Narrative Discourse and the Mahābhārata
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Joydeep Bagchee

So it is this narrating instance that we have still to look at, according to the traces it has left—the traces it is considered to have left—in the narrative discourse it is considered to have produced. But it goes without saying that the instance does not necessarily remain identical and invariable in the course of a single narrative work.

—Genette, *Narrative Discourse*

Introduction

As this panel is dedicated to Alf Hiltebeitel, let me begin by recalling the opening lines of his *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*, the book that, by Hiltebeitel's own testimony, marks the culmination of his "literary turn" in the Mahābhārata studies.[1] Hiltebeitel writes:

> Western scholarly reception of the *Mahābhārata* is squarely built upon the premise, aired most magisterially by Moriz Winternitz and Hermann Oldenberg, that the *Mahābhārata* is a "literary unthing" (*literarisches Unding*), a "monstrous chaos" (*ungeheuerliches Chaos*). Although our time is now one in which "literary monstrosity" might imply a kind of artistry … the phrase is simply not adequate to the critical task.[2]

To underscore Hiltebeitel's contribution, I wish to note another opinion about the Mahābhārata also "aired most magisterially" by Moriz Winternitz, this time concerning the authorship of the Mahābhārata:

> To the present day this gigantic work, in spite of all the divergent elements which have entered into it, is generally considered in India as one uniform poem, composed by the venerable Rishi, Krishna Dvaipáyana, or Vyása, who is also credited with the arrangement of the four Vedas and the authorship of the Puránas. (This is about the same as if one were to believe that the whole of Sanskrit literature from Kalidasa to Jayadeva was composed by one man.)[3]

Since there is no better means of exposing this *niaiserie allemande* than by looking over the border, I shall now turn to a French literary theorist.

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[1] Alf Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 1.

[2] See Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, "Introduction," in *Reading the Fifth Veda: Studies on the Mahābhārata—Essays by Alf Hiltebeitel*, vol 1, ed. Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee (Leiden: Brill, 2011), xx–xxv.

[3] Moriz Winternitz, "The Mahabharata," *The Visva-Bharati Quarterly* 1 (1924): 345–46. There are actually three arguments here: (1) the *quantitative* argument (the four Vedas, the Mahābhārata, and the eighteen Mahāpurāṇas cannot have been composed by one man); (2) the *temporal* argument (Kalidasa and Jayadeva are separated by some seven centuries); and (3) the *linguistic* or *stylistic* argument (Kalidasa's and Jayadeva's work are separated by differences of language and style). The first argument has been effectively countered in Bruce M. Sullivan, "The Tale of an Old Monkey and a Fragrant Flower: What the Mahābhārata's Rāmāyaṇa May Tell Us about the Mahābhārata," in *Argument and Design: The Unity of the Mahābhārata*, ed. Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 188–89 and the third in Bruce M. Sullivan, "The Significance of *The Nay Science* for the Study of the Mahābhārata," reviews of *The Nay Science*, *International Journal of Dharma Studies* 4, no. 10 (2016): 12–13. The present paper addresses the second argument, which it shows is based on a misconception about the nature of Vyāsa's identity.

Vyāsa as the Author of the Mahābhārata

The concept of "metalepsis," first theorized by Genette,[4] provides a new way to look at Vyāsa in the Mahābhārata. Discounting the facile expression "the legendary/mythic author of the Mahābhārata," scholars have so far viewed Vyāsa in one of four ways:[5]

1. As the epic's "diaskeuast" (Pott and Lassen);
2. As the name of the "rhapsodes" who recited and transmitted the epic (Holtzmann Sr.);
3. As the "personification" of the alleged Brahmanic redactors of the epic (Holtzmann Jr. and von Simson); and
4. As "symbolic" of the epic poets, "the *ṛṣis* of the 'Fifth Veda'" (van Buitenen and Hiltebeitel).[6]

Although each of these four alternatives conceives of Vyāsa somewhat differently, a common theme unites them all: as "the ultimate authorial agency"[7] behind the text, Vyāsa represents "the actual creators of the text."[8] The "actual creators" again may be very diverse: opinions range from Indo-Germanic bards to a Buddhist poet working at the court of King Aśoka,[9] not to forget Brahmans who wished "to clarify to the devout kings of India … that they can meet with no greater fortune than when sacred Brahmans lust after their wives and graciously desire to take a hand in ennobling their lineage."[10] But whoever these "actual creators" were, it *appears* that, at some stage, the tradition decided to place the entire canon under the seal and authority of Vyāsa.[11] Thus, the central problem of Mahābhārata studies hitherto has been to determine:

1. Just who or what was behind the text;

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[4] Dorrit Cohn, "Metalepsis and Mise en Abyme," trans. Lewis S. Gleich, *Narrative* 20, no. 1 (2012): 105–14.

[5] I explicitly exclude from discussion here Bruce M. Sullivan, *Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa: The Seer of the Fifth Veda* (Leiden: Brill, 1990); of all scholars of the epic, Sullivan comes closest to understanding what Vyāsa represents when he sees him as the textual Brahmā in the universe of the Mahābhārata. This entire paper works towards a validation of this view.

[6] Full citations and translations, where appropriate, of these passages follow in an appendix.

[7] Even this statement requires interrogation: Vyāsa is not the "ultimate authorial agency" in the sense that he is the narrating instance most proximate to the literary instance (these terms are explained later in the paper). He is the ultimate authorial agency on the strength of *the text's attribution*, and we must ask why the text attributes authorship to someone who is at best an occasional metadiegetic or meta-metadiegetic narrator.

[8] Fitzgerald's views in James L. Fitzgerald, "The Many Voices of the Mahābhārata," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123, no. 4 (2003): 804, n. 9.

[9] Adolf Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik des Mahābhārata* (Kiel: C. F. Haessler, 1892), 105–6.

[10] Adolf Holtzmann Sr., *Indische Sagen. Zweite verbesserte Auflage in zwei Bänden*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Adolf Krabbe, 1854), xii.

[11] Compare Brockington on Vyāsa's "authoritativeness": "The designation of the Mahābhārata as the 'fifth Veda' is not only a claim to continuity with the past but more importantly a claim to the authoritativeness of the Vedas, an authority which in theory also is contained within it). This was reinforced by claiming that it had been promulgated by Vyāsa, the *ṛṣi* who was traditionally the compiler of the Vedas, even if the trend then to designate him as Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa had the effect of reversing the process by tending to make him again an individual." John L. Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 7. But since Vyāsa is first identified as the divider of the Vedas ("Greatest of the scholars of the *Veda*, he divided the One *Veda* into four parts"; Mahābhārata 1.54.5; van Buitenen trans.) *in the Mahābhārata*, the argument cannot be used retrospectively to justify placing the Mahābhārata under his name. Indeed, except for one reference to Vyāsa, the son of Parāśara, in the Taittirīya Āraṇyaka, the Vedas do not know of Vyāsa.

2. When and why it was attributed to Vyāsa;
3. Who or what Vyāsa represents;[12] and
4. What the tradition intended with this attribution.[13]

Certainly, there are reasons to view Vyāsa as the epic's author: we are told that these tales were first "recited" by Vyāsa;[14] that he "compiled" the *saṃhitā*;[15] that he "composed" the *itihāsa*;[16] that he "taught" it to Vaiśaṃpāyana,[17] and that the latter "recited" it during the pauses of the sacrificial session of Janamejaya.[18] It is this story that the bard Ugraśravas carried to the Naimiṣa, where we "hear" it alongside the sages in that forest. Further references to Vyāsa's creation of the Mahābhārata *ākhyāna* such as the one at Mahābhārata 1.56.32[19] only reinforce the impression that Vyāsa is not only the first source of the epic; he is also the identical with the source we imagine existed *outside* of the narrated world of the epic.[20] But this conclusion is premature for several reasons:

1. We do not know that such a person existed;
2. Interpretations of Vyāsa as the "arranger" or "compiler" of the text beg the question; and

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[12] See the useful summary of opinions provided in Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*, 32.

[13] It initially seems as though Mahābhārata scholars were actually preoccupied with other problems: for example, establishing the existence of a heroic Aryan race, justifying their theories of racial superiority (of the "Indo-Germanic epic peoples"), and so on. But insofar as these were elements arising from the *story*, they did not pose much difficulty for scholars. If the Mahābhārata only consisted of the *bheda*, the dicing, the forest-exile, and the war as postulated by scholars, it would have offered little resistance to their interpretations. The history of Mahābhārata scholarship will bear out my contention that greater effort went into explaining why what is in the text was *not there originally*, and that the Ādiparvan in particular was a focus of scholarly attention. After all, it was here that the thesis of progressive inflation (and, concurrently, distortion or manipulation) of the text first found a foothold: interpreted "historically," the multiple narrations, though the text's *fiction*, seemed to confirm just that process of change and expansion that scholars wished to see in the text. For the source of the quote, see 75.

[14] kṛṣṇadvaipāyanaproktāḥ supuṇyā vividhāḥ kathāḥ | (Mahābhārata 1.1.9; cf. also 1.1.15: dvaipāyanena yat proktaṁ purāṇaṁ paramarṣiṇā |)

[15] vedaiś caturbhiḥ samitāṁ vyāsasyādbhutakarmaṇaḥ | (Mahābhārata 1.119)

[16] itihāsam imaṁ cakre puṇyaṁ satyavatīsutaḥ || (Mahābhārata 1.1.52)

[17] śaśāsa śiṣyam āsīnaṁ vaiśaṁpāyanam antike || (Mahābhārata 1.1.57)

[18] sa sadasyaiḥ sahāsīnaḥ śrāvayām āsa bhāratam |
karmāntareṣu yajñasya codyamānaḥ punaḥ punaḥ || (Mahābhārata 1.1.58)

[19] tribhir varṣaiḥ sadotthāyī kṛṣṇadvaipāyano muniḥ |
mahābhāratam ākhyānaṁ kṛtavān idam uttamam || (Mahābhārata 1.56.32)

[20] For all his advances over the German text-historical method, this problem still bedevils Hiltebeitel, who argues: "I propose further that the *Mahābhārata* was written by 'out of sorts' Brahmans who may have had some minor king's or merchant's patronage, but, probably for personal reasons, show a deep appreciation of, and indeed exalt, Brahmans who practice the 'way of gleaning': that is, *uñchavṛtti* Brahmans reduced to poverty who live a married life and feed their guests and family by 'gleaning' grain." Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*, 19. It should thus be understood that, by turning to the theory of metalepsis to interpret Vyāsa, I am proposing something other than Hiltebeitel's "literary turn," which remains the illegitimate (and Oedipal) offspring of his French structuralist inheritance from Biardeau and his attempts to ingratiate himself with the German "text-historical" school. This paper approaches the question of Vyāsa from *within* the narrative universe of the Mahābhārata, rather than search for the author or authors who putatively exist "outside" the text, and is thus closer to Adluri's *aesthetic* approach to the Mahābhārata as a "work of art" rather than a "work of literature."

3. Even if the tradition wished to note the role of an arranger or compiler in shaping the texts, it does not explain why it should attribute this role to Vyāsa.[21]

As an alternative to text-historical speculations about the author, his milieu, whether multiple "authors" or "redactors" worked on the text, and how their activity might have driven the expansion of the text, I propose using Genette's typology of narration from the sixth chapter of *Narrative Discourse*[22] to look at Vyāsa in relation to the epic's several "narrating instances." I argue that the equation of Vyāsa with a historical author or with the "literary instance" of the Mahābhārata is not so easy. Vyāsa is a crucial element of the epic's use of "narrative metalepsis," that is, "taking hold of (telling) by changing level" (235, n. 51). As such, he cannot be identified with an author outside the text without doing massive violence to it. Indeed, this naïve and reductive identification explains *why* most scholars have misunderstood the literary nature of the text.[23]

Voice as an Element of Plot

Genette first introduces the concept of "metalepsis" in *Narrative Discourse*, in the sixth chapter on "Voice." This chapter comprises a discussion of "the way in which the narrating itself is implicated in the narrative" (33), and hence is obviously the most relevant chapter for the Mahābhārata. Before discussing metalepsis itself, I first briefly review some of the concepts Genette introduces in the first section of this chapter. I will then explicate two key concepts—narrating instance and narrative levels—that set up Genette's discussion of metadiegesis and metalepsis.

Drawing on Benveniste's distinction between "story" and "discourse,"[24] Genette makes a distinction between narrative and narrating instance.[25] The latter effect is

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[21] Logically, it makes more sense for Śaunaka, perhaps working together with the other sages of the Naimiṣāraṇyaka, to compile all the materials at his disposal.

[22] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980). All citations to Genette hereafter will be provided in parentheses in the text.

[23] This way of posing the problem has given scholars endless scope for emphasizing their critical superiority over Indians. Thus, von Simson writes, "The Mahābhārata belongs—at least according to the Western view—to the anonymous literature of India, whose authorship cannot be determined at all and whose period and circumstances of emergence can only be determined in broad outlines. The Indian tradition, however, which we know about from the Mahābhārata itself but also from other sources, believes it can identify an author, Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana, who is familiar under the moniker Vyāsa." Georg von Simson, *Mahābhārata: Die Große Erzählung von den Bhāratas* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2011), 636–37. Steiner makes the contrast even more explicit: "After all, it makes a massive difference to the interpretation and historical assignment of a text and its parts whether one, for example, believes that the gigantic Indian epic Mahābhārata, which traditionally consists of 100,000 double verses, was composed by a single author, namely, the sage Vyāsa, or whether one attempts to demonstrate methodically with critical methods that a long tradition of oral compositions, which would have been recited by bards, preceded the manifold written recensions of the epic, which differ from each other and are today regionally distributed." Roland Steiner, "Indologie? Vom Jubiläum und vom Sterben," *Südasien* 3 (2018): 18. But von Simson and Steiner can save themselves their jejune racial thrills, because they *themselves* commit *the very error they accuse Indians of*—that is, of identifying Vyāsa with a historical person and then thinking that this one historical person must have written the entire Mahābhārata.

[24] Émile Benveniste, "Subjectivity in Language," in *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. M. E. Meek (Coral Gables: FL: University of Miami Press, 1971), 223–30.

[25] Even though Genette sometimes uses "narrating instance" to refer to the person narrating at any given time, it should not be misunderstood to mean just this. Maximally, it can refer to everything related to the narrating situation, provided we understand this to mean not just the description or the setting of the narration, but aspects such as narrative level, relation between narrator and narratee or narrator and other

subsumed under the category of "voice," a term Genette borrows from Vendrys, but expands considerably. For Genette, the subject (of Vendrys's definition) is "not only the person who carries out or submits to the action, but also the person (the same one or another) who reports it, and, if need be, all those people who participate, even though passively, in this narrating activity" (213). Thus, "voice" designates not just "the mode of action of the verb in its relations to the subject"[26]—active narrator or passive narratee (the specific "verb" under consideration being "to narrate")—but all those who are in some way related to this narrating activity, be it through further acts of narration or being indirect recipients of the narrative, implied listeners, and so on.

In this paper, I shall use Genette's category to locate all the interactions that Mahābhārata scholars have previously theorized, though inadequately, under rubrics such as "embedding," "emboxment," "framing," and "frame narratives."[27] Genette's terminology overcomes the hypothesis of mechanical and extrinsic additions to a "core" epic, which has characterized Mahābhārata scholarship ever since Lassen first proposed it in 1837,[28] while also underscoring an important point Genette makes: in literary works featuring second order narrations, often the real drama lies, not in the story itself, but in *how the story is relayed*.[29] The use of "voice" in this paper thus corresponds to the shift from the *bheda* narrative, taken by scholars since Lassen to be the "real" story (that is, in their opinion, *history*), to the *discourse* aspect of that narrative.

The reasons why Mahābhārata scholars have, hitherto, hardly considered the latter aspect of the epic are too well known to reprise them here.[30] Suffice it to say that German Indologists approached the Mahābhārata as a deficient example of "history." The epic was a recollection of the heroic age, and reported on an actual conflict between two parties. This historical account was then enclosed in diverse materials of a religious and ritual nature, while also being distorted to suit the interests of the new political rulers of

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narrators (second degree, third degree narrators, etc.). See also the translator's note on p. 31: "The narrating instance, then, refers to something like the narrating situation, the narrating matrix—the entire set of conditions (human, temporal, spatial) out of which a narrative statement is produced."

[26] *Petit Robert*, s.v. "*voix*."

[27] On "embedding" in the Mahābhārata, see C. Z. Minkowski, Janamejaya's *Sattra* and Ritual Structure," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, no. 3 (1989): 401–20. On "frame narratives" as an element of the epic's mechanical and ideology-driven expansion, see Thomas Oberlies, "(Un)ordnung im Mahābhārata: Rahmenerzählungen, Gesprächsebenen und Inhaltsangaben," *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 25 (2008): 73–102.

[28] "A great portion of the introduction of the text at present is related to this later version, since everything that is found until page 80 of the printed edition, up to the *Âdivançaparva* or the book of the first generations, is only there to acquaint the listeners of *Saûti* with the things they must know in order to understand the occasion and purpose of the snake sacrifice of *G'anamêg'aja* [Janamejaya] at which the *Mahâbh.* was first narrated. *All this does not belong to the actual story of the great battle in any way at all*." Christian Lassen, "Beiträge zur Kunde des Indischen Altertum aus dem *Mahâbhârata* I: Allgemeines über das *Mahābhārata*," *Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* (1837): 68 (italics added).

[29] "When I read *Gambara* or *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*, I am interested in a story, and care little to know who, tells it, where, and when; if I read *Facino Cane*, at no time can I overlook the presence of the narrator in the story he tells; if it is *La Maison Nucingen*, the author makes it his business to draw my attention to the person of the talker Bixiou and the group of listeners he addresses; if it is *L'Auberge rouge*, I will undoubtedly give less attention to the foreseeable unfolding of the story Hermann tells than to the reactions of a listener named Taillefer for the narrative is on two levels, and the second—*where someone narrates*—is where most of the drama's excitement is" (212–13).

[30] See Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, *The Nay Science: A History of German Indology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

northern India.[31] However, besides the reasons peculiar to the German reception of the epic—a lack of literary sophistication, a naive belief in "history" as "true," and a lack of interest in anything except a blood and guts narrative of Aryan Kṣatriya glory—there is a further reason that has hindered discussion of the discourse aspect of the Indian epic, this is the difficulty of separating narrative from writing, fiction from reality. Genette recognizes this difficulty as well:

> Poetics is experiencing a comparable difficulty [to linguistics] in approaching the generating instance of narrative discourse, an instance for which we have reserved the parallel term *narrating*. This difficulty is shown especially by a sort of hesitation, no doubt an unconscious one, to recognize and respect the autonomy of that instance, or even simply its specificity. On the one hand, as we have already noted, critics restrict questions of narrative enunciating to questions of 'point of view'; on the other hand they identify the narrating instance with the instance of 'writing,' the narrator with the author, and the recipient of the narrative with the reader of the work: a confusion that is perhaps legitimate in the case of a historical narrative or a real autobiography, but not when we are dealing with a narrative of fiction, where the role of narrator is itself fictive, even if assumed directly by the author, and where the supposed narrating situation can be very different from the act of writing (or of dictating) which refers to it. (213)

This last sentence is crucial. No proofs are required to show that Mahābhārata scholars explicitly and repeatedly identified the epic with a historical narrative, and hence "the narrating instance with the instance of 'writing,' the narrator with the author, and the recipient of the narrative with the reader of the work." Indeed, this identification underlies all four ways of viewing Vyāsa listed earlier. If Indologists at all acknowledged the complexity of the Mahābhārata, it was precisely in terms of ascribing the different narrators and their narratives to external and individual "points of view."[32] Thus, the Vyāsa narrative represented the epic's Brahmanic iteration, the epic's Naimiṣa frames were the work of "Nārāyaṇa theologians,"[33] Vaiśaṃpāyana's narration to Janamejaya

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[31] Speculations about who these rulers were range, of course, from the "thieving hill folk" of the Pāṇḍavas (Weber, Holtzmann Jr.) to the "upstart Pāṇḍavas" (van Buitenen). More recently, Fitzgerald has proposed multiple redactions of the epic, alternately under the aegis of Puśyamitra Śuṅga and the Guptas, including an unclear role played by King Kharavela of Cedi! See James L. Fitzgerald, "No Contest between Memory and Invention: The Invention of the Pāṇḍava Heroes of the Mahābhārata," in *Epic and History*, ed. David Konstan and Kurt A. Raaflaub (Malden, MA: Wiley–Blackwell, 2010), 103– 21.

[32] Schreiner provides a detailed account of the logic underlying this approach to unraveling texts: "An analysis of the traces of the redactional history must set out from the premise that the combination did not occur arbitrarily and accidentally but that the intentions and motivational reasons ('motives') of the composers/redactors/transmitters let themselves be discovered at least partially or hypothetically or can be read out of the wording, the arrangement, the cross-references in the text…. The textual corpus will be synchronically interrogated with a view to whether traces of an opposition of standpoints ('position' and 'counterposition'; 'argument' and 'counterargument'; 'question' and 'answer') can be found. As interpretive statements about the text, these standpoints should be objectifiable results; they can be brought into a hypothetical order that, on the one hand, indicates a 'conceptual development' and, on the other, (diachronically) the course of the history of religion, at least in the area of doctrinal development(s)." Peter Schreiner, "'Schau Gottes'—ein Leitmotiv indischer Religionsgeschichte?" in *Nārāyaṇīya Studien*, ed. P. Schreiner (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997), 161–62. A more concise statement of what Indological "text-historical" praxis aims at cannot be found.

[33] A claim made by both Thomas Oberlies and Reinhold Grünendahl, with each disputing the other's authorship. It is, of course, ridiculous. "Nārāyaṇa Theologie" is as much a part of the war books as it is of

was possibly "the original Bhārata," whereas Saṃjaya's narration corresponded to the original "war situation" of the Mahābhārata. Furthermore, each of these narrations referred to a concrete stage in the text's historical evolution: Jaya, Bhārata, and Mahābhārata.[34] But this way of unraveling the text's complexity does not work because:

1. As we have argued in previous work, the order of narrators does not align with the putative developmental history traced by scholars for the work;
2. Although the different narrating instances introduce important modulations into the work, none of them can simplistically be identified with a particular "ideology"; and
3. We have to remember that all of them are *fictions*[35] of the text: Vaiśaṃpāyana exists in Ugraśravas's narrative, Vyāsa and Vaiśaṃpāyana both meet and

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the Ādiparvan as Adluri's contribution in this seminar shows. See Thomas Oberlies, "Die Ratschläge des Sehers Nārada: Ritual an und unter der Oberfläche des Mahābhārata," in *New Methods in the Research of Epic/Neue Methoden der Epenforschung*, ed. Hildegard L. C. Tristram (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1998), 125–41 and Reinhold Grünendahl, "Zur Stellung des Nārāyaṇīya im Mahābhārata," in *Nārāyaṇīya-Studien*, ed. Peter Schreiner (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997), 197–240. I present only the latter's conclusions here: "Within the epic textual layer(s) dealt with here, we found diverse connections between two aspects of Vyāsa: on the one hand, as the enunciator of Nārāyaṇa theology (in particular, the doctrine of identity), who is regarded as part of or identical with Nārāyaṇa, and on the other hand, as the author of the *mahābhārata*. I therefore would like to postulate that the latter aspect belongs to the specific intellectual content of the school of Nārāyaṇa theology outlined above. This school in particular manifestly had a decisive influence on the final redaction of the epic. On the other hand, Vyāsa appears in numerous passages in the epic where the two aspects are not addressed at all; in other respects as well, we can at best recognize a loose connection with the ideological profile outlined above, for example in his aforementioned discourse on 'epic' yoga (12.224ff.). In numerous other passages there is absolutely no connection to Nārāyaṇa theology. I therefore think it likely that this school made use of Vyāsa, a figure already found in the epic, to underpin its claim to authority in general and its position in the Mahābhārata in particular. Let us summarize in conclusion: The Nārāyaṇa theology of the Nārāyaṇīya and the ideological profile that can be assigned to it are manifest in various passages distributed throughout the Mahābhārata, which together form a kind of framework. By means of this framework, the school of the »epic Pāñcarātrins« which articulates itself in this framework has apparently systematically integrated its theological ideas into the Mahābhārata (see p. 209) and at the same time has given the epic as a whole its distinctive stamp" (ibid., 239–40).

[34] The classic example of such "historical" unraveling of the epic's multiple narrations is provided by Oberlies who opines: "According to Mbh 1,1.50 there are 'some Brahmans who learn the Bhārata beginning with Manu, others who learn it beginning with Āstīka, and [again] others who learn it from Uparicara on in the right way' (*manvādi bhāratam kecid āstīkādi thatāpare/ thatoparicarādy anye viprāḥ samyag adhīyate*). The beginning from 'Manu' on may refer to Mbh 1,1.27ff., where the creation of the world is reported. Āstīka and Vasu in contrast clearly target Mbh 1,3/13 and 1/57. If then this hint of the Mahābhārata is to be understood 'historically' [historisch], the reference here would be to three versions of the text. And if one compares these against the text present to us in the critical edition, the 'Manu-version' would be characterized through the fact that it 'begins with the beginning', the 'Āstīka-version' through the fact that it lacks the outermost frame (and therewith the first dialogical level) and the list of contents, and the 'Vasu-version' through the fact that it would be without the narrations of Āstīka and (therewith without) the inner frame, that of the 'snake sacrifice', (as well as without the outer frame and the first four lists of contents). In other words, the distinguishing characteristic of these three versions could be the *absence* of a frame—the 'Manu-version' would be that with two, the 'Āstīka-version' that with one frame, while such [a frame] would be completely lacking for the 'Vasu-version'." Oberlies, "(Un)ordnung im Mahābhārata," 87–88.

[35] I use "fictional" here in the strict sense in which it is defined in Dorrit Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 12–15, that is, in the sense of "a literary nonreferential narrative," where *nonreferential* "signifies that a work of fiction itself creates the

converse in Ugraśravas's narrative, Ugraśravas himself exists in the literary fiction that is the Naimiṣa, and the Naimiṣa itself in the book's description of it.[36] The complexity of the situation identified by Genette is heightened in the Mahābhārata because we have at least two narrating instances[37] (Ugraśravas to the Naimiṣa *ṛṣis* in the Naimiṣa and Vaiśaṃpāyana to King Janamejaya at the *sarpasattra*), instances that are depicted as occurring consecutively, even though textually they unfold concurrently, whereas the act of composition, the act of dissemination, and the act of transmission are separated out in both "space" and "time,"[38] and *all three* are different from the act of writing (which, however, occurs only in a late, and brilliantly philosophical, interpolation: Gaṇeśa's *amanuensis* of the Mahābhārata).[39] Moreover, there is a

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world to which it refers by referring to it." Cohn further specifies that, "when we speak of the nonreferentiality of fiction, we do not mean that it *can* not refer to the real world outside the text, but that it *need* not refer to it. But beyond this, the adjective of my definitional phrase also signifies that fiction is subject to two closely interrelated distinguishing features: (1) its references to the world outside are not bound to accuracy; and (2) it does not refer *exclusively* to the real world outside the text." These clarifications are important because, under the influence of Protestant literalism and even more so of nineteenth-century historicism, "fiction," like "myth" and "allegory," has come to have the derogatory meaning of "not real" or "untrue," in other words, of being "merely fictional." Fiction is then seen as a deficient category of history (equated with "true narrative about the past"), rather than referring, as Cohn notes, to a different (and often *higher*) degree of reality. The present desire felt by many Indians to demonstrate the "historicity" of the Mahābhārata is a direct response to the German equation of history with "the truth," whereas as art the Mahābhārata actually stands higher than reality.

[36] Even the reference to three versions of the text—Jaya, Bhārata, and Mahābhārata—which scholars took as one of the few secure pieces of "historical" information that could be gleaned from the text is a *fiction* internal to the text.

[37] Obviously, there are other instances such as Saṃjaya narrating to Dhṛtarāṣṭra or Bhīṣma narrating to Yudhiṣṭhira. But these are partial narrations. Here I mean only the two narrating intances for the narrative of the Mahābhārata. The question of how these extradiegetic and diegetic narrating instances relate to other higher degree narrations in the text (whether they are *metadiegetic* or *meta-metadiegetic* or even *meta-meta-metadiegetic*) will be taken up in a future study.

[38] Space does not permit me here to develop these distinctions. I will only note that the "time of the narrating" forms a central element of narrative theory for Genette, since "I can very well tell a story without specifying the place where it happens, and whether this place is more or less distant from the place where I am telling it; nevertheless, it is almost impossible for me not to locate the story in time with respect to my narrating act, since I must necessarily tell the story in a present, past, or future tense. This is perhaps why the temporal determinations of the narrating instance are manifestly more important than its spatial determinations" (215). The Mahābhārata's complex narrative structure and its telescoping of narrative time and narrated time provide a rich field for exposition of this topic, the epic employing all four of Genette's categories of the temporal determination of narration: (1) "*subsequent* (the classical position of the past-tense narrative, undoubtedly far and way the most frequent)"; (2) *prior* (predictive narrative, generally in the future tense, but not prohibited from being conjugated in the present…)"; (3) *simultaneous* (narrative in the present contemporaneous with the action)"; and (4) *interpolated* (between the moments of the action)." Thus, Ugraśravas's narrative is both *subsequent* to the *sarpasattra* and the Kurukṣetra and *prior* to the conclusion of the former; it is *simultaneous* with Vaiśaṃpāyana's narration, while *that* narration, Vaiśaṃpāyana's narration to Janamejaya Pārikṣita, is *interpolated* between the intervals of that king's *sarpasattra*. Consequently, whereas Ugraśravas's narration appears to be continuous, its archetype is *not*, which implies that further temporal dilations or distortions occur with respect to the latter: sometimes Ugraśravas's narration will be *synchronous* with Vaiśaṃpāyana's (though not *simultaneous*), sometimes it will be *prior* (if he omits the pauses in Vaiśaṃpāyana's narration during the sacrifice), sometimes it will be *subsequent* (not because it occurs after Vaiśaṃpāyana has finished narrating, but because interruptions and digressions cause it to lag behind its archetype).

[39] See Vishwa Adluri, "The Perils of Textual Transmission: Decapitation and Recapitulation," *Seminar* 608, *The Enduring Epic: A Symposium on Some Concerns Raised in the Mahābhārata* (2010): 48–54.

deliberate attempt to obscure the existence of what Genette calls the "literary instance" as opposed to the "narrating instance." Although we are told that "Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana the sage rose daily for three years and created this marvellous story of *The Mahābhārata*,"[40] this does not justify identifying him as the epic's "literary instance." Vyāsa's act of "making" or "doing" recalls *adbhutakarmaṇaḥ* at Mahābhārata 1.1.19.[41] Scholars have taken *adbhuta*[42] to refer to the creation of a text as large as the Mahābhārata, considered as the simple story of two camps of warring cousins. They thus interpret Vyāsa as the historical author of the Mahābhārata, that is, as the literary instance of the text who necessarily exists outside of it. But if we take the text's claim to being both *pañcamaveda* and *vyāsasya mataṃ kṛtsnaṃ* seriously, this cannot be because: (1) the Veda is authorless,[43] and (2) Vyāsa's "entire thought" would have to include the narrating instances that give rise to him. This, however, is impossible: the very act of identifying Vyāsa with the "literary instance" of the Mahābhārata removes key elements of narrative metalepsis from the text and thus once again leaves us with a text shorn of his "entire thought." Somehow, we need to keep both aspects together—Vyāsa as the Mahābhārata's "author" and Vyāsa as a metadiegetic or meta-metadiegetic narrator and a character in the epic. In the next section, I explicate the concepts of narrative instance and narrative level, before turning to my main focus: metalepsis in the Mahābhārata.

Narrating Instance and Narrative Levels

We saw previously, that the term "narrating instance," which Genette borrows from Benveniste,[44] refers to the totality of the narrative context of an utterance and includes factors such as the time and place of the narrating, its recipients, and its relation to other narrative situations involved in the same narrative. Even though the temporal determination of the narrating instance makes up a major portion of Genette's discussion

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[40] tribhir varṣaiḥ sadotthāyī kṛṣṇadvaipāyano muniḥ |
mahābhāratam ākhyānaṁ kṛtavān idam uttamam || (Mahābhārata 1.56.32)

[41] vedaiś caturbhiḥ samitāṁ vyāsasyādbhutakarmaṇaḥ |
saṁhitāṁ śrotum icchāmo dharmyāṁ pāpabhayāpahām || (Mahābhārata 1.1.19)

[42] Prodigious, extraordinary, transcendental, supernatural; *Apte*, s.v. "*adbhuta*."

[43] Has anyone ever asked how the Mahābhārata can be the "fifth Veda," if Veda is by definition authorless? Moreover, how can it simultaneously be a Veda and an Upaniṣad, and thus *śruti*, and also *smṛti*? I propose that Vyāsa's fictional status allows him to bridge the gap between the Veda's *apauruṣeyatvam* and *smṛti's* authored status: as a work with a named author, the Mahābhārata is *smṛti*; but as a work without a "real" author, it remains "Veda." This status, moreover, explains why in Hinduism there cannot be a further or a second revelation: the revelation is full and complete in itself but it is also an ongoing *timeless* revelation, as the very word reveals. Thus, on the one hand, it is impossible to add a "New Testament" to the Veda (it neither requires a supplement nor can it be superseded); on the other, the *itihāsa-purāṇa* is not merely a collection of human historical texts because that would make it impossible for revelation to extend into the reader's present. As Adluri notes, the revelation's inexhaustible creativity *requires* that it continually descend in ever new waves or surges just as in Pañcarātra Nārāyaṇa's descent does not end with the Aniruddha hypostasis but continues into the *arca mūrti*. Thus more is at stake in Vyāsa's authorship of the Mahābhārata than merely "text-historical" considerations; the alternative explanation provided by Hacker and others (see below) is precisely an attempt to argue for the timebound and community- and author-centered nature of (the first) revelation so as to make place for a second.

[44] Émile Benveniste, "The Nature of Prounouns," in *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. M. E. Meek (Coral Gables: FL: University of Miami Press, 1971), 217–22.

and the topic is particularly relevant to the Mahābhārata,[45] for reasons of length I forego a discussion here. Let me turn, instead, to his discussion of narrative levels, as this is important for understanding our topic today, metalepsis in the Mahābhārata.

The concept of narrative levels introduces a distance between episodes and their narration, a distance that, as Genette, using *Manon Lescaut* as his example, notes, "lies neither in time nor in space, but in the difference between the relations which both the episodes and the inn [the Lion d'or, where the Chevalier recounts the episodes of his loves to the Marquis de Renoncourt] maintain at that point with Des Grieux's narrative" (227–28). Genette qualifies this distinction by noting that "what separates them [that is, the episodes of the Chevalier's loves and the inn with its occupants, including the Chevalier in his function as a narrator] is less a distance than a sort of threshold represented by the narrating itself, a difference of *level*" (228). The former is *inside* the narrative, whereas the latter is outside it.

We are accustomed to designating this difference with the term "embedding"; Todorov has even noted that "The record [for embedding] seems to be held by the narrative which offers us the story of the bloody chest. Here

Scheherazade tells that

Jaafer tells that

the tailor tells that the barber tells that

his brother (and he has six brothers) tells that…

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[45] One point from Genette's discussion, however, is important here. This is his observation that, "telling takes time (Scheherazade's life hangs by this one thread), and when a novelist puts on his stage an oral narrating in the second degree, he rarely fails to take that into account…. Nevertheless—and this is finally very odd—the fictive narrating of that narrative … is considered to have no duration; more exactly, everything takes place as if the question of duration had no relevance…. Contrary to simultaneous or interpolated narrating, which exist through their duration and the relations between that duration and the story's, subsequent narrating exists through this paradox: it possesses at the same time a temporal situation (with respect to the past story) and an atemporal essence (since it has no duration proper). Like Proustian reminiscence, it is rapture, 'a moment brief as a flash of lightning,' a miraculous syncope, 'a minute freed from the order of [T]ime'" (223). Without drawing too strong a parallel, we should note that Takṣaka's life, like Scheherazade's, hangs on the fact that telling the vast epic of the Mahābhārata, takes time: precisely the time it takes the snakes to hatch their plan and dispatch Āstīka to the sacrifice where he works his miracle. Ugraśravas's subsequent narrating, the fictive narrating of the narrative of what happened at the *sarpasattra*, which includes the narration that was narrated *karmāntareṣu yajñasya* (Mahābhārata 1.1.58) by Vaiśaṃpāyana, has a clearly defined temporal situation with respect to that narrative: it occurs *after* the *sarpasattra* has finished and he has visited Samantapañcaka. We know roughly when he began his narrating, yet, like Marcel's narrating in Proust's *Recherche*, the narrating itself "bears no mark of duration, or of division: it is instantaneous." These temporal *aporiai* come into play in the text itself in a narration that Adluri calls "a silent, implicit, never explicitly expressed" narration in the text "beyond and behind the double narration of Vaiśaṃpāyana and Ugraśravas": the narration of the snake sacrifice by Pramati to his son Ruru. In an apparent reversal of the former this narrating has *no* temporal situation with respect to the past story (Adluri asks, "when can Pramati have recounted the story of Āstīka? He cannot narrate it before the sacrifice has occurred and Āstīka has performed his miracle. The sacrifice, however, unfolds as a *literary* event, couched in Ugraśravas's narration of it"), yet its temporal extension is fairly defined, even if it extends into the infinite. It appears not to fall into any one of Genette's four categories of the temporal determination of the narrating: it is neither *subsequent*, nor *prior*, nor *simultaneous*, nor *interpolated*, being rather, as Adluri argues, a "*paused* conversation" (my italics), "a '*vouloir-dire*' that is nonetheless present throughout Vaiśaṃpāyana's narration." Vishwa Adluri, "Literary Violence and Literal Salvation: Śaunaka Interprets the *Mahābhārata*," *Exemplar: The Journal of South Asian Studies* 1, no. 2 (2012): 52–53.

The last story is a story to the fifth degree."[46] But as Genette notes, "the term 'embedding' does not do justice to the fact precisely that each of these stories is at a higher 'degree' than the preceding one, since its narrator is a character in the preceding one; for stories can also be 'embedded' at the same level, simply by digression, without any shift in the narrating instance: see Jacques's parentheses in the *Fatalistic*" (214, n. 4).

This is important because in relation to the Mahābhārata, a theory of embedding often leads to the view that what makes a narrative "contained" in another is the fact that it has been enclosed by a beginning and an end;[47] this view, then, gives rise to the perception that the narrative A is the first, not only in order of narrative priority, but also in historical time: it must be the "nucleus" or the "core" around which materials "accreted." Conversely, narrative B is reduced to its function of "framing": it is seen as an extrinsic addition to a previously existing narrative,[48] one that was floating around either as part of "bardic" tradition or as part of "anonymous (purāṇic) literature."[49]

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[46] Tzvetan Todorov, "The Narrative Men," in *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 71.

[47] Luis González-Reimann provides the classic statement of this misconception in "Ending the *Mahābhārata*: Making a Lasting Impression," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 15, no. 1, *The Mahābhārata – Perspectives on its Ends and Endings* (2011): 101–10, when he writes: "There is no question that the received *Mahābhārata* is a layered text, that is, a text that includes interpolations and additions. That is why a critical edition was needed for a proper study of the history of the epic. But we must remember that even the Critical Edition—which is the one used here—is only the version of the epic that existed at a certain time (around the fourth-fifth century CE) and that the Critical Edition itself is the result of conflation, interpolation, and addition. In this sense, the *Mahābhārata* is not only a text, it is a text with embedded commentary. The role of an interpolator or editor is in many ways similar to that of a commentator, with the difference that a commentator normally identifies himself and he makes his comments outside of the text, while the interpolator or redactor/editor incorporates his explanations or additions into the text itself in order to create the illusion that they are part of the original narrative" (101). But Gonzales neither understands the relation that beginnings and ends have to the narrative, when he remarks, "Beginnings and endings play a crucial role in any text, but they are especially important when the text is devoted to the narration of events; in other words, when it tells a story, as in the case of the *Mahābhārata*. The beginning sets the stage, it provides context, and it predisposes the listener/reader to understand the story from a certain perspective and within a given set of assumptions. The ending, on the other hand, allows the author, editor or interpolator to tie up loose ends, to emphasize certain aspects or characteristics of the narrative, and to make any necessary correctives or clarifications that he deems necessary. Beginnings and endings are usually among the late additions to a text" (101), nor does he grasp how literature works: "Finally, I must point out that several verses that appear towards the end of the last book put forth ideas that had already been stated in the first book. This confirms the importance that the beginning and the end have for framing the narrative. The beginning as the place for setting the tone and predisposing the audience, and the end as the place for making a final and lasting impression on the reader or listener. The emphasis of these verses is on the rewards that one will receive by reciting or listening to the *Mahābhārata*—or parts of it—as well as on its encyclopedic nature. They also stress Vyāsa's authorship of the poem. Significantly, one of these verses from the last book adds the terse statement that Vyāsa composed the *Mahābhārata* 'for the sake of *dharma*,' *dharmakāmyayā* (18.5.41)" (109). *Beginnings are not separable from the story and endings cannot provide an interpretation or a message that the story will not bear.*

[48] As an example, I provide Oberlies's table of the Ādiparvan's expansion in an appendix.

[49] The term is Hacker's, but also applied by all of his students, including, most recently, Peter C. Bisschop. Hacker first introduced the term, to my knowledge, in *Prahlāda*: *Werden und Wandlungen einer Idealgestalt* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1959), 126, but here I take the explicit definition found in Paul Hacker, "Zur Methode der geschichtlichen Erforschung der anonymen Sanskritliteratur des Hinduismus. Vortrag gehalten auf dem XV. Deutschen Orientalistentag Göttingen 1961," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 111 (1961): 483: "I would like to propose the expression 'anonymous

A closer look at matters, however, serves to dismiss this misconception because narrative B does not just consist of the part outside of A; *it is also A*. We forget that A is B's fiction, and that B, far from consisting of a beginning and an end (with an "older" middle section that can be lifted out), is actually a *continuous* narrative, even if at some point it hands over the narration to one of its characters.[50] I therefore propose that we set aside the misleading language of both "embedding" and "enclosure," and adopt, instead, Genette's terminology. Three of his definitions are particularly relevant for us here:

1. Narrative level: "*Any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed*" (228). Translated into Mahābhārata terms, this means that the snake sacrifice is one diegetic level higher than Ugraśravas's narration; the Kuru conflict is one diegetic level higher than Vaiśaṃpāyana's narration (which is the narrating act producing this narrative) and two diegetic levels higher Ugraśravas's narration, and so on.
2. Extradiegetic, digetic or intradigetic, and metadiegetic: "M. de Renoncourt's writing of his fictive *Mémoires* is a (literary) act carried out at a first level, which we will call *extradiegetic*; the events told in those *Mémoires* (including Des Grieux's narrating act) are inside this first narrative, so we will describe them as *diegetic*, or *intradiegetic*; the events told in Des Grieux's narrative, a narrative in the second degree, we will call *metadiegetic*" (228). Again, translated into the

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literature' as a collective noun in particular for the Mahābhārata, the Purāṇas, and the Dharma texts of Hinduism." Literally, of course, this term is false: neither the Mahābhārata nor the Purāṇas nor the *dharmaśāstras* are anonymous texts. Thus, what Hacker really means is that we possess no historical-biographical information about Vyāsa as we do, for example, about Proust. We cannot, for instance, say of Vyāsa's "creation" what Genette says about *Recherche du temps perdu*: "The present of Proustian narrating—from 1909 to 1922—corresponds to many of the 'presents' of the writing, and we; know that almost a third of the book—including, as it happens, the final pages—was written by 1913. The fictive moment of narrating has thus *in fact* shifted in the course of the real writing; today it is no longer what it was in 1913, at the moment when Proust thought his work concluded for the Grasset edition" (224). But Hacker's real emphasis lies elsewhere. It is revealed in the following sentence: "It thus no longer appears promising when investigating an anonymous work to begin, first, by investigating its literary character as a whole or, indeed, to investigate or to present the contents that have been compiled in such a work as being coherent for this reason, just because they had once been collected by the tradition." Hacker, "Zur Methode der geschichtlichen Erforschung, 486–87. Thus, by a series of logical leaps, whose sequence can be represented thus: absence of historical-biographical information about the author → anonymity in the sense of the absence of a named author → anonymity in the sense of the absence of an author → absence of a single author → absence of a (single) authorial intention → absence of an authorial intention → compilation with some intention *other* than an authorial intention → lack of unity → lack of coherence → need for identifying the developmental-ideological logic by which these incoherent texts were put together, Hacker is able to force the "historical" investigation of Hinduism, an enterprise entirely tangential to how the tradition actually unfolded as a superb dialogue between texts and about concepts (see Adluri's contribution to this seminar).

[50] Genette notes this very difference: "The "Lion d'or," the Marquis, the Chevalier in his function as narrator are for us inside a particular narrative, not Des Grieux's but the Marquis's, the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*; [whereas] the return from Louisiana, the trip from Havre to Calais, the Chevalier in his function as hero are inside another narrative, this one Des Grieux's, which is *contained* within the first one, not only in the sense that the first frames it with a preamble and a conclusion (although the latter is missing here), but also in the sense that the narrator of the second narrative is already a character in the first one, and that the act of narrating which produces the second narrative is an event recounted in the first one" (228).

context of the Mahābhārata, Ugraśravas is the extradiegetic narrator; the *sarpasattra* (and Vyāsa's arrival at the sacrificial ground, etc.) are diegetic or intradiegetic events; the Mahābhārata war, an event told in Vaiśaṃpāyana's narrative (although Ugraśravas's narrative "repeats" the telling), is metadiegetic; whereas the Kurukṣetra battle, an event told for the most part in Saṃjaya's narrative to King Dhṛtarāṣṭra, is meta-metadiegetic, and so on.[51]

3. Metadiegesis and metanarrative: "The prefix *meta*- obviously connotes here, as in 'metalanguage,' the transition to the second degree: the *metanarrative* is a narrative within the narrative, the *metadiegesis* is the universe of this second narrative, as the *diegesis* (according to a now widespread usage) designates the universe of the first narrative. We must admit, however, that this term functions in a way opposite to that of its model in logic and linguistics: metalanguage is a language in which one speaks of another language, so metanarrative should be the first narrative, within which one would tell a second narrative. But it seemed to me that it was better to keep the simplest and most common designation for the first degree, and thus to reverse the direction of interlocking. Naturally, the eventual third degree will be a meta-metanarrative, with its meta-metadiegesis, etc." (228, n. 41). Under the previous point, I briefly discussed the relevance of Genette's approach to the Mahābhārata's "embedded" narratives. But here, I wish to emphasize the literary-theoretical, intellectual-historical, and the philosophical consequences of Genette's corrective to the earlier way of viewing higher degree narrating. At a literary-theoretical level, Genette's approach *restores* the correct relationship or, rather, the correct *sequence* to the reader's reality (since we must still raise the question of what the correct relationship of narrative to the reader's reality is). This sequence that has been disrupted ever since readers of the Mahābhārata, including some Indian readers, began taking their cues from

[51] These relationships still need to be examined more closely. For instance, at what level is the narration in Bhīṣma's postwar narration of the Śāntiparvan and Anuśāsanaparvan to Yudhiṣṭhira? At what level is it when he introduces further narrators in the course of this narration? The present paper merely aims to introduce Genette's categories, without answering these questions. One significant consequence, however, is already apparent: rather being the "real," "true," "historical" event, the Kurukṣetra battle is among the events in the Mahābhārata most removed from "reality" understood as the (shared) plane of existence author and reader inhabit. I put "reality" in question marks, because, as Borges notes in "Partial Magic in the Quixote," "Why does it disturb us that the map be included in the map and the thousand and one nights in the book of the *Thousand and One Nights*? Why does it disturb us that Don Quixote be a reader of the *Quixote* and Hamlet a spectator of *Hamlet*? I believe I have found the reason: these inversions suggest that if the characters of a fictional work can be readers or spectators, we, its readers or spectators, can be fictitious. Jorge L. Borges, "Partial Magic in the Quixote," in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings* (New York: New Directions, 1964), 231. The "inversions" Borges mentions are, of course, what Genette theorizes under the heading of "metalepsis," whereas the episode of Scheherazade narrating her own story which Borges mentions is what Genette has classified under the heading "*structure en abyme*" (more commonly referred to as "*mise en abyme*" following Dorrit Cohn). I plan to write a second paper titled "Borges and the Bhārata" in the future exploring these paradoxical consequences, so beloved of Borges. For the present it suffices to note that the Mahābhārata *cannot* be an example of shoddy historiography, if it is playing such a sophisticated game over reality with the reader. The Indian epic is *aware* of the narrated nature of spatio-temporal reality and it exploits the full resources of narratology to *awaken* the reader to this fact.

German Indologists.[52] At an intellectual-historical level, Genette's approach *affirms* the hermeneutic-exegetic literary tradition within which the texts of the *itihāsa-purāṇa* tradition circulated. It correctly interpreted these texts, in particular, their relationship to reality, to the world of narrative, and to each other.[53] Consequently, it provides the *sole correct means of access to them*. Philosophically, Genette's approach is closer to Indian philosophy, for which narrativity is a feature of *jagat*, which is conditioned by time, space, and causality, rather than *Brahman*, which transcends the three modes of time. Genette grasps that as we enter second and third degree narratives, we are not transcending language (as the term "metalanguage" would suggest), but moving *away from* the reality represented by the literary instance outside the text.

Five further clarifications are also important:

1. "These terms (metadiegetic, etc.) designate, not individuals, but relative situations and functions" (229);
2. "The possibly fictive nature of the first instance does not modify this state of affairs [namely, that "the narrating instance of a first narrative is therefore extradiegetic by definition, as the narrating instance of a second (metadiegetic) narrative is diegetic by definition, etc."] any more than the possibly 'real' nature of the subsequent instances does" (229);
3. "Neither Prévost nor Defoe [the historical authors of *Manon Lescaut* and *Robinson Crusoe*] enters the space of our inquiry, which, let us recall, bears on the narrating instance, not on the literary instance… In short, we shall not confound extradiegetic with real historical existence, nor diegetic (or even metadiegetic) status with fiction" (229, 230); and
4. "The same character can, moreover, assume two identical (parallel) narrative functions at different levels: for example, in *Sarrasine*, the extradiegetic narrator

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[52] See, in particular, M. A. Mehendale, "Message of the Mahābhārata," *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute* vol. 60/61 (2000–2001), 11 trying to undo the immense work done to move the argument forward by V. S. Sukthankar in *On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata* (Bombay: Asiatic Society, 1957): "Dr. Sukthankar asserts that it is only this way one 'will be able to understand and interpret the Mahābhārata, and that all attempts to explain it merely as an evolute of some hypothetical epic nucleus are merely examples of wasted ingenuity.' I humbly beg to differ. I am not going to offer you today my critique of Dr. Sukthankar's views. That can be the subject of a separate talk. I shall end only by saying that in spite of Dr. Sukthankar's views, I have ventured to give expression to my opinion on what constitutes the nucleus of the Mbh. and what message the nucleus has for us." See also R. N. Dandekar, "The Mahābhārata: Origin and Growth," in *Exercises in Indology* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1981), 262–91.

[53] As Adluri notes in his contribution to this seminar, the Bhāgavata continues this dialogue: "The seventh *skandha* is contained in the second dialogical frame, that is, the conversation between Parīkṣit and Śuka. The outer frame is set in the Naimiṣa and contains the dialogue of the bard Ugraśravas with Śaunaka and other *ṛṣis*. The outer frame explicitly sets up the inner frame by relating the eschatology (last events) of the Mahābhārata and setting up a soteriology (the salvation of Parīkṣit). Since Parīkṣit is already dead when Janamejaya performs the snake sacrifice, this *purāṇa* is both "earlier" than the revelation of the Mahābhārata and composed "later" than it. Both texts claim their author is Vyāsa, who composed the Bhāgavata to clarify certain aspects of the Mahābhārata. These intertextualities and narrative strategies justify us in reading the Bhāgavatapurāṇa as an interpretation of the Mahābhārata. They also demonstrate that the poetic genius of this tradition depended on retellings, adaptation of narratives, and philosophical outlooks, poetic invention and re-invention, and of course the development of themes disclosed in the Mahābhārata."

himself becomes intradiegetic narrator when he tells his companion the story of Zambinella" (229, n. 42); and

5. Extradiegetic narrative is not even necessarily handled as written narrating: nothing claims that Meursault or The Unnamable wrote the texts we real as their interior monologues, and it goes without saying that the text of the *Lauriers sont coupés* cannot be anything but a 'stream of consciousness'—not written, or even spoken—mysteriously caught and transcribed by Dujardin. It is the nature of immediate speech to preclude any formal determination of the narrating instance which it constitutes" (230).

This discussion of narrative levels sets us up to consider the concepts of metadiegesis and metalepsis next.

Metadiegesis and Metalepsis

Metadiegetic narrative is "second-degree narrating" (231). Genette distinguishes three types of relationships "that can connect the metadiegetic narrative to the first narrative, into which it is inserted" (232).

1. Direct causality: "The first type of relationship is direct causality between the events of the metadiegesis and those of the diegesis, conferring on the second narrative an *explanatory* function. It is the Balzacian 'this is why,' but taken on here by a character, whether the story he tells is someone else's (*Sarrasine*) or, more often, his own (Ulysses, Des Grieux, Dominique). All these narratives answer, explicitly or not, a question of the type 'What events have led to the present situation?' Most often, the curiosity of the intradiegetic listener is only a pretext for replying to the curiosity of the reader (as in the expository scenes of classical drama), and the metadiegetic narrative only a variant of the explanatory analepsis" (232);
2. Purely thematic relationship: "The second type consists of a purely *thematic* relationship, therefore implying no spatio-temporal continuity between metadiegesis and diegesis: a relationship of contrast (the deserted Ariadne's unhappiness, in the midst of Thetis' joyous wedding) or of analogy (as when Jocabel, in *Moyse sauvé*, hesitates to execute the divine command and Amram tells her the story of Abraham's sacrifice). The famous *structure en abyme*, not long ago so prized by the 'new novel' of the 1960's, is obviously an extreme form of this relationship of analogy, pushed to the limits of identity" (233);
3. No explicit relationship: "The third type involves no explicit relationship between the two story levels: it is the act of narrating itself that fulfills a function in the diegesis, independently of the metadiegetic content—a function of distraction, for example, and/or of obstruction. Surely the most illustrious example is found in the *Thousand and One Nights*, where Scheherazade holds off death with renewed narratives, whatever they might be (provided they interest the sultan)" (233).

Metadiegesis is introduced early in the Mahābhārata. The extradiegetic narrator Ugraśravas hands over the narrating to the diegetic narrator Vaiśaṃpāyana at Mahābhārata 1.55. This relationship is not directly causal: no question is raised in the first-degree narrative that the second-degree narrative answers. The function of Vaiśaṃpāyana's narrative is *explanatory* for Janamejaya (it answers the question of *kathaṁ samabhavad bhedas teṣām akliṣṭakarmaṇām | tac ca yuddhaṁ kathaṁ vṛttaṁ*

bhūtāntakaraṇaṁ mahat ||; Mahābhārata 1.54.19), but not so for the Naimiṣa sages. Not only have they heard the Mahābhārata before; their cognitive interest is also unequivocally center on *dharma* and purification from sin (cf. *saṁhitāṁ śrotum icchāmo dharmyāṁ pāpabhayāpahām*; Mahābhārata 1.1.19). The relationship of Vaiśaṃpāyana's narrative to Ugraśrava's narrative is thus either "purely thematic" (both are related at sacrificial sessions, both concern ritual: Ugraśravas's primarily the *sarpasattra* and secondarily the *raṇayajña* of the Kurukṣetra; Vaiśaṃpāyana's primarily the *raṇayajña* and secondarily the *rājasūya* and perhaps other rites such as the *aśvamedha*; both are concerned with *dharma*, though from different perspectives)[54] or there is "no explicit relationship" (the act of narrating what happened at that *other* sacrifice fills up the time during Śaunaka's twelve-year sacrificial session, just as the act of narrating the *bheda* narrative fills the time between the pauses of Janamejaya's *sattra*; at least in the case of the *sarpasattra* the narrating gives the snakes time to hatch their plans and to prepare for the arrival of Āstīka).[55]

I am not suggesting that these categories are exclusive or even that they are the only possible ones. The relationship between diegetic and metadiegetic narration could be *pedagogic*, it could be *transformative*, it could be *revelatory*, and so on.[56] For instance, we might ask: what difference does the Naimiṣa narration make to the Mahābhārata? It is the same narrative narrated twice, so we could also simply have heard it from Vaiśaṃpāyana. In fact, except for the first five books of the Ādiparvan, we for the most part do, yet the text chooses *deliberately, intentionally* to subordinate the primary narrating instance to an extradiegetic narrating instance. What is achieved by this? We shall not answer these questions here; I merely wish to show how a *completely different perspective* is opened up on the Mahābhārata and in particular on the allegedly "late" Ādiparvan,[57] when we approach the epic from the perspective of literary theory rather

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[54] Vishwa Adluri, "Ahiṃsā in the Mahābhārata: Sacrifice, Violence, and Salvation," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 26, no. 2 (2018): 45–75.

[55] I cannot agree with Genette, however, when he declares, "from the first type to the third, the importance of the narrating instance only grows. In the first type, the relationship (of linking) is direct; it is not via the narrative, which could very well be dispensed with: whether Ulysses tells about it or not, the storm is what cast him up on the shore of Phaeacia, and the only transformation his narrative introduces is of a purely cognitive order. In the second type, the relationship is indirect, rigorously mediated by the narrative, which is indispensable to the linking: the adventure of the members and the belly calms the populace *on condition* that Menenius tell it to the plebs. In the third type, the relationship is only between the narrating act and the present situation, with the metadiegetic content (almost) not mattering any more than a Biblical message does during a filibuster at the rostrum of the United States Senate" (233–34). First, this is to discount transformation of "a purely cognitive order," which may be the highest achievement of art and what a narrative can achieve. Second, from the fact that the narrative can be (or *was*) relayed in other ways, we must not conclude the relative insignificance of the narrating instance. As I noted, Ugraśravas is "unimportant" in one sense, since the entire narrative could have been received directly from Vaiśaṃpāyana, but this would be to discount the important *cognitive-interpretive* work that is achieved through the retelling. Third, the metadiegetic content of the *Thousand and One Nights* may be relatively irrelevant (after all, Scheherazade only has to tell *some* story),

[56] Vishwa Adluri, "Frame Narratives and Forked Beginnings: Or, How to Read the *Ādiparvan*." *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 19, no. 2 (2011): 143–210.

[57] Compare van Buitenen's assessment: "The first of the eighteen Major Books of *The Mahābhārata* illustrates to perfection all the issues that the text as a whole raises. Parts of it are manifestly components of the main story; others are equally obviously accretions that have no organic relationship to the story whatever; still others are difficult to determine one way or the other. The book itself takes cognizance of the fact that it may well contain unnecessary episodes: 'There are brahmins who learn *The Bhārata* from

than "text-historicism." With this overview of *metadiegesis*, let us now turn to *metalepsis*.

In traditional usage, *metalepsis* refers to "the metonymical substitution of one word for another which is itself a metonym; (more generally) any metaphorical usage resulting from a series or succession of figurative substitutions";[58] metalepsis is thus a subset of metaphor. Genette, however, derives *metalepsis* as a term of art from Greek *lambanō*, meaning "to take hold of, grasp, seize," and *meta*, in the sense of "second degree"; and he defines it as, "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse" (235–36). More precisely, Genette calls this form of metalepsis "narrative metalepsis": its variations range from the author making an aside to the reader ("while the venerable churchman climbs the ramps of Angoulême, it is not useless to explain…"; Balzac, *Illusions perdues*) to suggesting that he is about to depart for a place that exists only in his narration ("but I have no time left now, *before my departure for Balbec*…, to start upon a series of pictures of society"; Proust, *Temps perdu*) to various other kinds of transgressive effects ("changes of level in the Robbe-Grillet type of narrative"; 235) that Genette details.

But here I wish to use instead a set of distinctions Cohn develops, which partly develop and partly oust Genette's concept of narrative metalepsis. They are as follows:

1. Discursive metalepsis vs. story metalepsis: "The first distinction I wish to stress is between metalepsis at the discourse level and metalepsis at the story level. Metalepsis at the discourse level is (in the sense established by Genette) a kind of 'figure': it consists in the habit of certain narrators interrupting the description of the routine actions of their characters by digressions; it results in a light-hearted and playful synchronization of the narration with the narrated events. Genette illustrates this kind of metalepsis with several passages from Balzac, including one that begins thus: 'While the venerable churchman climbs the ramps of Angoulême, it is not useless to explain ...' (235). In the following pages, I will not be concerned with this relatively inoffensive kind of discursive metalepsis, but rather with the kind of metalepsis that is much more daring and shocking, also much more spectacular, and that appears at the level of the story: a particularly troubling transgression that Genette exemplifies with Julio Cortázar s story 'Continuity of Parks.' In this very brief tale, a man who is reading a novel becomes the victim of a murder that is committed in the novel that he is in the process of reading. Here, the boundary between the primary story (the reader's

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Manu onward. others again from the tale of *The Book of Āstīka* onward. others again from the tale of Uparicara onward.' When we look at the main story. it is reasonably clear that originally it could hardly have begun before 1.90. and all that went before, roughly half the entire book, was added at a later time. In the latter half, too, quite a few additions are evident: the narratives of 1(11), *The Book of Citraratha*, have nothing to do with the story; *The Story of the Five Indras* in 1(12) is a justification of the polyandrous marriage of the five Pāṇḍava brothers; *Arjuna's Sojourn in the Forest*, a clear premonition of the twelve-year exile of the Pāṇḍavas, and therefore presupposing it, can hardly be original; nor is *The Story of the Śārngaka Birds* in 1(19)." J. A. B. van Buitenen, "Introduction," in J. A. B. van Buitenen, trans., *The Mahābhārata: I. The Book of the Beginning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 1.

[58] *OED*, s.v. "*metalepsis*."

story) and the secondary story (the framed novel) is violated, leading to a confusion between distinct ontological levels."[59]

2. Exterior metalepsis vs. interior metalepsis: "The other important distinction—Genette makes it himself, but without emphasizing it—is between what I call exterior metalepsis (by far the more frequent) and interior metalepsis. I call exterior all metalepsis that occurs between the extradiegetic level and the diegetic level—that is to say, between the narrator's universe and that of his or her story (e.g., John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*). I call interior all metalepsis that occurs between two levels of the same story—that is to say, between a primary and secondary story, or between a secondary and tertiary story (e.g., Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds*)."[60]
3. Metalepsis in homodiegetic vs. heterodiegetic narratives: "I will pause for a moment to consider exterior metalepsis, first to focus on a fact that has not been noted until now, namely that we do not find metalepsis in homodiegetic narratives but only in heterodiegetic narratives. One searches in vain for cases of a fundamental destruction of the narrative situation in the first person. We do not even find it in the most casual stories, the most self-ironic. Thus, the metafictional games of *Tristram Shandy* leave intact the form of the 'I.' It is the same in Beckett's *The Unnamable* and in Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. Thus, Becketts narrator maintains the same 'I' when he writes, 'How, in such conditions, can I write. ... I don't know. ... It is I who write, who cannot raise my hand from my knee. It is I who think, just enough to write, whose head is far' (295). And Nabokov's narrator maintains the 'I' even when he questions his own existence in the final sentence of the novel: 'I am Sebastian, or Sebastian is I, or perhaps we both are someone whom neither of us knows' (205). This 'someone' is evidently the author, who is however far from beginning to speak himself."[61]

Armed with these definitions and clarifications, we are finally prepared to look at the topic of metalepsis in the Mahābhārata.

Metalepsis in the Mahābhārata

In *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*, Hiltebeitel provides the following overview of Vyāsa's appearances in the Mahābhārata:

> By "rough count," Mehta "noticed…about thirty occasions when [Vyāsa] turns up in the course of events narrated' (1990, 105). My count is forty-one….but no one has adequately theorized the relation between the Vyāsa's interventions in the main story, which are all that Mehta counts and passages where he moves around between the epic's inner and outer frames. Indeed, Vyāsa's appearances in the Mahābhārata are a problematic category. For, along with the obvious cases where he drops into the main narrative, there are numerous instances where he is quoted, or his actions recalled. In, these he enters his characters' or narrators' thoughts, with which he has a wonder-provoking relation throughout.[62]

[59] Cohn, "Metalepsis and Mise en Abyme," 105–6.
[60] Ibid., 106.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Hiltebeitel, *Reading the Mahābhārata*, 46.

Hiltebeitel thereafter provides a summary of "Vyāsa's interventions in the main story of the epic's inner frame: that is, what Vaiśaṃpāyana tells Janamejaya about Vyāsa's doings in the days of Janamejaya's ancestors," while leaving "Vyāsa's relation to the other frames" to other chapters.[63] I provide a summary of Hiltebeitel's findings in an appendix, but here I wish to note three striking features:

1. Although referred to as "dropping into the narrative" and "entering," Vyāsa's appearances in the Mahābhārata are *not* metaleptic in nature, according to the strict definition we set up earlier. Metalepsis, let us recalled, requires an "intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse" (234–35), but Vyāsa is *not* the narrator or narratee here: he is a character like any other in Vaiśaṃpāyana's narrative. Hiltebeitel is *misled* by the attribution of authorship to Vyāsa into interpreting Vyāsa's appearances in the epic narrative as "interventions in the main story," whereas they are, to begin with, completely "normal" interactions of a character with other characters in the narrated world of the text.
2. The circumstance that Vaiśaṃpāyana and Vyāsa meet and converse, that Vaiśaṃpāyana recognizes Vyāsa as his teacher,[64] or that he acknowledges having received the Mahābhārata from him[65] *also* does not make Vyāsa's appearances in the narrative metaleptic. Metalepsis, let us further recall, requires that one overstep a boundary "between two worlds, the world in which one tells, [and] the of which one tells" (236), but here no boundary has been overstepped. If Vaiśaṃpāyana had narrated these interactions in a first-person narrative ("I along with my teacher went to Janamejaya's *sarpasattra*, where Janamejaya asked to hear the story of his ancestors, a story I had heard before from my teacher, who then asked me to retell it to the king"), they would have been unremarkable.
3. Indeed, what really makes Vyāsa's appearances in the Mahābhārata metaleptic is the circumstance that he is a character in the *diegetic* narrative told by the extradiegetic narrator Ugraśravas; when he *now* enters the *metadiegetic* narrative told by the *diegetic* narrator Vaiśaṃpāyana, he violates a boundary, precisely that between "the world in which one tells, [and] the of which one tells." This means, however, that from a cognitive perspective or a literary-theoretical perspective, attention *must center* on the epic's Naimiṣa narrating instance. It is the "addition" (using this word in a very different sense than that in which German Indologists use it) of this narrating instance that *first* turns Vyāsa into an *extradiegetic* character *with respect to Vaiśaṃpāyana's narrative*, and it is this transformation that first makes his appearances in that narrative *diegetic* (recall that "these terms (metadiegetic, etc.) designate, not individuals, but relative situations and functions" [229], so that what is *metadiegetic* from one perspective can also be *diegetic* from another). The unsettling feature of metalepsis that Genette notes—its "unacceptable and insistent hypothesis, that the extradiegetic is perhaps always

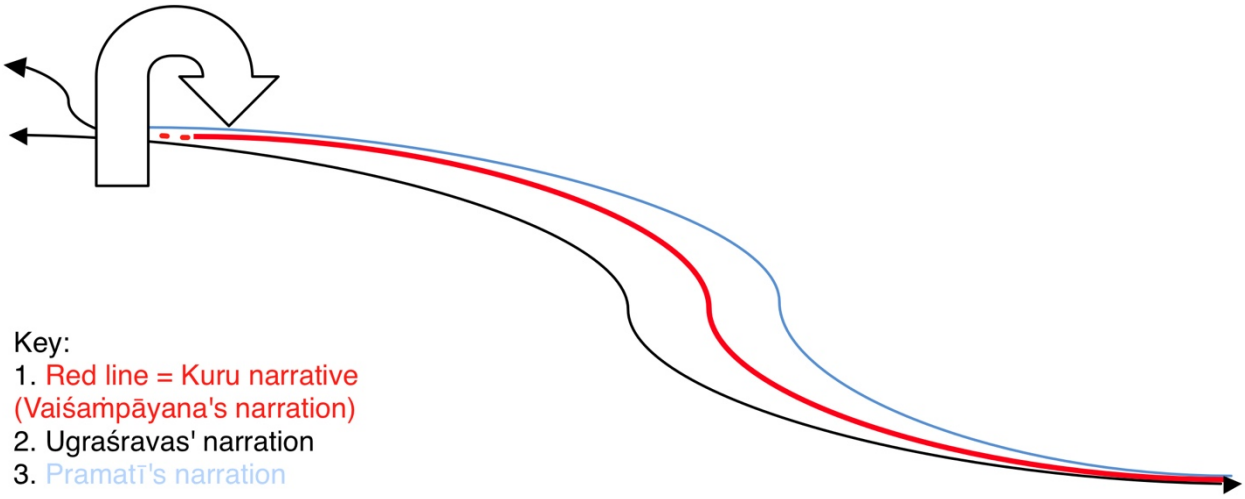
[63] Ibid.
[64] gurave prāṅ namaskṛtya manobuddhisamādhibhiḥ |
saṁpūjya ca dvijān sarvāṁs tathānyān viduṣo janān || (Mahābhārata 1.55.1)
[65] śrotuṁ pātraṁ ca rājaṁs tvaṁ prāpyemāṁ bhāratīṁ kathām |
guror vaktuṁ parispando mudā protsāhatīva mām || (Mahābhārata 1.55.3)

diegetic, and that the narrator and his narratees—you and I—perhaps belong to some narrative" (236) now results. The further consquences of this insight, of course, still need to be worked out.

Conclusion: Reading the Mahābhārata as Literature

These reflections on narrative theory now prepare us to read anew the Mahābhārata. Since this is a task that exceeds my abilities (I do not wish, like German Indologists, to make a fool of myself by speaking of that which I do not know), following the example of my august predecessors in the Mahābhārata, I hand over the narration to Vishwa. Here is the greatest living scholar of the epic on the Mahābhārata's narrative architecture:

Thus far scholars have thought that there is *one* Vaiśaṃpāyana narrative framed by its movement through various settings. Vyāsa composed it somewhere and it went to his students in his *āśrama* (one assumes) and then to Takṣaśīla where it was recounted to Janamejaya where the *sūtas* Lomaharṣaṇa and Ugraśravas heard it and finally Śaunaka heard it. Now, this is a diachronic "fate" of the text, which has been thought historically—and unsatisfactorily. Consider then what happens. Look at the names: Vyāsa the divider, Vaiśaṃpāyana, then Ugraśravas and Lomaharṣaṇa (terror-fillers and horripilators) and then the calm coating of Śaunaka's canine hermeneutics. This is an *editorial, textual process* also, not just some floating versions. Considered thus, the frames persist throughout to the outer and inner frames, which are actually *sheaths*. One can add another one: Pramati telling Ruru the Āstīka story. Now, there is a problem: the story Ruru wishes to hear is the story of the *sarpasattra*. Thus, until the *sattra* is over, Pramati cannot tell this story. Now the *sattra* is fully told—and by fully we mean the Vaiśaṃpāyana narrative included—only in Book 18. So in a way, Pramati must silently wait for this entire narrative to run its course. Only then, once Vaiśaṃpāyana finishes his narrative and the ritual is interrupted and Āstīka saves the snakes, can Pramati tell the story to Ruru. So Ruru is waiting; Pramati is waiting. Pramati also does something else: he is Āstīka's teacher, which means whatever Āstīka brings to the story as its intellectual component is engendered by Pramati, even though in its existential aspects the story is engendered by the Jaratkārus and fatefullyp by Brahmā himself and, paradoxically, by the mother of horror Kadrū. So now we see, not only are Pramati and Kadrū waiting, but in a sense Āstīka too and all the snakes are waiting for Vaiśaṃpāyana to complete the story! They are partisans of *ahiṃsā* as are the Naimiṣa *ṛṣi*s. The following diagram clarifies the relation of these multiple narrations to each other:



Śaunaka is present throughout this *ahiṃsā* narrative as well as the violent *kṣatriya* narrative of Vaiśaṃpāyana and Ugraśravas' narration of the *sattra* itself. But at the head of his editorial activity stands the donor of his name, the *śunaka* Saramā. Even as the editorial process aesthetically becomes more hair-raising and bloodcurdling, so also the violent Kuru narrative is being transformed into just one thread, which will be pulled out of the horse's tail in Nārāyaṇīya, where the *bheda* narrative effectively ends. It will continue again in Anuśāsana to be sure, but no one there is interested in anything more than wrapping up the narrative. Śaunaka is most interested in restoring the circular architecture. In a way, the textual *aśvamedha* is finished and bloodlessly so by the time Nārāyaṇa appears in the Nārāyaṇīya and Vasu, who began the narrative, performs it there. This textual *aśvamedha* is finished yielding *mokṣa* before the Pāṇḍavas complete theirs—a bloody one, a second one, a *kṣatriya* one, which a weasel mocks as useless. So then there are these sheaths that extend throughout, *but* in Āstīka they are synchronized because it is the moment where Ugraśravas, simultaneously tested and working under Śaunaka's direction, is putting together the Kuru narrative told at the sacrifice—the Vaiśaṃpāyana narrative—with the *other one* normally understood as the frame narrative. But there is the *doubling* now of Pramati saying the *same* to Ruru, and if he hasn't waited until the whole Vaiśaṃpāyana narrative is done, he is at least iterating it as it unfolds. Thus, the whole Vaiśaṃpāyana narrative is encompassed by Ugraśravas's narrative of the sacrifice and that whole thing is doubled and encompassed by the Pramati-Ruru frame. The Pramati-Ruru frame thus hearkens back to the double-beginning, which contains the propadeutic materials that allow us to understand the epic as *not* about *kṣatriya* violence. Thus, two points must be borne in mind:

1. Structurally, there is a synchronization of narratives in the Āstīkaparvan using various strategies such as succession (Ugraśravas's description of sacrifice, then a *vistareṇa* version, then the Vaiśaṃpāyana narrative) or doubling (Pramati and Ugraśravas henceforth narrate the same Vaiśaṃpāyana narrative) and Śaunaka forging all this into a circular narrative. He ought to know the ways of the dog going up and coming down every day as Saramā.
2. The second point, which depends on this structural one, is semantic: the presence of a Pramati doubling provides an elaborate *ahiṃsā* plane to this text where *not one word* of the Kuru narrative (Kurukṣetra) or the sacrificial telling (Takṣaśīla) is

> brought into the Naimiṣa Forest without first Pramati present. Thus the Mahābhārata is an *ahiṃsā* text on the structural and semantic levels; it is violent only on an imaginative, aesthetic level. This is expressed by the fact that the names of the carriers of the story get progressively more horripilating the more distant the story gets from the Kurukṣetra. In sum, the frames are not just structural, but reveal the poetic intentions and philosophical commitments of the text and nothing external at all. To consider them external and to see the Vaiśaṃpāyana narrative as the main one is to miss the fact that Pramati is *also* narrating and thus to get only half (or even less) of this Veda.

Let us now put all these points together: As a text, the Mahābhārata has a fairly obvious organization, a structure. It is a text composed of eighteen *parvans*. The entire narrative is presented as "nested" narratives within two frames: the Naimiṣa Forest and *sarpasattra* retellings. But there are other implied narratives: Vyāsa composing the text for three years on the peak of Mount Meru, Vyāsa teaching it to his students, and also Pramati narrating it to Ruru. There are other narratives the Naimiṣa sages have heard before. And there is the 100,000 verse "prototype" composed by those colorful sages, the Citraśikhaṇḍins. Nevertheless, the eighteen-*parvan* text with the two frames structures all other narrations, and organizes them, and the Mahābhārata is organized, transmitted, and received in this recognizable structure. But beyond this simple sense of structure, where we can speak of textual morphology, we also have themes guiding the narrative. Thus the text has an architectonic, which is composed of two aspects of ontology: Being and Becoming thematized as eternity and time. Biardeau has noted the two semantic frames of *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*; indeed, the text is self-conscious of this distinction as an organizing principle. These two *dharmas* are held together in the text, and the text provides the intellectual space in which the relation between the two is presented. We cannot call this "structural" since the Mahābhārata is not divided into two parts—for example, parts A and B—corresponding to these two themes. Rather, *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti dharmas* form an architectonic that drives the narrative on a deeper, philosophical level and gives it a meaningful structure.

The term architectonic can only be applied to something abstractly conceptual; it does not invite and enclose the subject, the reader. We do not merely "view" the map of a pyramid or a temple and understand its significance; rather, we enter these structures, explore their architectonic, and are contained by their architecture. Beyond structure, which organizes, and architectonic, which guides, there is architecture, which encloses us and grants us present experience. By this I mean more than simply the experience of reading; for which the category of architectonic is sufficient. Even Hegel's aesthetically uninspired *Phenomenology of Spirit* has an architectonic: a bloodless historical retelling of the stations on the way to Calvary. I mean something more: that we enter the epic as we enter a temple, a prison, or a labyrinth. This is possible because the text erases the distinction between the phenomenal (that is, merely historical), biological dimension of reality that exists in time and its ethical, aesthetic, and ontological transcendence. Vyāsa, the "author" is also the procreator of characters, and is presented as a variant of the creator himself, the *pitāmaha* Brahmā. Thus to truly read the Mahābhārata according to the direction of the "author" Vyāsa is to become free from historical situatedness and also embodiment. Because the epic is repeating a paradigm: *devāsura* conflict, we can re*live*

it. One could argue this reliving is merely aesthetic, but the epic has already collapsed the distinction between the aesthetic and the vulgarly historical.

Granted the Mahābhārata does not merely have a structure in the trivial sense; does not merely have a structure even in the deeper sense of a theme that is worked out as in a musical composition or even an architectonic. What sort of architecture does it then have? To answer this question would require a decision on what the paradigm of all architecture is: is it the temple, the labyrinth, or the prison? Both Bataille and Foucault characterized our social political existence with reference to a prison.[66] The Mahābhārata would argue all three structures are implied in its architecture. From a *pravṛtti* perspective, the epic is a prison, enclosing us without any chance of escape. The epic goes further in its unrelenting and unsentimental analysis of our social-political-historical existence: neither death nor time can provide an exit. This sense of "no exit" is secured through cyclical composition; where history is not merely left behind as fodder for nostalgia, but as a sentence of slaughter to come. Endlessly. The only "escape" is the *nivṛtti* path, in whose light the prison is a temple, and we recognize our embodiment and historical situatedness—that is, finitude and imprisonment in history—as merely a ritual, aesthetic, *delightful* sojourn. We can leave the architecture once we realize the aesthetic nature of both human history and cosmic cycles. Casting off the body, casting off the social-political, casting off the universe itself, Vyāsa's son Śuka exits the text. As readers we can follow Śuka, who flies out of the temple or tarry in the prison by repeating the cycle of the epic, which is not different from another cycle in the universe: rebirth.

This is what I mean by "architecture" then, where my soul experiences both the act of reading the text and the act of embodied existence as *one* aesthetic experience, wandering within an edifice. Without this aesthetic dimension we live in the slaughterhouse of nature or the prison of time. The structure of eighteen *parvans* guided by the architectonic of ontology becomes architecture in the epic's circular composition. As I have shown, two signposts guide our way through the epic: the Bhagavadgītā and the Nārāyaṇīya, placed in two numerically equal intervals at Book 6 and Book 12 of the epic. The Bhagavadgītā teaches the vital aspect of living in *pravṛtti* with equanimity; the Nārāyaṇīya, placed shortly after Śuka breaks through the architecture of the text and

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[66] This is in Georges Bataille, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, ed., Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989) and Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977). Here is Bataille's editor on the prison: "If the prison is the generic form of architecture this is primarily because man's own form is his first prison. In other words, it is not possible simply to oppose the prison to the free man. Nessus's lion skin stuck to the skin of Hercules. In the same manner, man's revolt against prison is a rebellion against his own form, against the human figure. And this is precisely what, in Bataille's view, the mythical figure of Acephalus was intended to show: the only way for man to escape the architectural chain gang is to escape his form, to lose his head. This self-storming of one's own form requires, in fact, an infinitely more underhanded strategy than one of simple destruction or escape. The image of Acephalus, thus, should be seen as a figure of dissemblance, the negative image of an anti-monumental madness involved in the dismemberment of 'meaning.' The painter André Masson drew this figure and Bataille wrote an aphorism to go with it: 'Man will escape his head as a convict escapes his prison.'" Denis Hollier, "Introduction: Bloody Sundays," in Georges Bataille, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), xii. Is it any wonder, then, that the Indians placed the god who is the acephalic figure par excellence at the entrance to this text? Whether the Gaṇeśa episode is early or late, what is important is to appreciate splendid genius of the *ideas* in the epic against which the laborious machinations of the German critics appear both tedious and jejune.

escapes it, presents the reader with how to live life as if in a temple. This is achieved through *bhakti*: The epic, which sets up a textual universe, and then provides successive levels of narration that simultaneously provide ways of transcending this textual universe, achieves exactly the same effect. In it, a cathartic description of Becoming at a narrative level leads through its sublime aesthetic portrayal of the human condition to an experience of cognitive ecstasy on a transformative level. This ecstasy is, in the original sense of the word, a standing out of Becoming (Greek *ekstasis* = "to stand out"), that is to say, a direct apprehension of Being. The Mahābhārata is thus itself conducive not only to the desire for liberation, but also of a knowledge of Being.

The failure of the text-historical method in its application to the Mahābhārata, as detailed in *The Nay Science*, and the exposure of the German Indologists' "text-critical" expertise, as undertaken in *Philology and Criticism*, now open up fresh avenues for engaging with the epic. After two hundred years of "critical," "historical," and "scientific" approaches, we are nowhere near appreciating the life of the text in relation to humans and humanities. Following Biardeau, Hiltebeitel has suggested we read the epic as literature. This is encouraging, but is this not exactly how the Hindu tradition received this text? To answer this question, I wish to suggest even the turn to "literature" does not fully open up the scope of the Mahābhārata. In fact, it returns us in a different way to a historicist perspective, albeit *this time* we wish to give a history of the Mahābhārata as literature. To avoid this, I suggest we take an "aesthetic" approach. Such a new beginning has the advantage of providing us with an approach uncontaminated by a long list of the followers of Christian Lassen: the two Adolf Holtzmanns, Theodor Goldstücker, Hermann Oldenberg, Edward W. Hopkins, Georg von Simson, John L. Brockington, James L. Fitzgerald, and Andreas Bigger. In contrast, the aesthetic approach to Mahābhārata presents the text as an experience of the reader, and thus it clarifies thoughtful, subjective judgments. These judgments are not solipsistic in that they can be presented *as if universal*. However, these judgments do not yield "objective" knowledge, but an aesthetic experience, consisting of judgments that can be shared or quarreled about. It is rational to the extent that we construct rational arguments and shareable experiences of the text. But it is not rational in the dead sense of creating historical facts; which in the case of the epic has led an entire sub-discipline into error. Thus we approach the epic with as few prejudices as possible and, in every experience, clarify how the subject is engaged by the text. In such self-critical approaches the epic reveals itself an experience worthy of thoughtful engagement. Intellectual *frisson* and aesthetic delight transform the soul. The epic shares this purpose of humanities. The "experts" of the epic were always professors of the epic; they did not remain students. To give one example from the Mahābhārata, the Ādiparvan presents itself as a Prelude to a large orchestral work. Imagine the text-historian demanding that it does not "fit" with the upcoming narrative, which is reduced to a cliché: a battle scene! Beyond the "historical" and "literary" approaches we thus need a new approach to the study of this epic as a work of art—an approach does not contrast the "truth" of history with the "falsity" of myth, but rather, it looks for features of narration that are common to both. In my next work, I hope to provide a justification for such an approach, based on the features of the Mahābhārata's architecture outlined here.