sources*, pp. 174–175.

24 The Thompson Indexes classify this widely-employed motif as D40 and D630: Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, 6 vols, rev. edn Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1955–1958 (repr., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, no date); Stith Thompson and Jonas Balys, *The Oral Tales of India*, Indiana University Publications, Folklore Series X, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958.

From at least as early as the beginning of the tenth century, Rājaśekhara and other dramatists had shown Rāvaṇa as lusting for Sītā from the time of the suitor test, and even competing in it. That he must fail is inevitable. The plot says so. He leaves Mithilā still pining for Sītā, and physically humiliated; the awe-inspiring might that could momentarily lift Kailāsa has been overshadowed when what appears to be a puny ascetic youth lifts and breaks Śiva's bow.[25] Rājaśekhara presents the elderly *rākṣasa* Mālyavān as commissioning the creation of a counterfeit Sītā in an attempt to comfort the lovesick Rāvaṇa (illusion 1.1.; see also 5.2.). Initially deluded, Rāvaṇa soon realizes the deception, as he must be made to do to allow the mandatory traditional abduction narrative to proceed undisturbed.

In the late seventeenth century, Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita exploits the comic potential inherent in the confusion produced when he brings counterfeits and true characters together at the suitor test; in his *Jānakīpariṇaya* he has Mārīca plot with the traditional *rākṣasa* maker of counterfeits, Vidyujjihva, to create an illusory Sītā apparently leaping into fire before her marriage, in an unsuccessful attempt to delude the genuine Rāma into imitating her, leaving the field clear for Rāvaṇa to satisfy his desire for the real Sītā (illusion 1.2.).

Also at the suitor test, Rāma Pāṇivāda aims his illusions at military rather than romantic goals in a complicated plot to avenge Rāma's victories over Tāṭakā, Mārīca and Subāhu. A *rākṣasa* counterfeits Daśaratha (along with his driver Sumantra), but loses his opportunity to forbid Rāma to take the suitor test when—predictably—the true Daśaratha and Sumantra arrive; the same *rākṣasa* then incites Paraśurāma to attack Rāma, with the usual lack of success; finally he incites Rāvaṇa to abduct Sītā (illusion 1.3.).

Subhaṭa's version of Aṅgada's embassy to Laṅkā (already mentioned), where he meets a counterfeit Sītā, and Rāvaṇa panics into revealing the deception (illusion 6.2.), is replaced by a much less inventive illusion in Mahādeva's *Adbhutadarpaṇa*; news is brought to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa by a *rākṣasa* counterfeiting a *vānara* ally that Aṅgada has been subverted by Rāvaṇa, news that is predictably countered by the return of Aṅgada.[26] The same *rākṣasa* later deludes them by purporting to show them Sugrīva's severed head (illusion 6.3.).

Vengeful *rākṣasa*s continue to persecute the victors during and after their return to Ayodhyā (illusions 7.1., 7.2.). Śūrpaṇakhā continues to pursue her malice against Rāma and Sītā for many years after their return to Ayodhyā, hoping to

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25 *VRm* 7.16.17–20; 1.66.17.

26 Many post-*VRm* authors explore the fact that as the son of Vālin, killed with questionable legitimacy by Rāma, Aṅgada's loyalty is open to subversion by Rāvaṇa; I have met no version in which the attempt succeeds.

destroy the whole family, now that she has two scores to settle: her mutilation, and the death of her brother. In Kalya Lakṣmīnṛsiṃha's drama, she possesses the washerman whose gossip deludes Rāma into banishing Sītā, then provokes the conflict between Rāma and his sons by planning to steal the *aśvamedha* horse; when Lava has been drawn into battle with Śatrughna, she counterfeits Sītā jumping into fire, bringing about his capture by Bharata when the delusion has caused him to swoon (illusion 8.).[27]

6. Secondary Villains

The secondary villains of the original narrative, Kaikeyī and by extension Mantharā, are accorded a rather different fate, in that the early dramatists absolve them of all guilt for the exile, although Kaikeyī's excuse in the *Pratimānāṭaka* is clumsy and unconvincing.[28] The process, already started in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, of deflecting Daśaratha's responsibility on to the women is extended and reversed by Bhavabhūti, Rājaśekhara and Murāri; Rājaśekhara extends the innocence to include Daśaratha himself (illusions 2.1., 2.2., 2.3.; see also 2.4., 2.5.). This entails focusing attention rather more on the *rākṣasa* perpetrators of similar delusions than on their victims, with the consequence (possibly unintended) of presenting Bhavabhūti's and Rājaśekhara's Mālyavāns, and particularly the favoured and obedient little granddaughter Śūrpaṇakhā, as less sinister, while they achieve greater stature than the erstwhile villain. On the other hand, Rāma's future allies lose some sympathy in Murāri's rewriting, where the power of counterfeiting is now attributed to the *vānara*s and their motives seem unconvincing: his Mantharā is counterfeited by the Śabarī on the instructions of Jāmbavān (illusion 2.3.). This policy of absolving Mantharā of guilt is in direct opposition to the process in some non-classical versions, where Mantharā acts less out of loyalty to her mistress but more out of a desire to avenge herself against Rāma, who, as a boy, had treated her in a way we now consider cruel.[29]

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27 Moorty reports that similar motifs are found in Telugu tradition (Kalya Lakṣmīnṛsiṃha, *Janakajānandanāṭaka*, ed. and tr. C. Lakshmi Narasimha Moorty, Arakere: Vidya Samvardhani Parishat, 1992, p. 24).

28 She claims (illogically) to have procured the exile to fulfil the blind ascetic's curse on Daśaratha, and then mistakenly to have said '14 years' when she meant '14 days'; *Pratimānāṭaka*, tr. Janaki, 6.73–74.

29 In Sanskrit, the revenge motif is first recorded added to the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* in some Northern mss (2.124*), then by Kṣemendra (*Rāmāyaṇamañjarī*, see Raghavan, *The Rāmāyaṇa in Classical Sanskrit*, p. 86, and Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, vol. 6, pp. 365–366); there is also an allusion at *Agni Purāṇa*, 6.8 (tr. N. Gangadharan), Ancient

7. Implications

Were the classical dramatists not worried that they were presenting a negative view of their hero? Of a hero, still irreproachable but perplexed and deluded, saved by agencies other than his own strength? Of a hero assailed by his enemies at all points in the narrative, but with weapons that his own superhuman strength cannot counter? Although a few early *nāṭya*s credit him with some *kṣatriya* values, in the main he has lost his towering epic stature. At the best, he is an object of pity. Now that he is a god, he seems more human.

The composers of some at least of the *nāṭya*s seem to have gloried in deliberately irreverent parodies, not only of Rāma, but also of a Rāvaṇa early portrayed as less strong than Rāma, who must be comforted by counterfeits, and liable to panic in a crisis. He has become less terrifying, more a figure of fun, now that the violent passion of the fearsome monster whose power could terrify the gods themselves is presented as weak lovesickness. Is he a fitting opponent for the once-superhuman, now divine, Rāma?

The circumstances in which these dramatic retellings were produced may provide an answer to such conundrums. The *nāṭya*s differ from other categories in being conceived as entertainment for the Sanskrit-speaking, cultured, elite court circles; they are primarily secular, but set within the religious and social context of their time, reflecting the developing understanding of Rāma as divine without seeking either to propagate or to deny it; similarly, the growing image of Hanumān as celibate is reflected by his self-control in Abhinanda's *kāvya* (illusion 11.1.).[30] These tellers took care not to reproduce each others' works in detail, and so could not expect their own to be reproduced; generally speaking, their variants did not enter the tradition, nor, it seems, were they intended to.

In that case, how far does it matter that the character they ascribe to hero, heroine and villain has been redrawn? The plays were not aimed at devotees, and

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Indian Tradition and Mythology, vols 27–30, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984–1987. The motif also appears in vernacular adaptations at the latest from the twelfth century onwards (Tamil: Kampaṉ, *Rāmāyanam*, tr. H.V. Hande, Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1996, p. 107; Telugu: *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa*, tr. Shantilal Nagar, Delhi: B.R. PC, 2001, 1.591–600; 2.141–150; Malay: *Hikayat Seri Rama*, see Alexander Zieseniss, in *Die Rāma-Sage bei den Malaien*, Hamburg: Friederichsen and de Gruyter 1928, p. 11, tr. P.W. Burch and *The Rāma Saga in Malaysia*, Singapore: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1963, p. 15; Thai: *Rāmakien*, tr. Ray A. Olsson, Bangkok: Praepittaya Co., 1968, pp. 70, 89). Whether this behaviour caused audiences of the time to see the young prince in quite such an unsavoury light as modern ones are likely to do is open to some doubt.

30   The image of Hanumān as celibate is largely limited to India; the view of his sexuality in Southeast Asia is startlingly different.

their authors were protected by the status of their patrons—as long as that patron remained in power; it comes as no surprise that a great many plays are known to have been lost, perhaps victim to the overthrow of their patrons. Unlike the epic continuators, unlike Paurāṇikas, Buddhists, some later vernacular tellers, and most certainly unlike Jains, they did not set out to present 'the right version'; even Virūpākṣadeva's revision of the narrative's outcome is at best scanty and half-hearted. Bhavabhūti himself presented two quite different plots without commenting on their lack of relationship; both the *Mahāvīracarita* and the *Uttararāmacarita* were possible ways of telling Rāma's story: that they were different evidently did not matter. These tellers were not interested in telling the old, well-loved story 'the right way'; they did it 'my way'—or, in the case of Bhavabhūti—in at least two incompatible 'my ways'. There is an irony inherent in the constant, restless search for novelty and fanciful elaboration of the narrative they had inherited. Constrained ever to seek novelty, the dramatists were destined by the rules of their genre never to achieve innovation. Their new features did not enter the tradition, and were not designed to enter it. Their *nāṭya*s are all what narratologists term 'variants'. Each play stands—or in some cases falls—alone.

Appendix

1. Illusions surrounding the suitor test

1.1. Rāvaṇa lusts for Sītā
Mālyavān commissions the creation of a counterfeit Sītā and her nurse/companion Sindūrikā to comfort the lovesick Rāvaṇa; though initially deluded, Rāvaṇa soon realizes the deception.

> Rājaśekhara, *Bālarāmāyaṇa* (acts 1–5), tr. S. Venkatarama Sastri, Bangalore: Irish Press, 1910, 1.42–43; 2.17–20; 3.9; 5.6–9.

1.2. Mārīca plots with Vidyujjihva to create an illusory Sītā apparently leaping into fire before her marriage, in an unsuccessful attempt to delude Rāma into imitating her, leaving the field clear for Rāvaṇa to satisfy his desire.

> Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita, *Jānakīpariṇaya*, see Kalya Lakṣmīnṛsiṃha, *Janakajā-nanda-nāṭaka*, pp. 22, 24.

1.3. Rāma Pāṇivāda aims his illusions at military rather than romantic goals in a complicated plot to avenge Rāma's victories over Tāṭakā, Mārīca and Subāhu. These illusions produce no corresponding delusions in their victims. A *rākṣasa*

counterfeits Daśaratha (along with his driver Sumantra), but loses his opportunity to forbid Rāma to take the suitor test when the true Daśaratha and Sumantra arrive; the same *rākṣasa* then incites Paraśurāma to attack Rāma, with the usual lack of success; finally he incites Rāvaṇa to abduct Sītā.

> Rāma Pāṇivāda, *Sītārāghava*, ed. Suranad Kunjan Pillai, Trivandrum Sanskrit Series CXCII, Trivandrum: Suranat Kunjan Pillai, 1958, pp. 3–4.

2. Illusions surrounding the exile

Foundational episode recomposed by some dramatists to such an extent that little remains recognizable beyond the mere fact that Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa leave for the forest.

2.1. Bhavabhūti makes the *rākṣasa* Mālyavān the chief culprit, helped by Śūrpaṇakhā; he knows he must remove Rāma (and especially Sītā) from the safety of Ayodhyā to the forest where Rāma will be vulnerable to attack from Virādha, Kabandha and others, and Rāvaṇa will be enabled to abduct Sītā; to save Laṅkā from carnage, Mālyavān expects Vālin to kill Rāma. Śūrpaṇakhā counterfeits the absent Mantharā and demands the exile from the deluded Daśaratha.

> Bhavabhūti, *Le Mahāvīracarita de Bhavabhūti accompagné du commentaire de Vīrarāgava*, éd. et trad. François Grimal, Publications de l'Institut français d'indologie Pondichéry, LXXIV, Pondichéry: Institut français, 1989, Act 4.

2.2. For Rājaśekhara Daśaratha too is innocent: sentence of exile is pronounced by a counterfeit created on the orders of Mālyavān, this time with Kaikeyī impersonated by Śūrpaṇakhā, and Mantharā by Śūrpaṇakhā's servant.

> Rājaśekhara, *Bālarāmāyaṇa*, 6, see Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, vol. 5, pp. 441–445.

2.3. For a quite different purpose, Murāri introduces a similar far-fetched ruse to contrive the exile, organized, not by Rāma's enemies, but by three of his closest allies or admirers: Jāmbavān, the Śabarī ascetic-woman, and Hanumān. The conspirators wish to depose Vālin and restore Sugrīva by promoting an alliance between Rāma and Sugrīva. Mantharā dies on her way to Mithilā and is counterfeited by the Śabarī on the instructions of Jāmbavān, presenting a forged letter apparently sent by Kaikeyī demanding the exile, while Hanumān cares for the Śabarī's body.

Murāri, *Anargharāghava*, 4.49.207–214; 5.3, in *Rama Beyond Price*, tr. Judit Törzsök, Clay Sanskrit Library, New York: New York University Press and JJC Foundation, 2006.

2.4. The exile is secured by less inventive means: a counterfeit Kaikeyī created by Śūrpaṇakhā claims the two boons from Daśaratha.

Sundaramiśra, *Abhirāmamaṇi*, 'Reconstructing Abhirāmamaṇi, a Lost Sanskrit Play', Radhavallabh Tripathi, *Sanskrit Studies*, 4, 2015, pp. 45–51; see p. 50.

2.5. Mantharā is counterfeited by the *rākṣasī* Ayomukhī, in order to promote her friend Śūrpaṇakhā's lust for Rāma.

Rāma Pāṇivāda, *Sītārāghava*, p. 4.

3. Śūrpaṇakhā's abortive attempt to seduce Rāma

Śūrpaṇakhā approaches Rāma as a counterfeit Sītā. This clumsy plot fails, for Rāma is not surprisingly bewildered to be faced with two apparent Sītās. Lakṣmaṇa saves the situation by asking them both to fetch a Pārijāta flower from heaven; the real Sītā is quite unable to perform this feat, and Śūrpaṇakhā is exposed when she carries it out with ease.

Dharmagupta, *Rāmāṅkanāṭikā*, see Doniger, Wendy, *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 19–20.

4. Abduction

Rāma is included in the delusion produced by the disguised Rāvaṇa.

4.1. Rāma welcomes the counterfeit mendicant to the hermitage, consults him about what offering he should make at Daśaratha's forthcoming *śrāddha*, and is advised to obtain a golden-flanked deer from the Himālaya; he prepares to leave to fetch one, taking Sītā with him. To avert the threatened ruin to Rāvaṇa's plan, the counterfeit mendicant hurriedly produces a new claim: a suitable one has appeared near the hermitage. In Lakṣmaṇa's absence, the deluded Rāma decides to go to hunt it himself, instructing Sītā to honour their guest, with the usual consequence.

Pratimānāṭaka, tr.Janaki, 5.57–61.

4.2. Rāma is deluded when approached at the hermitage by Rāvaṇa (with Prahasta disguised as a woman) impersonating Virādhita.

> (Jain) Rāmacandra, *Raghuvilāsa*, see Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, vol. 7, pp. 160–162 and 171–175.

4.3. Māyurāja has Rāvaṇa take on the identity of a named mendicant known to Rāma. This time it is Lakṣmaṇa who goes to hunt Mārīca, but Rāma and Sītā are sufficiently alarmed by a false pre-arranged report that Lakṣmaṇa has been carried off (brought by Rāvaṇa's similarly-disguised companion) that Rāma, urged by Sītā, entrusts her to Rāvaṇa's care and rushes to the rescue. Lakṣmaṇa, returning from killing Mārīca, meets the true mendicant.

> Māyurāja (Mātrarāja) Anaṅgaharṣa, *Udāttarāghava*, Acts 2, 3; critically edited by Venkatarama Raghavan, Chennai: Dr. V. Raghavan Centre for Performing Arts, 2016.

4.4. Śaktibhadra's retelling of this scene is even more complex. Rāvaṇa and his charioteer counterfeit Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, deceiving Sītā so that she enters Rāvaṇa's chariot voluntarily, deluded into believing that Bharata has been attacked by enemies and that they are going to his aid. The true Rāma, meanwhile, or rather his corpse, has also been counterfeited by the dying Mārīca, so that Lakṣmaṇa (the true Lakṣmaṇa), encountering them both, does not know which is his real brother; the true Rāma solves his dilemma by kicking the corpse (which of course reverts to *rākṣasa* form from the effect of the sages' magic ring). They then return to the hermitage, where they both suffer further delusion: Sītā has herself been counterfeited by Śūrpaṇakhā, until Rāma eventually wipes away her tears, and his touch causes her to revert to *rākṣasī* form (he is still wearing the sages' ring). It is from her that he learns of the abduction. Watching this close by in the chariot with the counterfeit Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, the true Sītā is puzzled to see the true Rāma talking to a counterfeit version of herself, but is reassured by Rāvaṇa, who is still counterfeiting Rāma, until she bashfully brushes away his hand and he reverts to *rākṣasa* form (the effect of the sages' other gift, her hair jewel).

> Śaktibhadra, *The Wondrous Crest-Jewel*, Acts 3, 4.

5. Illusions during the search

5.1. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa wait impatiently for news from the search parties, and despair when a counterfeit Hanumān reports that Sītā has been killed by Rāvaṇa;

the true Hanumān returns from his leap to Laṅkā just in time to prevent the suicide of Sugrīva.

Rāma Pāṇivāda, *Sītārāghava*, p. 5.

5.2. Rāvaṇa attempts to demoralize Rāma and prevent him building and crossing the causeway by throwing to the northern shore the severed head of a counterfeit Sītā; reassurance is provided by a bird (see illusion 1.1.).

Rājaśekhara 7, see Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, vol. 5, p. 444.

6. Illusions during the battle

6.1. Rāvaṇa attempts to secure peace by offering Rāma a *rākṣasī* counterfeiting Sītā; the ploy fails when the deception is detected by Lakṣmaṇa.

Rāghavābhyudaya, see Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, vol. 3, pp. 248–249.

6.2. Aṅgada, sent to Laṅkā with a defiant message from Rāma, is confused when several *rākṣasa*s assume Rāvaṇa's form, then confronted with a Sītā created on Rāvaṇa's instructions telling him that she is now Rāvaṇa's wife, and advising Rāma to return at once to Ayodhyā, for the city has been devastated by *rākṣasa*s and Bharata is dead. Aṅgada's delusion lasts only until news is brought that the real Sītā is attempting suicide, and the panic-stricken Rāvaṇa orders her guards to save her.

Subhaṭa, *Dūtāṅgada*, tr. Louis H. Gray, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 32, 1912, pp. 58–77; see pp. 69, 71.

6.3. The episode of Aṅgada's embassy is later supplied with a much less inventive illusion; news is brought to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa by a *rākṣasa* counterfeiting a *vānara* ally that Aṅgada has been subverted by Rāvaṇa, news that is predictably countered by the return of Aṅgada. The same *rākṣasa* later deludes them by purporting to show them Sugrīva's severed head.

Mahādeva, *Adbhutadarpaṇa*, see Ghosh, *Epic Sources*, pp. 177–178.

6.4. Rāvaṇa attempts to convince Sītā that Rāma has already triumphed; he courts her in the *aśokavana* in the counterfeit form of Rāma, carrying his own counterfeit ten heads, but she is disabused by her virtue as a faithful wife and reassured in unoriginal fashion by a heavenly voice that she will suffer no further

deceptions, for she will not see the real Rāma again until she sees the dead body of her captor.

> *Hanumannāṭaka*, Wilson, vol. 2, p. 368; *Mahānāṭaka*, tr. Bahadur, 3.513–515.

6.5. A magic device enables Rāma to watch events unfolding in Laṅkā; he watches Sītā repulse Rāvaṇa's advances as Hanumān arrives.

> Jayadeva, *Prasannarāghava*, see Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, vol. 7, pp. 488–498.

6.6. A magic mirror enables Rāma to watch events unfolding in Laṅkā. Though providing Rāma with reassurance by showing him Rāvaṇa declare that Sītā's chastity is unassailable, his reaction is to declare that Sītā will still have to provide proof. The traditional rejection of Sītā after the victory is actually performed (unknown to Rāma) by a counterfeit, in such a fashion that the true Rāma believes Sītā's attempted fire-suicide to have been a voluntary demonstration aimed at the public; it is actually an unsuccessful attempt by Śūrpaṇakhā and Maya to gain vengeance by provoking Sītā to commit suicide.

> Mahādeva, *Adbhutadarpaṇa*, see Ghosh, *Epic Sources*, pp. 28–29.

7. Illusions post-victory

7.1. Counterfeit tactic inverted: a spy of Rāvaṇa's relative Lavaṇa deludes those anxiously awaiting their return to Ayodhyā that Rāma and his companions are dead and that those approaching in the *puṣpaka* chariot are counterfeits, so that Bharata prepares to shoot Vibhīṣaṇa, assuming that this *rākṣasa* is Rāvaṇa until he is undeceived by Vasiṣṭha.

> Someśvaradeva, *Ullāgharāghava*, see Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, vol. 7, pp. 633–651.

7.2. Vengeful *rākṣasa*s plague both the returning victors and those anxiously awaiting their return. Counterfeits delude both parties, persuading them that the others are dead, so both parties prepare to commit suicide in the river Sarayū, to be saved just in time by the appearance of the others.

> Māyurāja, *Udāttarāghava*, Act 6.

8. Śūrpaṇakhā pursues her malice against Rāma and Sītā after their return to Ayodhyā

Śūrpaṇakhā possesses the washerman whose gossip deludes Rāma into banishing Sītā, then provokes the conflict between Rāma and his sons by planning to steal the *aśvamedha* horse, hoping to destroy them all; when Lava has been drawn into battle with Śatrughna, she counterfeits Sītā jumping into fire, bringing about his capture by Bharata when the delusion has caused him to swoon.

Kalya Lakṣmīnṛsiṃha, *Janakajānandanāṭaka*, Acts 3 and 5.

9. Delusions without counterfeits

9.1. Janaka becomes an ascetic when he is deluded into believing that Sītā has committed suicide, and Kausalyā too grieves.

Bhavabhūti, *Uttararāmacarita*, tr. Pollock, 4.17–19, pp. 31–49.

9.2. Sītā, invisible, is sent by Gaṅgā to comfort her distraught husband, who has swooned at the memories brought back by his visit to Janasthāna; her touch and tears revive him, but she remains invisible until permanently reunited with Rāma in Act 7.

Bhavabhūti, *Uttararāmacarita*, tr. Pollock, 3.13–14, 46–63, pp. 190–261.

9.3. Vālmīki, having invited Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to his hermitage, and knowing that many people will come to the bathing pool, makes the hermitage women, including Sītā, invisible so that they can continue to bathe there. Sītā's reflection nonetheless remains visible in the pool, glimpsed by Rāma, who faints when he cannot find her; Sītā cannot stop herself approaching and her touch revives him. Rāma begs forgiveness, wipes his eyes on her garment, pulls it off (she is still invisible) and puts on her wrap, while she puts on his and leaves. The repentant Rāma's hopes are shattered when the jester Kauśika announces that the nymph Tilottamā intends counterfeiting Sītā, and he concludes that he has been deceived.

Dhīranāga, *Kundamālā*, Acts 3 and 4.

10. Plays-within-plays

10.1. Rāvaṇa has failed the suitor test and left Mithilā without knowing the result; pining for Sītā, he is shown a drama of the outcome.

Rājaśekhara, *Bālarāmāyaṇa*, tr. Venkatarama Sastri, Act 3.

10.2. The captive Sītā is enabled to see what has happened in Daṇḍaka since she has been abducted, reassuring her that Rāma is taking steps to locate and rescue her and that Hanumān is indeed a messenger to be trusted and not a counterfeit *rākṣasa*. However, in this case the dramatic illusion is not used to save the playwright from presenting his whole narrative in the previous acts.

Bhagavantarāyamakhin, *Rāghavābhyudaya*, Act 5.

10.3. Vālmīki arranges for Rāma and others to watch the dramatic nature of Sītā's disappearance during labour into the care of Earth and Gaṅgā. Bhavabhūti's audience already know what Vālmīki's audience do not, that Gaṅgā has long since taken the weaned twins, Lava and Kuśa, away from their mother, to be fostered and educated in Vālmīki's hermitage.

Bhavabhūti, *Uttararāmacarita*, tr. Pollock, 1.101; 2.16; 3.9; 7.22.

11. Illusions within *Kāvya*s

11.1. Within Svayaṃprabhā's cave, Hanumān resists a seduction attempt by a certain Māyāmaya counterfeiting a *vānarī*.

Abhinanda, *Rāmacarita*, see Raghavan, *Rāmāyaṇa in Classical Sanskrit*, p. 66.

11.2. Sītā is briefly deluded by the sight of Rāma's corpse (not just his head) counterfeited by Vidyujjihva; reassurance by her *rākṣasī* sympathizer, Saramā, is supplemented by the proof of her own eyes when she is taken to see the true Rāma standing fit and well beside Lakṣmaṇa on Mt. Suvela, and she believes what she sees.

Rāma Pāṇivāda, *Rāghavīya*, ed. L.A. Ravi Varma, Trivandrum Sanskrit Series CILVI, Trivandrum: Supt., Govt. Press, 1942, 16.66–69.

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