Writing a Romantic History

No act of history-writing is neutral: this idea has been established many times over. I want to explore this concept more fully in this paper, considering what subjective history—by which I mean a history that makes no claims towards neutrality, objectivity, or even “accuracy” –– can do. I seek to consider what it would mean to lean into a subject-position in history-writing, rather than to attempt a sterile, empirical, statist history. Kalidāsa’s *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* is a ripe ground for this attempt because it is a retelling of an aitihāsik (historical) story from the Mahābhārata that highlights the interplay between love and dharma, especially evident in his narrative changes and the affect of the play. I argue that we see Kālidāsa as a historian, not *despite* but *because of* his ability to aestheticize in storytelling. This argument allows us to expand our ways of imagining the past: instead of appreciating art for aesthetic pleasure alone, we can think about what claims art, an expression of subject-position, makes about the past, too.

Kālidāsa is credited with authoring some of the most famous extant Sanskrit texts, one of those being the *Abhijñānaśākuntalaṃ*, a *nāṭaka* (drama), which tells the love story of two ancestors of the family in the Mahābhārata. Kālidāsa, a fifth-century Sanskrit author, is a literary giant about whom we have very little definite material but an oeuvre of stories about his life: thus, I am inclined to see Kālidāsa not as a definite being, but an author-figure that represents a broader cultural moment.[[1]](#footnote-2) While Kālidāsa is celebrated for his literary craft, few, if any, have recognized Kālidāsa as a historian. In this paper, I examine the development of *sṛngārarasa* in the first act of Kālidāsa’s *Abhijñānaśākuntalam,* considering how the aestheticization of this story from the Mahābhārata is an act of rewriting historical narrative. I show Kālidāsa as a historian who actively negotiates dharma-centric content of an itihāsa-grantha to romanticize an imagined past.

Insofar as the task of the historian is interpreting and representing the past, Kālidāsa is certainly a historian. Note my rather broad account of what a historian does, which I explore in more detail in the following sections: I have not asserted that a historian must gather empirical data, search archives, collect censuses, or anything of that matter, for my argument is informed by the understanding that no act of evidence collection and interpretation can be completely neutral and is, at all times, colored by what we wish to see. The world, and especially the past, is a sort of Mirror of Erised.[[2]](#footnote-3) Therefore, to consider a historian as special in some regard, in that they can accurately access the past close to as-it-was, is not a helpful perspective. Still, historians are set apart in their efforts to interpret the past, rather than just retell as they please. Historians can make informed speculations, based on material they have, but no more than that. This is not to say that the endeavor of history is a futile one, but rather, I hope to appreciate more fully what particular views about the past reveal about the historian’s social cluster, as well as what that particular subject-position can offer in imagining a past event (much like the goals of oral history). To make this argument, I engage theories proposed by Romila Thapar and Ranajit Guha.

Background

The Sanskrit nāṭaka *Abhijñānaśākuntalaṃ* tells the story of Bharata’s parents, Śakuntalā and Duṣyanta-- a story originally featured in the Mahābhārata. In Kālidāsa’s version, King Duṣyanta first encounters Śakuntalā in her āśrama (penance grove), while her father, the head of the āśrama, is away. They fall in love, and as Duṣyanta returns to the palace, he gives her his ring. Some time later, a powerful rishi named Durvāsā visits the āśrama, but Śakuntalā, preoccupied with the thoughts of her beloved, fails to properly welcome him. Durvāsā Rishi, incensed, places a curse that Duṣyanta forgets her. He recants a part of his curse later, out of pity, and says that her beloved will remember her only when presented with a personal token he gave her. After seven acts, during which the ring ends up in a fish’s belly at some point, Duṣyanta eventually remembers Śakuntalā. The play ends with Duṣyanta being impressed by their son, Bharata, and their family reunites. Bharata is the progenitor of the clan in the Mahābhārata and the namesake of Bhāratavarṣa.

Kālidāsa changes key features of the Mahābhārata story in his retelling. Scholars such as Romila Thapar, Edwin Gerow, Nell Shapiro-Hawley, and others have studied these differences and their implications in detail.[[3]](#footnote-4) The story of Śakuntalā and Duṣyanta in the Mahābhārata is more rapid, aggressive, and direct, whereas Kalidāsa’s version develops a coy, gentle, blossoming love. In the Mahābhārata Adiparvan chapters 62-69, wherein this story is narrated, vīrarasa, or heroism, is apparent as the king hunts and conquers, and śṛngārarasa, or the erotic, emerges from natural and bodily descriptions. The Mahābhārata version features only Śakuntalā and Duṣyanta, whereas Kālidāsa includes new characters. Śakuntalā is forthcoming in introducing herself and more readily agrees to the gandharva marriage, whereas in the nāṭaka, she hardly says a word to the king in the first act. Duṣyanta, lustful and conniving, pretends to forget Śakuntalā when she reappears in his court with her son to succeed the throne under the conditions of their marriage. After a benediction from the sky, the king accepts his son and admits to feigning ignorance to maintain his people’s trust.

While these rasas are preserved in Kālidāsa’s nāṭaka, the development and effect of the story is different. Kālidāsa’s narrative changes, enacted through alaṃkāra (rhetorical ornaments), inclusion of different characters, and stage directions, slowly create śṛngārarasa to be savored in the hearts of a sensitive audience. In the first act, which is the focus of this paper, the king first glimpses Śakuntalā as she lovingly waters tender saplings with her friends, who joke about her breasts outgrowing her bark-cloth. The audience is attuned to the marriage of a flowering vine to a mango sapling–– symbolizing and foreshadowing Śakuntalā’s marriage to Duṣyanta. Śakuntalā dances around to escape from a bee, directly after which Śakuntalā and Duṣyanta meet face-to-face. As the ascetic-girls prepare to welcome Duṣyanta with their hospitality, they whisper amongst themselves about Śakuntalā’s marriage. Much of the couple’s attraction in the first act is inferred from what is left unsaid, but very little through direct conversation or physical interactions. In this play, Kālidāsa turns the Mahabharata’s strong, free-willed and demanding Śakuntalā into a naive, shy, and accommodating girl.[[4]](#footnote-5) Just as the king is made more honest and humbler, Śakuntalā’s fierceness, too, is toned down in the initial encounter. As such, both characters meet in the middle with a reserved love, rather than one’s overpowering pursuit of the other. Such coyness is underplayed in the Mahābhārata, showing how śṛngārarasa is differently developed.

These differences raise questions about Kālidāsa’s aims in retelling this epic story. The changes he makes in a story considered historical draw attention to a particular subject position, revealing of not just the semi-mythological author-figure Kālidāsa, but of the entire social milieu with which he would have engaged. Why narrate this first interaction with more gentle and reserved love? Theinclusion of the signet ring and curse in Kalidāsa’s play, notes Nell Hawley, helps save the character of the king. Duṣyanta is a lovelorn cursed king doomed by fate, not a raging egomaniac, which would tarnish his son Bharata’s and subsequent lineage’s reputation (which feels more satisfactory than supposedly pleasing his townspeople by lying about Śakuntalā). Thus, Kālidāsa writes a more emotionally satisfactory story by playing with aesthetics.

Drama at the Limit of History

Remakes, such as Kālidāsa’s story, have a long history in South Asia and have been the subject of much scholarly attention. Drama, especially, is noted for depicting stories from itihāsa literature, but with new twists.[[5]](#footnote-6) Elisa Freschi and Philip Maas term similar instances as “adaptive reuse,” whereas Yigal Bronner, David Shulman, and Gary Tubb consider “innovation and newness” in these remakes. I suggest using a different framework and think about this artistic remake, Kālidāsa’s *nāṭaka,* as an instance of interpreting and retelling a story, effectively rewriting history. The broader import of this argument is that we think more about artists as social historians, so that we can more fully appreciate the subject-position in historiography.

Granted, many scholars have regarded the Abhijnanasakuntalam as historically revealing. Romila Thapar, a historian of ancient South Asia, reads Kālidāsa’s nāṭaka as historically significant, too. She sees his retelling of the Śakuntalā story as a juncture that can reveal more about social histories that inform certain narrations.[[6]](#footnote-7) She suggests that we not simply comb literature for so-called “historical facts” but understand how a story retold can signify historical change. The contents may be fictional, but the mode of narrative might indicate something of historical significance.[[7]](#footnote-8) In her account, distortion or change in retellings are especially revealing of social-cultural moments. This approach to poetry and literature in history is one shared by many historians, including Daud Ali and Edwin Gerow.[[8]](#footnote-9) While I agree that this is a legitimate and useful way to approach Kālidāsa as a historian, I go even further. It is not just the case that Kālidāsa tells us about social-historical circumstances, but that Kālidāsa himself is *crafting* narrative, and that creative act makes him a historian himself. Historians interpret and represent the past, which is precisely what Kālidāsa is doing.

Modern assumptions of historiography, which Ranajit Guha critiques, inadequately account for stories like Abhijnanasakuntalam*.[[9]](#footnote-10)* Hegel writes in his *Lectures on Philosophy of History* that:

It strikes every one, in beginning to form an acquaintance with the treasures of Indian literature, that a land so rich in intellectual products, and those of the profoundest order of thought, has no History… India has not only ancient books relating to religion, and splendid poetical productions, but also ancient codes; the existence of which latter kind of literature has been mentioned as a condition necessary to the origination of History — and yet History itself is not found.[[10]](#footnote-11)

Hegel (and later, Marx) has famously proclaimed that India has no history, in which he meant that a state-less nation is no nation at all, and what could it write about if not statehood?[[11]](#footnote-12) He lauds the very poetical productions that I argue are history, too, if we were to broaden what Hegel considers history. On Hegel’s account, simply writing about the past is not enough; the state is a necessary condition to producing history.[[12]](#footnote-13) The state both supplies the content of history and helps produce it.[[13]](#footnote-14) Statehood is a central criterion of eligibility for World-history.[[14]](#footnote-15) Guha reads Hegel as saying “no state, no history.”[[15]](#footnote-16)

Guha critiques Hegel’s concept of *World-history* for limiting history to statist and imperial concerns, which thereby unfairly reduces all other forms of narratives about the past to “prehistory.”[[16]](#footnote-17) Those narratives were seen as prose of the world or historicality, but not history.[[17]](#footnote-18) Thus, Guha pushes to explore more of history that lies outside the boundaries (or even *at the limit of*) World-history, which would then include the quotidian experiences of the everyday. In challenging Hegelian World-history, he engages literature considered historical in South Asia, namely, *puranetihas* literature. These stories did not fit into the sterile and statist sense of historiography, World-history, which was synonymous with “reason in history.”[[18]](#footnote-19) Guha challenges the very premise of expecting reason in history writing in his chapter titled “Experience, Wonder, and the Pathos of Historicality,” and explores how the process of making World-history in colonial South Asia included retellings of the Mahābhārata.

Guha writes that “a certain distance between narrator and event rather than the immediacy of any personal experience that makes up the story for *itihāsa.*”[[19]](#footnote-20) He does not mean that distance from an object of inquiry makes someone a historian, which would have absurd consequences. Guha writes specifically in the context of narrativization and modern history writing: in European narrative, experience is tied to reason and stands for truth, whereas experience is not a necessity in South Asian historical writing.[[20]](#footnote-21) He argues in the broader context of how a Hegelian notion of world-history was made in South Asia as imperialist and modernist project, and specifically, how world-history latched onto the preexisting archai of kathā/ākhyāna (retellings and narrations) on the itihāsa literature. Itihāsa is a marked departure from dominant strains in modern Western history-writing, which centralized direct experience of an event.

Itihāsa, and kathā thereupon, embody distance between the storyteller and the story itself. That commitment is reflected in the very name of the genre, explains Guha: *iti ha asit*, wherein *iti* is the invisible quotation marks, translating to “it happened as such.” The etymology of the word itself keeps the utterance away from the speaker. Experience is not a prerequisite of historical writing in South Asia, he says. Stories such as the Mahābhārata are retold through many layers, and the narrator is many times removed from the contents of the story. In all practical senses: no listeners are asking a bard about his journey–– they want to hear the familiar story of the Mahābhārata.

Using Guha’s exploration of features of itihāsa that differentiate it from world-history but nevertheless qualify it as history, I argue that Kālidāsa is a historian through 1. His distance from the occurrence and 2. Aesthetic affect of the story via rasa theory. Importantly, the latter is not incidental or merely ornamental to the historical narrative, but precisely what makes it so: these aesthetic features offer an interpretive angle without which we could not fully appreciate what makes it historical. I will first make room for Kālidāsa in Guha’s conceptualization of historicality before expanding Guha’s use of rasa theory.

I now establish Kālidāsa’s distance from the occurrence narrated. Though little verifiable biographical information about Kālidāsa exists, we know that Kālidāsa was not hiding behind the āśrama trees and did not directly experience the interaction between Śakuntalā and Duṣyanta. Still, he wrote a retelling of the story in a nāṭaka. The story of Śakuntalā is not quite *his* story from first-hand experience, insofar as World-history goes, but he nonetheless occupies the role of a historian. Kālidāsa’s nāṭaka can function as what Guha calls akhyāna, insofar as both are retellings.[[21]](#footnote-22) As a retelling, there is an additional layer of distance between the actors of the story and the storyteller, Kālidāsa, a historian who offers a narrative of the past. Kālidāsa need not have experienced an event to tell the story of it in the South Asian account of historicality.

To be clear: Kālidāsa is not writing *itihāsa*, nor is he claiming to. He is retelling a story that originates in the itihāsa genre. By Guha’s argument, that very retelling is still a form of historicality that the Hegelian paradigm of World-history misses. No one *really* writes itihāsa, after all; even the role of Vyasa as author is contested, and he is considered a compiler, instead.[[22]](#footnote-23) Itihāsa is not generated, but retold, and Kālidāsa is among the lineage of narrators. His version, though, heavily features aesthetic elements; this aestheticization is the focus of the next few paragraphs.

Listeners enjoy *rasa* when they hear this story (as opposed to the novelty that accompanies first-hand experience in World-history). As Hughes-Warrington puts it, retellings renew “our sense of the world in an everyday sense of history—*aitihāsikatā* or historicality... In short, history can be everywhere because wonder is everywhere.”[[23]](#footnote-24) Guha focuses on adbhutarasa, which is produced by that separation between the original and the retelling associated with *itihāsa*. To substantiate his focus on adbhuta, he draws from the mention of *citrāḥ kathāḥ* (stories of wonder) in Mahābhārata 1.1.3 and literary theorist Abhinavagupta’s mention of *camatkāra* (rapture, which he translates as “heightened joy of wonder”).[[24]](#footnote-25) While these connections are not unwarranted, I am afraid that the concept of wonder does not fully do justice to the question of why people listen to ākhyānas on itihāsa. The answer to this question is much more than wonder; to focus on wonder alone would be inaccurate and possibly reductive, when the range of expression in rasa theory is far more expansive, and Kālidāsa’s *nāṭaka* draws attention to this fact. To move even further from Hegel’s World-history, we can delve deeper into rasa–– why stop at wonder? What is to be said of fear, disgust, love, anger, humor, courage, sadness and peacefulness? Insofar as there is implicit a project of expanding historiography beyond the colonizer’s frameworks, I propose rasa at large (not just wonder) as an answer to the question that Guha raises: “But what do the listeners get out of all this?”[[25]](#footnote-26)

To support this proposal, I draw on the work of literary theorist Abhinavagupta. In theories on aesthetics, a central concern is that rasa is not *real* emotion, but an aestheticized one (*alaukika*). Thus, rasa is not connected to the primacy of experience, but is completely limited to the aesthetic realm.[[26]](#footnote-27) For example, when a perceptive audience member (*sahṛdaya*) is watching King Duṣyanta hunt the deer on the stage, they are feeling not that exact, actual heroism from speeding through the woods on a chariot, but a generalized and aestheticized version of it. Abhinavagupta says (and Pollock translates) that “aesthetic tasting is, to be sure, a form of awareness, but utterly different from any kind of real-world awareness, since its means, the aesthetic elements, differ utterly from real-world means.”[[27]](#footnote-28) He writes that rasa is not effected by real-world valid cognitions (*pramāṇas*), such as immediate experience (*pratyakṣa*), in contrast to the Hegelian emphasis on experience.[[28]](#footnote-29) If it were, we would never return to a theatre—who would want to subject themselves to actual pain, disgust, fear? Kāvya, on this account, is the aestheticization of everyday emotions, and according to rasa theory, they are distinctly not *laukika*, but belong exclusively to the realm of art and are not *real*. Substantiating this point, Abhinavagupta writes that “Rasa exists only in drama-- not in the world.”[[29]](#footnote-30) Note that there is no important difference between rasa arising from drama and poetry versus from itihāsa; these authors admit that rasa arises in itihāsagranthas, too, such as Ramāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata. Because rasa itself, as aestheticized emotion, can move us away from the immediacy of experience, I propose reading any such rasa as achieving this aim, and not *adbhutarasa* alone. Wonder certainly emerges in the *nāṭaka* too, but attention to it alone would diminish the important role of *śṛngārarasa* (the erotic, love) in this retelling. A sensitive audience experiences an aestheticized love while watching the first act of the play. I offer examples from the first act to demonstrate this aesthetic particularity and its implications.

Even further, I suggest that rasa makes the past more palpable and thereby deepens the audience’s engagement with a historical story. This idea could explain why a general Indian public, after watching a period film, feels a heightened connection with a particular imagined past. Even if a sensitive connoisseur is aware that a nāṭaka is unreal, that does not prevent their enjoyment of rasa, and in the process, the imagination required to connect to that generalized emotion. The way that rasa works, according to Abhinavagupta, is that a presented image becomes abstracted to me, and instead of thinking of the particulars illustrated, I am enjoying a more generalized, unreal feeling of, in this first act, love. Through an imaginative leap, a spectator enjoys the rasa.[[30]](#footnote-31) Poetic language rich in literary features brings into being (bhavanā) these emotions in a suspension where reality and unreality converge.[[31]](#footnote-32) When an itihāsa story is told through a nāṭaka, it makes the past and importantly its effects closer to the audience. Aestheticized tellings thus perform a unique function that not all forms of history can achieve.

Romantic History: Reading Śṛngārarasa

I am reading from the Devanagari recension (which differs slightly in content from the Bengali recension) with Rāghavabhaṭṭa’s commentary, edited by Narayana Balakrishna Godabole and Kashinath Pandurang Parab and published in 1891. The play starts with *virarasa* as an aesthetic experience, as in the Mahābhārata. The king dashes through the āśrama on his chariot until ascetics stop him from killing an āśrama deer. When he sets his arrow down, the ascetics are pleased and bless him, prophesizing the birth of a *cakravartin* son.[[32]](#footnote-33) Though the ascetics are out to collect firewood, they invite him back to the āśrama. The kulapati is not there—he has gone to Somatirtha to expel his daughter Śakuntalā’s bad fate—but Śakuntalā is there to receive guests, so the king figures that she will convey his well-wishes to her father. The king says to his charioteer, “We [will] cleanse ourselves by darshan of the meritorious āśrama,” indicating a dharmic intention. As they approach, he asks his charioteer to park further away, so that the noise does not disturb the penance-grove, and he removes some of his royal attire and the bow in effort to “enter with modest attire.” The king, cognizant of the unspoken rules (dharma) of the tapovana, respectfully complies. When he arrives, he sees girls carrying watering pots. At this point, the king first expresses desire as he says to no one in particular:

King: (having given an ear) Oh, those ascetic-girls with watering vessels suited to their own strength are going to get water here for the young plants. (examining closely) Oh, the sight of them is lovely!

If this body, rare in a king’s palace, is of the person living in the aśrama,

Of course, the forest vines far surpass even the flowering vines of the city-garden because of their qualities.[[33]](#footnote-34)

The king was surprised to see these girls, who are extremely beautiful, says the commentator Rāghavabhaṭṭa (*aho iti vismaye. saundarya atiśaya darśanena vismayaḥ*).[[34]](#footnote-35) They are carrying pots to water saplings, one of their duties around the *āśrama*–– the kulapati has entrusted his daughter and her friends to this task in his absence. Description of the king’s surprise is heightened in the next verse as he compares the women he likely has seen in his palace to the women before him in the āśrama.

The verse communicates that the girls he sees in this forest surpass even the rare girls from the palace harem (*śuddhānta*). The imagery evokes those of courtly, and thereby permitted, sex, which is not a taboo for the king who can indulge pleasure (*bhoga*). The reference to the *śuddhānta* stands out not because of the actions it evokes, but rather, the person to whom it is directed-- the king has entered an āśrama, wherein *yoga*, often diametrically opposed to *bhoga* and thought of in terms of restraint, is traditionally general injunctive, and these are women of the āśrama. The ritual atmosphere of the location implies some degree of sexual restraint. Kālidāsa equates women to delicate and flowering vines. The women of the palace harem are nothing in comparison to these girls, according to the verse, raising questions as to why exactly they are more beautiful-- barring physicality. Their connection to the āśrama and thereby dharma makes them any more attractive than women in the palace. These women are both elevated and viewed as forbidden fruit, because they are pure and innocent daughters of *dharmacārin* ascetics.

In any case, the king seems to think Kaśyapa Ṛṣi—despite his ritual purity and elevated dharmic status–– is quite foolish for having enjoined his daughter in these menial duties. When he realizes that one of these beautiful girls is Śakuntalā, the Ṛṣi’s daughter, he remarks, again, to no one in particular:

King: How is this the daughter of Kanva? There certainly the great Kaṣyapa is not seeing well for he enjoined her in duties of the āśrama.

By all evidence, he who wishes to make this body, which is naturally beautiful, fit for penance,

that ṛṣi will certainly try to cut a stick of firewood with the edge of a blue lotus petal.[[35]](#footnote-36)

Anasūyā, one of the friends, had just joked with Śakuntalā, saying that these little saplings must be dearer to Kaṣyapa than even his own daughter. She says that even Śakuntalā, who is as soft as a new malika flower, is put to work in watering the base of the trees.[[36]](#footnote-37) This image draws attention to Śakuntalā’s youthfulness and naiveite. But Śakuntalā, who has a deep love extending to all living beings, says, “It is not just the task of my father. My familial love (*sodarasneha—*which the commentator glosses as “love for a brother”) is on them, too.”[[37]](#footnote-38) Śakuntalā is aware of her duties, assigned by her father, and performs them with great reverence. At the same time, Śakuntalā’s delicate frame and soft body is contrasted with the laborious work she was requested to do.

Then a stage direction indicates that Śakuntalā “acts the watering of the trees.” The commentator Rāghavabhaṭṭa describes what this acting looks like: she gestures her hands in a way that looks like a cluster of water-lilies, leads forward with her shoulder, and bows her head down forward in a gesture of reverence. This stage direction indicates that the actor moved and behaved in a way that too creates śṛngārarasa, even in dutiful obeyance of her father’s request.[[38]](#footnote-39)

The king, feeling pity for Śakuntalā out of affection for her, thinks that anyone who brings her tender body trouble must be dense—even if a great sage and head of the āśrama. While the image of Śakuntalā as delicate is communicated, another meaning is too: that someone as beautiful as her need not do penance. Why should she do hard work when she is so beautiful? Only someone foolish enough to try to cut wood with a flower petal would misuse a person like her. The subtext is: clearly that body is meant for other purposes.

The king remains under cooling tree shade this entire time, where he is reposed in the hot summer season to wait for the girls. From here, he sees Śakuntalā say to her friend:

Anasūyā, friend, because Priyaṃvadā tied the bark-garment too tight, I am confined. Just make it looser.

Śakuntalā, a developing young woman, is outgrowing her clothes. Suggestive imagery resonates as Priyaṃvadā, her friend, jokes:

Priyaṃvadā: (laughing) Here you should blame your youth, which is made obvious by your breasts.

The word “*vistārayitṛ*,” which I have translated as “made obvious,” also means “spread out.” Since this word is placed next to “*payodhara*” in a compound, it can likewise invoke imagery of large breasts, which is precisely what the king seems to fixate on. The king, eavesdropping on this banter between friends, responds to this encounter, saying:

King: It is true that the bark-garment is not suitable for her age. Even then, it does not nourish the beauty of ornaments. How?

The growing lotus is beautiful even with moss

The stain of the moon, though dirty, shines luster

This slender woman is even more charming even with a bark-garment

In that way, how could an ornament not belong to beautiful figures?[[39]](#footnote-40)

The commentator Rāghavabhatta writes that the meaning is that this bark garment really *does* suit her (*api tu puṣyati iti arthaḥ*).[[40]](#footnote-41) She might be outgrowing her clothes, but she looks good because of it–– her breasts spill out of her clothes and the king is enjoying the view. By this sort of imagery, her own splendor is certainly reaffirmed (*anena śobhā ātiśaya asya avaśyakatvaṃ dhvanyate*).[[41]](#footnote-42) As such, the king’s thoughts lead into his verse.

The verse presents two examples, familiar to Sanskrit imagination, about a lotus growing in filth and the moon being stained, though with a unique touch. In the first metaphor, where the lotus is beautiful even when surrounded by moss, which is its inherent characteristic (*avinābhāvāt*),[[42]](#footnote-43) the lotus is compared to the woman and moss to her clothes. Notable is the “even with” (*śaivalena api*)-- she is not beautiful despite her assumingly tattered clothing, but even *in* it, as if it enhances her beauty. In the second metaphor, the stain of the moon is still shining, just like her clothes are. They might be a stain in comparison to the rest of her form, but even then, they are beautiful. In the crux of the verse, Kālidāsa reaffirms that this woman is even more charming because of her clothing (*valkalena api*). So even if this simple, too-tight bark-garment is itself like moss or a stain, because of its association with something beautiful, it, too, becomes beautiful.

As the king is still watching the girls, Śakuntalā rushes towards a saffron sapling, taken by its gentle movement in the wind, to bow in respect to it. Her affection for all living beings is once again evident, as her love seems to pour out of her just as she was watering saplings. Her friend Priyaṃvadā says:

Priyaṃvadā: Oh Śakuntalā, stand here for a moment. When you have gone close, the saffron sapling appears lovely as if it were provided with a vine.

Śakuntalā: This is why you are Priyaṃvadā (well-spoken, flatterer)!

King [to himself, still hiding behind the tree]: Priyaṃvadā speaks sweetly, but also true about Śakuntalā. As you can see,

Her lower lip is red [like] buds, her two arms imitate delicate branches at the top of the tree

[her] youth, desirable, is embedded throughout her body like a flower.

The proximity of the creeper and tree indicates a marriage between the two, given that the creeper is intertwined around the tree. In a typical presentation of this image, as is provided in the poem, a female creeper is married to a male sapling. Kālidāsa, though, subverts this expectation in his verse, wherein Śakuntalā’s body is the site of marriage. The king thinks of her physical features, such as her bud-like buds and branch-like arms, as the tree, and her youthful nature as the flowering vine. Her youthfulness is emphasized as feminine and delicate through this comparison, indicating that the king feels a sensual attraction to her naivete.

Her friends lightheartedly talk about the marriage of a mango sapling, which they named Sahakāra (help), and creeper, which they named Vanajyotsnā (moonlight of the forest). These names foreshadow: Vanajyotsnā, a forest-beauty, represents Śakuntalā, she will too be married to someone who will soon rush out to help (Sahakāra) her—the king. The friends joke about Śakuntalā’s longing look at the creeper and sapling, suggesting that she must also desire a suitable groom like that of Vanajyotsnā:

Priyaṃvadā: Anasuyā, do you know why Śakuntalā looks excessively at Vanajyotsnā?

Anasūyā: I am not able to imagine. Do tell.

Priyaṃvadā: Just as Vanajyotsnā is compatible with the suitable sapling, as such, she thinks, I must also get a compatible groom myself.[[43]](#footnote-44)

Śakuntalā bashfully writes off their comments and says, “That is certainly *your* desire.” Then, stage directions indicate that “she pours out the pot of water.” While the commentator does not expand on this stage direction, it’s possible that Śakuntalā would have danced in this moment. I speculate this based on the understanding that stage directions are intentional and not taken lightly: they are indicative of special moments in the play.

With this mention of union, marriage is on the king’s mind, too. For a second, the king questions whether their match is appropriate in terms of his caste-related dharma.

King: Is it the case that she is born of a kṣatriya of unequal castes from the Kulapati? Away with doubt.

Without a doubt, she is fit for being a kshatriya wife

Because my *ārya* (noble) mind is wishing for her

When the matter is suspicious

The actions of the mind of good people are a proof.[[44]](#footnote-45)

He starts to wonder about her caste, but then centers himself and determines that it doesn’t matter. Because he is a good person, and he desires her, that is plenty of reason to pursue the relationship he seeks. Therefore, the king’s desire overrides his obligation to caste-dharma. In some ways, it offers striking messaging for a dharma-centric world–– that caste does not hold a candle to love/lust.

At this time, a bee, whom Śakuntalā agitated as she watered the sapling, flies towards her mouth and she cries out for help.[[45]](#footnote-46) The stage directions indicate that “she acts out the bee attack.” The commentator, Rāghavabhaṭṭa, explains how she acts: with a trembling head, shaking midsection, a quivering lip, and her hand held out with the palm flat, which is a *mudra* (gesture) indicating to stop.

Avoiding the bee, she dances around, and the king looks on:

King: (longingly)

Again and again you touch her trembling sidelong gaze

As if telling a secret, you, moving near her ear, hum softly.

With [her] two arms flailing about, you drink all the passion [of] her bottom lip

Oh bee, I am defeated in seeking the truth. Certainly, you are clever.[[46]](#footnote-47)

The king is envious of a bee that hovers so close to her. Her eyes remain fixed upon this bee, it whispers in her ear, and even against her will, it remains persistent and snatches a kiss. The poetic rendering of a potential bee sting betrays the king’s fantasies that he projects onto the bee (albeit slightly violent, but that is a modern ethic projected onto the play; in this literary culture, perhaps this was an appreciated trope of love). He feels inferior to this bee, for the bee seems to have figured it out, and the king has lost something quite precious to it. Śakuntalā’s sidelong gaze (*apāṅgāṃ dṛṣṭiṃ*) connotes the erotic in Sanskrit literature, and for the bee to be the object indicates her beckoning a lover: so her trembling gaze indicates that she is consenting, perhaps hesitantly—a sentiment that is invoked throughout the act.

When Śakuntalā cries for help again, her friends joke, “Who are we to save you? Call out for Duṣyanta. The penance-grove is protected by the king.” Duṣyanta sees his golden opportunity and heroically emerges from behind the tree, offering his service. The girls stop in their tracks, confused. Anasūyā then assures the king that there is no great danger, and their friend was just scared of a bee. Then Duṣyanta says his first words to Śakuntalā: “King: (having been facing Śakuntalā) Is penance/heat (*tapas*) increasing? (Śakuntalā stands frightened and speechless).” The king’s question is a bit of an innuendo, as *tapas* suggests a fever of love. The girls prepare to welcome this guest with honor when Śakuntalā then thinks to herself, “How is it that having seen him, I clearly have become approachable of change that is contrary to a penance-grove?” Śakuntalā feels romantic attraction—one unlike the familial love she had for the plants–– that is not customary in an ascetic’s home. This line reveals that Śakuntalā is, too, attracted to the king, though she hides it throughout the act.

When Anasūyā asks the king who he is and where he has come from in a particularly florid way, Śakuntalā thinks to herself, “Heart, do not be distressed. Anasūyā is just saying what you were thinking.” She supresses her jealousy as the king answers, “I am appointed by the Paurava king for looking after dharma. I have come to this penance grove to remove any obstacles [to the practice of dharma].” The king now takes on his role as a protector of dharma while not fully revealing his identity, but not being entirely deceptive, either. The king maintains his role of dharma-protection throughout the play.

Anasūyā responds to the king: “Now the dharmacārina are protected.”[[47]](#footnote-48) The hidden meaning or alternate way of understanding the same sentence is “the wife will have a husband.” Then, stage directions indicate that “(Śakuntalā acts embarrassment of love [*śṛngāralajja*]),” which the commentator expands on: she turns her head away to show bashfulness. Through her body language and revealed inner thoughts, Śakuntalā is clearly interested in the king, as well, and her friends pick up on this fact. The play then reads:

Friends: (both having understood, within themselves) Oh Śakuntalā, if only your father were present here today.

Śakuntalā: Then what would happen?

Friends: He will make this special guest fulfilled with everything in his life.

Śakuntalā: Go away, you two. Why, having [something] in heart, do you deliberate? I will not hear your words.

When her friends figure it out and whisper amongst themselves, Śakuntalā, because of her shyness, pretends it is not true and feigns irritation instead. The king then asks her friends about her, and they explain that she is the child of apsara Meṇakā. The king responds:

King: Okay.

How could this form possibly be from a human?

A bright wave of light does not rise from the surface of the earth.

(Śakuntalā stands looking down)

By no means is the king shy in expressing his desire for Śakuntalā. Not only does he talk to her friends solely to ask about Śakuntalā, but he also openly calls her beautiful. He figures she must be of some divine origin, as someone this radiant could not have been earthly. Her friends play a key role in facilitating this blooming romance as Śakuntalā refuses to talk directly to the king.

Priyaṃvadā: (having seen Śakuntalā, smiling, facing the actor) it is as if the ārya is wishing to speak again.

(Śakuntalā berates her friend with a finger)

…

King: I wish to know the following about your friend.

Will she observe the ascetic vow, which is obstructed to the activities of love, until she is given in marriage?

Or will she live with the female deer with their intoxicating eyes forever?

The king is explicit in his wishes once again. He had overheard the friends’ request for a groom in jest and ponders to himself before Priyaṃvadā and Anasūyā prompt him to speak. Through verse, the king asks whether Śakuntalā plans to marry or live as an ascetic forever. In comparing her to a deer with attractive eyes, he makes his own wishes apparent-- he hopes for the former, but given her upbringing and commitment to dharma, he is unsure what she plans to do. Her friend responds:

Priyaṃvadā: Ārya, even in following dharma she is dependent on others. But the intention of the guru [is] for her marriage to a suitable groom.

King: (to himself) Surely, this request is not difficult to attain.

Heart, be wishful now [that] there is resolution of doubt.

When there is no doubt that it is fire, then the gem is appropriate to touch.[[48]](#footnote-49)

When the king’s anxieties are quelled upon finding out that she will marry, he becomes hopeful. In a comparison again familiar to Sanskrit imagination, he thinks of her like a gem that was mistaken for fire, given its radiance. He desires to touch her only after dispelling doubts about whether she would marry. He upholds dharmic norms of how to engage with women of the āśrama.

Śakuntalā feigns irritation with her friends offering her up in marriage and threatens to leave, but still, she remains put.

Śakuntalā: (as if angry) Anasūyā, I am going.

Anasūyā: Why?

Śakuntalā: I will make known to Gautami [that] this Priyaṃvadā is speaking foolishly to the ārya.

Anasūyā: Friend, it is not appropriate to wander independently, having left the special guest’s honoring.

(Śakuntalā, not having said anything, stands)

Śakuntalā is bound by a dharma that dictates she must remain in the company of the guest. However, dharma is a guise for her true feelings. In speaking to Anasūyā, it seems as if Śakuntalā herself does not want to leave, either, but pretends as if she is sticking around out of obligation. Priyaṃvadā teases her a bit more and insists she stay by reminding her of a debt: Śakuntalā still has to water two pots on her behalf. Only after she does that may she leave, says Priyaṃvadā. The king interjects:

King: Good woman, I notice she is tired just from watering the trees. Then:

[her] arms, whose shoulders are drooping beyond measure, whose palms are red from the lifting of pots,

Even now [her] breath, the greatest proof, generates heaving of the breasts.

On [her] face, there is a web of water from heat covering the shishira flower on [her] ear, drooping.

And as her bun is loosened, [she] holds [her] disheveled hair with one hand.

A tired, sweaty, panting, woman with her hair falling out of place is made into an image of the spectacular, marvelous, and attractive, all to create an erotic mood. The king carefully observes Śakuntalā, memorizing and memorializing in verse what she looks like, and likely imagining her in other contexts. But at the same time, this image is only possible because of the limits of dharma to which Śakuntalā is confined. She dutifully needs to water the saplings, and she had given her word, which are the circumstances surrounding this very image. In other words, Śakuntalā’s commitment to her dharma makes this very gaze and its following interaction possible. The king then says:

King: So, I free her from debt. (he wishes to give his ring)

(they both look at each other, having read the letters on the signet ring)

King: Do not imagine me being otherwise. This is a gift of the king. Understand me to be a royal person.

This exchange is the first physical interaction between the two characters, and the ring (which is an important feature of the plot) reveals the king’s identity to Śakuntalā. Their eyes meet, and the king makes his second and final address to Śakuntalā this entire act. Though the content of his statements here are assertions of power, they suggest a benevolent revelation in this context. He gives a ring as a token of his affection.

Priyaṃvadā, realizing who their guest is, quickly intervenes:

Priyaṃvadā: Owing to that, it is not proper to separate the ring from your finger. She has become without debt on account of your words. (laughs out loud) Oh Śakuntalā, you have been liberated by this kind noble person, or rather, by the king. Go now.

Śakuntalā: (to herself) If I will be able to. (out loud) Who are you to be dismissing or stopping me?

King: (having seen Śakuntalā, to himself) Is it that just as I am of her, she might be towards me? Has my desire found scope? For:

Even though she does not mix [her] speech with my words,

She gives an ear facing me when I am speaking.

  Although she does not stand directly towards my face

For the most part, her gaze is not on anything else, either.

Once again, Śakuntalā snaps at her friend to cover for her lovesickness. But still, she fools no one, as now the king has also caught on to how she must feel about him. He notices that even though she has not spoken to him, she is listening, and he catches her looking at him. For him, this is enough proof of the mutual attraction. Luckily, he was right. Soon after, when an elephant stampede breaks up their meeting and they must bid farewell to one another, a stage direction indicates that “Śakuntalā, while looking at the king, leaves with her friends under the pretense of longing.”[[49]](#footnote-50) The commentator Rāghavabhaṭṭa writes that she follows her two friends, indicating shyness. Still, her head is turned back towards the king, without saying anything.

The king must fulfill his dharma as a protector of his people, and so he must leave, but his heart is still with Śakuntalā—like a flag flying in the wind, as the pole marches forward and the flag flutters behind.[[50]](#footnote-51)

Much of the couple’s chemistry in the first act is inferred. While the audience has plenty insight into the king’s longing for Śakuntalā, her glances and misleading statements demonstrate reciprocated attraction. The king and Sakuntala seldom speak to each other; all that we know about their attraction to one another is through what they have said to themselves in their minds. As established through these readings, the primary aesthetic experience of this act is śṛngārarasa, and aesthetic theory bears on my argument about history: Kālidāsa’s telling of the story in this fashion makes it relatable to audiences, who are now vested in the story by virtue of feeling an aesthetic pleasure in common with the characters’ emotions. The fact that Kālidāsa’s narrative is aesthetic also is indicative of a particular subject position, makes no claims to neutrality or objectivity, yet counts as history by the account laid out in this paper.

Love and Dharma

In writing about plot structure, Edwin Gerow questions how and for what purpose the drama is constructed.[[51]](#footnote-52) The generic answer is to awaken rasa, and plot plays a crucial role in doing so—but that’s not all, he suggests. The plot structure is constructed to demonstrate how the two main characters, Śakuntalā and Duṣyanta, relate love to dharma, which seem to be in tension in various points of the play.[[52]](#footnote-53) Gerow writes that dharma is often is enacted through vīrarasa and related to the king, whereas śrngāra is largely located in the natural metaphors of the āśrama.[[53]](#footnote-54) He details how Śakuntalā and Duṣyanta develop towards the moral ideal throughout the play. Most interesting for my paper is his analysis of the first act, which he identifies as the *bija*, or the “need to act” located at the *arambha* (beginning of the play): he demonstrates how Śakuntalā and Duṣyanta relate to one another when they are initially unacquainted but infatuated with one another.[[54]](#footnote-55) Duṣyanta, the dharmic hero, who enters hunting, stops to respect the āśrama, and there meets Śakuntalā, then reveals himself in stages.[[55]](#footnote-56) Gerow writes that from this act, the principal focus of the play is śṛngārarasa (rather than vīrarasa), and this reading suggests that the main storyline circles around Śakuntalā, as she most clearly represents love in general, for all modes of life, such as towards the trees she waters.[[56]](#footnote-57) At the beginning of the play, the two main characters seem to embody competing ideas: Śakuntalā, love, and the king, dharma.[[57]](#footnote-58) The king embodies the dharmic ideal from the start when he submits to the ascetics’ authority and is blessed with a son, whereas Śakuntalā knows little about social duties, says Gerow (though I would contest that claim, given her inner dialogue detailed above).[[58]](#footnote-59) Throughout the play, we come to see how the characters have married ideals: “The King has found a love consistent with his royal duty (through rediscovery of his son) and Śakuntalā has won in her husband her rightful place in the dharmic world (without losing one whit of her natural beauty).”[[59]](#footnote-60) I hope to have shown through my close reading and the following section how dharma and love are deeply intertwined from the start of the play—sometimes in tension, as Gerow identifies, but a tension often resolved in the characters’ inner thoughts.

How do these aesthetic changes affect the messages of love and dharma? As always, it’s political: Gerow writes that “The Śakuntalā is not merely a document that provides evidence about culture, it is not just a cultured exemplar; it defines an integral part of the outlook and internal relationships of a civilization.” Here, it is worth recalling that Śakuntalā and Duṣyanta are Bharata’s parents; so, by extension, they are ancestral to the land known as Bharatavarsa. Thus, the qualities demonstrated in them are made more amenable to a history to be retold. In other words: why keep telling a cruel story about an absent dad who pretends to forget about his wife, when it can be a sweet love story instead? Duṣyanta is altogether recast with a character more conducive to *dharma* through the development of a slower romance between the main characters of the play.[[60]](#footnote-61) Admittedly, some of the character changes are by virtue of the rules of play-writing, as the main character (*dhirodatta nāyaka*) by definition cannot be forgetful, but still; the changes are significant.[[61]](#footnote-62) By reimagining the characters, Kālidāsa seems to claim that a dharmic king is one who loves softly and deeply. Such a man can stand as the proud origin of Bhāratavarṣa. By rewriting this love story, Kālidāsa seems to communicate that the Mahābhārata Duṣyanta is counterproductive to these aims.

Conclusion

Through a close reading of Act One of *Abhijñānaśakuntalām*, I’ve argued that Kālidāsa rewrites a historical narrative to highlight the moral takeaway, dharma, as characterized by humility, softness, and affection, through śṛngārarasa. This case study of Kālidāsa’s work, in being a particular narrativization of an event, can be considered history—and therefore, artwork that seeks to interpret and retell the past can similarly be considered as such. While dharma might not appear as a central theme in this act, it bears heavily on the play at large. Therefore, many of these verses and lines of the play have underlying implications for dharma, defined as religious action as related to the *vidhi/niṣeda* of what to do and not to do. The play comments on it in different ways: the king is both attracted to Śakuntalā’s naivety and innocence, likely by virtue of her position as an ascetic-woman, while also not heeding much attention to their caste-relations. Śakuntalā, too, seems to be conflicted with her emotions, as she is attracted to the king but feels it is somehow against the codes of the āśrama. Śṛngārarasa here is closely intertwined with the concept of dharma, which was a major preoccupation for classical audiences. With the help of aesthetics, Kālidāsa recasts the dharmic concerns of the Śakuntalā and Duṣyanta story in this play. My reading of the drama’s first act demonstrates not just the centrality of aesthetic features like śṛngāra, but how they make the drama historical by virtue of their inclusion.

More significantly, I have argued that Kālidāsa engages in the project of writing history by interpreting and retelling a narrative from a particular subject position*.* This argument suggests that someone who retells a story, especially with attention to aesthetic features, can be considered a historian. I have pushed my criticism of positivist forms of history to the extreme by suggesting that since we are at all times informed by our dispositions, art and literature, where subjectivity is at its fullest and most explicit, can seriously be considered as historical, too. By making room for Kālidāsa in the discipline of history, I am thereby arguing that we can consider artists as historians who actively renegotiate stories in their retellings. Thinking about art/artists as they are, beautified, distorted, and aestheticized (not to be mined for chronological details) as history/historians expands not just how we engage with artwork, but pushes the “limit” of history, as Guha says. What Guha engages as pre-history is akin to what Chakrabarty calls minority histories, being history that is treated as an immature form of thought, lesser, or marginal, and something that the historian’s own methods make inferior or non-rational.[[62]](#footnote-63) By whichever name this rose is called, Kālidāsa’s nāṭaka on various levels fits the description: it is an aestheticized retelling that by definition defies any objectives of rational descriptive narrativization. To borrow Chakrabarty’s language, there exists a tension between the archive and the discipline, and my attempt to bring art and history together mitigates it. Artistic imaginations of imagined pasts help us articulate the diverse goals of the discipline of history. Engaging this source does not just illuminate how people imagine the past, but how this imagination of the past exists in relation to disciplinary goals.

1. My approach to authorship here is informed by how scholars of South Asia often read bhakti poets as figures that represent a body of work. Following Barthes’ critique of reading literature with attention to an author in “The Death of the Author,” and Foucault’s conceptualization of the author-function in “What is an Author?”, I am not seeking out a historical Kālidāsa who existed for x years, had y children, and ate z for breakfast. I am interested in what discourses are enabled through how we imagine this figure, Kalidāsa. Jack Hawley on Author and Authorship describes bhakti poets as indicative of a genre, which is close to how I am seeing Kālidāsa here, too. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. The Mirror of Erised from the Harry Potter series shows the heart’s deepest desires. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Ibid; Romila Thapar. *Sakuntala: Texts, Readings, Histories.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.; Edwin Gerow, “Plot Structure in Śakuntalā, Pt 1.” *American Oriental Society* 99.4 (1979) 564. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Culp 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Thapar, *Sakuntala,* 45 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Romila Thapar, *Sakuntala,* 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Daud Ali. “Temporality, narration and the problem of history: A view from Western India c. 1100–1400” The Indian Economic and Social History Review, 50, 2 (2013): 237–259.; Edwin Gerow, “Plot Structure in Śakuntalā.” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Ranajit Guha. *History at the Limit of World-History.* Columbia University Press, 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hi/history5.htm#060> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Guha, *History at the Limit of World History,* 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Ibid, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Ibid, 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Ibid, 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Ranajit Guha. *History at the Limit of World-History.* [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Ganapathy Subbiah, “‘Historicality in Literature’: A Case Study of the Classical Tamil Text, the Patiṛṛuppattu” in *Literature as History: From Early to Post-colonial Times*. ed. Chhanda Chattopadhyay. Delhi: Primus Books, 2014. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Ibid, 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Ibid, 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Ibid, 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Romila Thapar agrees, as she writes about Abhijñānaśākuntalaṃ that “the ākhyāna or narrative from the epic was converted into a nāṭaka, the two being very different literary genres.

    Romila Thapar. *The Past Before Us : Historical Traditions of Early North India.* Harvard University Press, 2013. 158.

    Thapar cites MBh 1.1.24 here, which reads:

    आचख्युः कवयः केचित्संप्रत्याचक्षते परे ।

    आख्यास्यन्ति तथैवान्ये इतिहासमिमं भुवि ॥ २४ ॥

    *ācakhyuḥ kavayaḥ kecitsaṃpratyācakṣate pare |*

    *ākhyāsyanti tathaivānye itihāsamimaṃ bhuvi || 24 ||*

    Some poets on earth have narrated this *itihāsa*, others are narrating it now, and even others will narrate in the future. (Note that kavi, in the context of the Mahābhārata, often just means “wise person” and not necessarily “poet.”)

    Thapar also cites MBh 1.1.204, which reads:

    इतिहासपुराणाभ्यां वेदं समुपबृंहयेत् ।

    बिभेत्यल्पश्रुताद्वेदो मामयं प्रतरिष्यति ॥ २०४ ॥

    *itihāsapurāṇābhyāṃ vedaṃ samupabṛṃhayet |*

    *bibhetyalpaśrutādvedo māmayaṃ pratariṣyati* || 204 ||

    The interpretation of this verse is contested. Thapar seems to read it as Mehendale does, wherein “one should expand the Veda, i.e. the Mbh. by adding to it the narratives from the itihāsa and the Purana (and one who is well- versed (vidvān) can easily do that).”

    Mehendale, M. A. “Interpolations in the Mahābhārata.” *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 82, no. 1/4 (2001): 195. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41694638. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Marnie Hughes-Warrington. *History As Wonder: Beginning with Historiography.* Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019. 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History*, 67.

    I feel that the attention to chamatkara is not terribly accurate. Abhinvagupta uses camatkara to describe the experience of rapture, as Ingalls translates it, that accompanies the bliss of dhvani, or resonance, which his predecessor Anandavardhana identifies as the soul of poetry. What I mean to say is that the grouping of camatkara with wonder is slightly misleading, despite Guha’s use of Raniero Gnolli’s interpretation. Camatkara is used to describe the general experience of aesthetic delight. It can include experiences of trepidation. As Pollock puts it: “'Rapture' (camat-kara) is the 'action' (karana) of someone 'enjoying' (camatah)," that is, when one is immersed in a pulsation of a fantastical experience.” (195)

    Ānandavardhana, active 9th century, Rājānaka Abhinavagupta, and Daniel Henry Holmes Ingalls. *The Dhvanyāloka of Ānandavardhana with the Locana of Abhinavagupta*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990. 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History*, 61 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. “the savoring of rasa is in essence a supermundane rapture, completely different from the real-world awareness deriving from inference and memory.”

    Sheldon Pollock. *Rasa Reader.* Columbia University Press, 2016. 202 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Pollock, *Rasa Reader.* 203 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Ibid, 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Ibid, 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. David Shulman, *More than Real: A History of the Imagination in South India.* Harvard University Press, 2012. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Shulman, *More than Real*. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. *Abhijñānasākuntam*, 1.11. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. *Abhijnānaśakuntalā,* 1.15. pg 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. *The Abhijnānaśakuntalā of Kālidāsa with The Commentary (Arthadyotanikā) of Rāghavabhatta*. Eds. Narayana Balakrishna Godabole and Kashinath Pandurang Parab. (Nirnaya-Sagar Press, Bombay: 1891) 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. *Abhijnānaśakuntalā* 1.16, pg 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. Ibid, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. Ibid, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Ibid, 1.17. pg 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. Ibid, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. Ibid, 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. Ibid, 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. Ibid, 1.19. Pg 32-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. Ibid, 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. Ibid, 1.20. Pg 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. *seṇāhā dāṇīṃ dhammāriṇo*. (Sanskrit chāya: sanāthā idāniṃ dharmacārinaḥ.) [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. Ibid, 1.24. pg 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. Ibid, 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. Ibid, 1.30. pg 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. Gerow, “Plot Structure in the Śakuntalā: Pt 1.” 560. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. Ibid, 567. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
53. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
54. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. Ibid, 568. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. Ibid, 567. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
58. Ibid, 565. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
59. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
60. While Shapiro Hawley writes that the king is not anything different in the two versions, I think the very inclusion of the curse does change how his character is perceived. (82)0 [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
61. *The Abhijnânaśâkuntala of Kālidāsa with The Commentary (Arthadyotanikâ) of Râghavabhatta”* eds. Narayana Balakrishna Godbole and Kashinath Pandurang Parab. Nirnaya-Sagar Press, Bombay, 1891. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
62. Dipesh Chakrabarty. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference.* New ed. Princeton, NJ.; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008. 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)