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The Last Embrace of Color and Leaf:
Introducing Aśvaghōṣa's Disjunctive Style

1. A Book of Ruin

Allow me to begin this essay by mentioning a book that to the best of my knowledge does not yet exist. But the ontology of books yet-to-be-written, as that of ‘dead-souls’, is a particularly fine issue, and non-existence or quasi in-existence in no way absolves a book of the academic publisher’s dictum that all books, whether existent or non-existent, are to be possessed of a subtitle if they are to be referred to at all. I offer the following as a provisional subtitle for the non-existent book: *A Literary History of Ruin*, and note that Mr. J. L. Borges has already introduced us to several people capable of composing it. It shall not necessarily be a how-to book, not *How To Read The Poets* (the name of the book the critic Hugh Kenner discerned in the ruins of *The Waste Land*), not even a book like Calvert Watkins’ useful essay on Indo-European poetics, *How To Kill A Dragon*.

Wherefore, then, a book on ruin in literature if it is closer to being a maze and not a guide? Etymologically speaking, the word “ruin” includes two distinct phenomena that are often conflated. We are told that the word means “the act of giving way and falling down.” But I should think these two senses must be distinguished, if not entirely separated: first, there is the ruin that is the process or act of giving way before the fall, and second the more familiar fall, which can take various and all-too familiar forms: the violent rush; the sudden but quiet fall to the ground, and that which still-falls, imperceptibly around us. As a development on the second sense, the word also indicates the resulting condition of that which suffers falling: ‘ruin’ can then mean the remains, what is broken, or crumbled away, or collapsed: the falling of the lobe from Don Quixote’s ear severed in combat with the Basque, and also the slight, bloodied mess on the ground after.¹

The book of ruin shall pursue both senses of ruin, the act of giving way and falling down, paying attention to images of both kinds with an interest in teaching us distinctions and connections. For example, Isaac Babel’s glimpse of an orange sun in a war ravaged land in *Crossing the River Zbrucz*, “rolling across the sky like a severed head” shall be fruitfully compared not only to the visionary identification of the severed head of the sacrificial horse withdrawn (and not twilight, or the setting sun) that begins the stretch of text called the *Bṛhad-āraṇyaka-upaniṣad*, but also the longest book of war yet produced, the *Mahābhārata*, and its image of a head of a hero severed in battle, falling like a shining being from heaven when its store of merit is used up. The entry will be cross-listed to contrast speeds: to tell us, for example, whether the image is a quick one, the

¹ The rich history of the English word ‘ruin’ is the subject of the endlessly rich chapter “The Making of Meaning (I),” in Owen Barfield’s *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning*, (Wesleyan University Press: 1973). Of course, I use here the English word ‘ruin’ to name a concept that is distinguishable from the particular history the word enjoys in English. That I should wish to look for such a concept, however, is indebted to Barfield being awake to the possibilities in the changing use of that word. Any etymological dictionary worth its salt will provide one with the sense of “the act of giving way and falling down,” as a single sense. Stressing the distinction is a result of reading too much of Aśvaghoṣa. See below.

surprise of the metaphoric identification expressing the speed of the fall, or whether it is not rather intended to slow our pace: like Virgil's slow description at the close of the *Aeneid* of Turnus' desperate throw of the boulder that slows and miscarries ("as in dreams when languid sleep weights down our eyes") and the arrested pace of the description of the trajectory of Aeneas' fatal spear (whose passage was like 'a black hurricane') that ends the contest, where the narration slows even as the spear when it pierces shield, breastplate and thigh to the ruin of Turnus; or perhaps, the speed is rather like the slow disaster that is the fall of beings from heaven quickly told, but likened to a man slowly walking down the stairs and out of sight of his wife, nothing at all like the path of the sun across the horizon at the close of day, nor as quick or as terrible as Milton imagined the fall of the morning star based on a long history of apocalyptic vision. Such an entry on speed would not, of course, be possible on the basis of image alone. It requires sensitivity to the texture of the telling. The book on ruin shall have to be a book written to quarry not only comparisons of brute images or phrases, but differences in style, and the difference such differences make for the phenomena they help invent and compose. As the Reverend Skeat's *Etymological Dictionary* records, there are differences to be noted between the motions that help compose the sense of ruin in the Latin verb alone: falling, tumbling, sinking, rushing... being broken, being overthrown. We shall want a sensitivity to style as limber and graceful as Charles Chaplin if we are, in criticism, to exaggerate the various motions literature can at times too subtly convey in slight gestures.

The book's sensibility shall be everywhere comparative, and its audience shall be that mythical creature whose existence Virginia Woolf, reviewing The Loeb Classics for the Times Literary Supplement in 1917, claimed she could see recognized by the editors: the intelligent and enthusiastic amateur. One may continue to hope that the amateur is still with us, and if it all existent, that it is a creature capable of evolving beyond its niche and acquiring a taste for Sanskrit. The latter is a hope in part founded on the existence of those handsome, teal, emerald or turquoise hued pocket-books produced by the now sadly defunct Clay Sanskrit Library, a series Virginia Woolf did not live to see, nor, if I am to be absolutely honest, one that lasted long enough to be reviewed by a writer equal to her powers in English.²(Yet the press, as they say, must always be willing, however dispiriting the response to the spines on the shelf.)

Both the mythical creature that is the amateur enthusiast and the non-existent book are important to this essay. For I write for such a mythical creature, and not only to introduce one among their

² The series was, however, reviewed by Aditya Behl, a translator of rare distinction and a scholar of penetrating intelligence, much mourned by students of literature in South Asia. His piece, given the hard task of following on Woolf's essay, appeared in the same distinguished journal, *The Times Literary Supplement* on June 19, 2009, a decade shy of a century after her paean for the amateur. Behl's essay, entitled "Big Cat, Little Cat: Sanskrit's Hidden Gold," is available online at: http://www.claysanskritlibrary.org/press/CSL_TLSReview_200906.php; on the matter of the hopes of the press, see Eric Banks' interview with New York University Press director, Steve Maikowski in 2006, printed in *Bookforum*, an interview I found curiously revealing: http://www.bookforum.com/archive/dec_05/bookies.html.

kind to literary style of an author in Sanskrit per se, but ultimately to quicken their appreciation (and the appreciation of us all) for the phenomenon that is ruin as giving way before separation or fall, one that happens to have been brought into view particularly keenly by Aśvaghōṣa. After long years of his words lying idle with the few palm leaf manuscripts of his works we possess, Aśvaghōṣa has been recalled again on the subcontinent by our contemporaries, aided by the labors of philologists over the last hundred years. And he has, before this, been heard as the poet of ruin. I think of Shrikant Verma writing

For so are these here
That know only this
Distinct splendor, that climb
Up stairs, laughing,
That weep in descent:
At times, talking themselves down,
At times, the stairs

...towards the close of his poem titled ‘Aśvaghōṣa.’³ These lines recall one of Aśvaghōṣa’s most memorable images, offering again to readers one among the Buddhist poet’s characteristic concerns: transitions and the pleasure and distress they occasion in the midst of our too preoccupied rhythms. Verma had the pulse of Aśvaghōṣa who is not, after all, unfairly considered a poet who made inevitable descent his calling card, and it is not a bad idea to answer the closing question Verma puts to the nameless interlocutor in Aśvaghōṣa, “who are you?”, by considering his distinctive characterization of passage through ruin, wherein one can “pass through pain and not know it”, as John Ashbery once memorably put it.

³ The poem was first published in *Alocana*, September 1986, collected in *Garuda kisne dekha he?* I cite from the Collected Works: Shrikant Varma, *Racanāvalī*, ed. Arvind Tripathi, (Rajkamal Prakashan, New Delhi, 1995), vol. 1, 449-451. The translation is my own. For the modern aesthetic reception of Aśvaghōṣa, one can also look to the work of Mohan Rakesh in Hindi and that of Pingali and Keturi in Telugu, to offer but two examples. Pingali and Keturi’s rendition in Telugu, *Saundaranandamu*, is studied by Velcheru Narayana Rao, in “Buddhism in Modern Andhra: Literary Representations from Telugu,” *Journal of Modern Hindu Studies*, 1, 2008, 93-119; see especially 106. Mohan Rakesh’s play, *Lahrom ke Rājhaṃs*, is discussed with intelligence in Fritz Blackwell and Prem Kumar, “Mohan Rakesh’s *Lahrom ke Rājhaṃs* and Aśvaghōṣa’s *Saundarananda*: A Contemporary Play and its Classical Source,” *Journal of South Asian Literature*, (formerly *Mahfil*), Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University, vol. xiii, 1977-1978, 45-53. A study independent of this article may be found in Simona Sawhney’s more recent attempt to discuss the place of *Saundarananda* in Rakesh’s characteristic concerns in her *The Modernity of Sanskrit*, (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 2009), 57-85. These important sources confirm the general truth that Aśvaghōṣa has been read as being characteristically most interesting as a poet of ruin.

Given that Aśvaghōṣa's work is the earliest example of *kāvya* we today possess, perhaps dating to the first hundred years of the common-era, his style is our earliest surviving example of a self-consciously literary style in Sanskrit.⁴ This would be enough to secure the importance of my subject, but I should like to stake more: I hazard the prediction that few entries in the index of the book subtitled *A Literary History of Ruin* shall be more extensive than his, and to suggest why this is the case is the true subject of my essay, even as I write to make reference to Aśvaghōṣa inescapable for the author of that non-existent book of ruin in comparison.

My interests suggest at least one complication. Aśvaghōṣa wrote in Sanskrit, and the phenomenon I wish to introduce is best held in view by paying attention to the style of this author, the sort of attention that can often seem willfully to miss not only the forest for the trees, but often the tree for its bark, meaning that to introduce Aśvaghōṣa's sense of ruin I must require that the mythical creature chew on a lot of Sanskrit. This last will seem to put my belief in the existence of amateurs beyond the realm of any hope that is reasonable to hold. I remain obdurate in my beliefs. There will be bark, for readers, even amateurs, unlike gods, cannot subsist alone on fragrances and the savor of things enjoyed downwind, at distance.

The bark in the offering here is what I call Aśvaghōṣa's disjunctive style.⁵ I do not mean to suggest by this phrase that Aśvaghōṣa writes in only one style, or that the moniker 'disjunctive' will exhaust all there is to say about style in Aśvaghōṣa.⁶ But it is an important aspect of

⁴ Compare Sheldon Pollock's discussion of Aśvaghōṣa's role in the 'historic innovations' in literary genres, both the extended poem (*mahākāvya*) and drama in his "Literary History, Indian History, World History," 115, *Social Scientist*, vol. 23, no. 10 / 12, (October-December, 1995), 115. But it is surely significant that among the earliest complete examples of *kāvya* that we possess should conclude with the author telling us that he has offered us a "semblance of *kāvya*" (*kāvya-vyāja*), or *kāvya* as a pretext. (Compare here the comments of Stephanie Jamison on the importance of this phrase in her *The Rg Veda Between Two Worlds*, (vol. 74, Institut de la Civilisation Indienne, Paris, 2007), 63-64. I discuss what Aśvaghōṣa might mean by this phrase below, in the section titled "Style as Resolution".

⁵ I am pleased to say that this is a term that emerged in conversation with Professor Gary Tubb and Victor D'Avella, both of the University of Chicago. One other reason I stay with this term is suggested below.

⁶ There is much to be said for considering Aśvaghōṣa under the rubric of what Sanskrit critics knew as *rīti*, or *mārga*, which overlaps only in some respects with what we today consider under the rubric of 'style' in practical criticism. The chief distinction between *rīti* and what I here consider under style (as faith and grammar) is that the former, as it used in the typology of a few critics working in Sanskrit, indicates an impersonal literary manner, an over-all tendency to make coherent use of a range of particular properties (from the phonetic to the syntactic), a category adequate to describe the work of several poets that are nevertheless quite distinct on the basis of what we should call their style. (A. K. Warder has suggested that Aśvaghōṣa be considered a writer in the *gaudī* manner, and has already catalogued several effects of versification and manner dear to Aśvaghōṣa. He does not, however, take the time to help us see concretely enough how meaning is made through the adoption of these effects). In addition to the question of manner as

Aśvaghōṣa's overall flavor, and a vital part of his aesthetic situation as a Buddhist writer making himself at home by reworking a literary form, the extended poem (*mahākāvya*), that seems originally to have been intended, in subject and in manner, to divert, please and to confirm a courtly culture in its self-understanding and at its leisure. For what is a *mahākāvya*, that form which Aśvaghōṣa chose for himself? It seems to have been understood as an extended work in verse, composed of chapters, connected by plot but with an individual unity of its own. Daṇḍin, a later critic, seemingly speaking about the origins of this form we no longer possess, reports that it contained extended descriptions of cities, oceans, mountains, the seasons, and the rising of the moon and the sun; (1.16; which provides for many of the features critics like Fletcher may wish to consider part of an environmental style). As for my suggestion that they confirm the self-understanding of leisure, Daṇḍin speaks of descriptions of the separation and marriage of lovers, of the birth of sons, of diplomacy, ambassadors, expeditions, and battles, the ultimate success of its heroes, of distinct kinds.(1.17) Much of this, at the level of ingredients is there, though in a manner suggesting a distant smile, in the adventures of protagonists that we might recognize now as heroic, though if this so, it owes much to the ironic genius of Aśvaghōṣa, who saw the potentials in the stories of the Buddha, and his less heroic half-brother, Nanda.

While I will touch on Aśvaghōṣa's disjunctive style in a swerve from the conventions we may reconstruct for the form of his fictions, it is enough to note for now that I believe disjunctive style to be that use of language where Aśvaghōṣa's faith and grammar refuse to be parted, despite seeming at their most obdurately apart. I do mean by this style something distinctive of Aśvaghōṣa, one distinctively well suited to express ruin, to write about ruin ruinously well, (such that his scenes of ruin crowd-out our memory for his seeming subject, the heroic victory over distress, and the pleasures in freedom to which his heroes win through), but I mean something also more difficult to receive today: a way of talking about pleasure in union, pleurably, that nevertheless seamlessly writes-in to such a description ruin, particularly the 'act of giving way' before the fall.⁷ This is a feature a reader with the qualities of loving, pedantic attention more akin to that of the gardener or naturalist, rather than the trailblazer, is more likely to see. One wants the surgical hands of a grammarian to peel back the bark and expose the living principle of Aśvaghōṣa's verse, without damaging it beyond repair.

discussed by Sanskrit critics, there are other effects in Aśvaghōṣa pertinent to his faith and grammar, effects I discuss at length elsewhere. Chief among these are the ambiguous use of a common but complex *topos* (a mirror which is obscured, and into which no one seems to look), and the exploitation of complex words to sustain ambiguities of plot and mood analogous to the effects of disjunctive style. It is worth saying that not a few critics have found Aśvaghōṣa's true talents in his powers of characterization and plot, and not in his lyricism. I think there is truth in this, but as this essay attempts to show, there is ultimately no substitute for taking in his verses as making meaning at every scale of analysis.

⁷ My sense of what is important about what I call Aśvaghōṣa's disjunctive style for his situation as a Buddhist, if not my awareness for the phenomenon itself, was quickened by Geoffrey Hill's discussion of the style of Donne in his *Style and Faith: Essays*, (Counterpoint: 2003).

To be sure, there are many instances of ruin as fall in Aśvaghoṣa if we stay just with the images: leaves, and flowers torn by birds or scattered by winds; beings falling from heaven, and men walking down stairs, never to be seen again; women, ruined, on hearing news of the departure of their lovers, or women simply witness to bereavement, and overcome themselves. And to be sure, with such images Aśvaghoṣa will illustrate *A Literary History of Ruin* as surely as some of his definitive scenes were once used to illustrate halls in the caves of Ajanta: the Buddha leaving wife and child behind, and beautiful Nanda, leaving his wife to suffer ruin in separation, a portrait whose literary form is more devastating than the poignancy evoked in paint on a wall.



Ajanta Complex, Cave 16, Left Wall, Detail: The Dying Princess. (Farther to the right, is a frieze depicting the Conversion of Nanda.)

For there are few writers, even at the level of image alone, who offer us portraits of ruin in both etymological senses. But the important thing is not the image alone, but that there are fewer still who offer such portraits through the expressive powers in the minutiae of style, where even the difference in the phonetic texture of their lines makes meaning of slight differences. To secure Aśvaghoṣa a place in the book of ruin on the basis of his memorable images alone would be a Pyrrhic victory.

Perhaps it helps to avoid speaking about the forest or trees, and to begin considering style by considering how far the image alone will take us. Aśvaghoṣa is remembered most prominently today for his figuration of ruin as a catastrophic fall from heights, and not so much the giving way before the fall. Here is the Buddha, reflecting on the inevitable ruin of beings in heaven as he awakens to the kinds of ruin of beings in time:

And how they fall from heaven –

Even now they have not had enough of these fields of sense. The spindrift gaze, the blasted brilliance – these lovers wretched even as their garlands fade. Apsaras look on the fall: some grabbing on to the shirts their lovers wear. Some look as if they might fall themselves, their pearls swaying, holding on as best they can. Some look on with unsteady eyes...

So the shining beings fall from paradise, screaming:

“The grove of Caitraratha! The Heavenly Lake! Mandākinī – O Beloved!”⁸

This is a passage whose sense of ruin requires little commentary in order to be grasped. And it proved a gripping image in Sanskrit, though not unambiguously so. In some Buddhist texts, this scene has occasioned a burlesque sensibility. And it is easy to see why: the gods, and their companions, are in a sense pathetic, true, but also bathetic in their ignorance of inevitability. To see what some Buddhist writers and readers have seen in it, all one has to do is postulate a person who is not falling, but miming his inevitable fall, thrashing on the ground:

Now there was a divine being destined to fall, rolling about on the ground. As he rolled around and about, he lamented mournfully: “Ah Mandākinī River! Ah lotus pond! Ah water tank! Ah Caitraratha Grove! Ah Pāruṣyaka Grove! Ah Nandana Grove! Ah Miśraka Grove! Ah Pāriyātraka Grove! Ah Pāṇḍukambala Rock! Ah divine assembly hall! Ah Sudarśana!”⁹

⁸ All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own. This is a translation not from Sanskrit alone, but from the Tibetan translation of *The Buddhacarita*, 14.36-41, though I have silently omitted much of verse 40. Cf. E. H. Johnston, *Buddhacarita*, p207. We do not possess the Sanskrit for this text, but there is not a little overlap between this passage BC 11.41 and a verse in the *Saundarananda* 11.50: “*hā Caitraratha, hā vāpi, hā Mandākinī, hā priye*” *ity ārtā vilapanto ‘pi gāṃ patanti divaukaṣaḥ*, says Ananda.

⁹ From the *Sūkarika-avadāna*, translated by Andy Rotman as “The Story of a Wretched Pig,” in Andy Rotman, *Divine Stories, Part I*, (Wisdom Publications, 2008), 325. The Sanskrit for the passage is introduced by these symptoms of imminent fall: *dharmatā khalu cyavanadharmāṇo devaputrasya pañca pūrvanimitāni prādurbhavanti--akliṣṭāni vāsāṃsi kliṣyanti, amlānāni mālyāni mlāyanti, daurgandham kāyena niṣkrāmati, ubhābhyāṃ kakṣābhyāṃ svedah prādurbhavanti, cyavanadharmā devaputraḥ sva āsane dhṛtiṃ na labhate*. The text under discussion here reads: *athānyatamaścyavanadharmā devaputraḥ prthivyāmāvartate, samparivartyaivaṃ cāha--hā mandākinī, hā puṣkarinī, hā vāpī, hā caitraratha, hā pāruṣyaka, hā nandanavana, hā miśrakāvana, hā pāriyātraka, hā puṇḍukambalaśilā, hā devasabhā, hā sudarśana, iti karuṇakarūṇaṃ paridevate sma*.

I imagine this screamed in the voice of the comedian Mahmood, adopting the exaggerated voice of Prithvi Raj Kapoor, playing a minor functionary in heaven, wallowing like the pig he is destined to be. This is comedy, and to be sure, of a grim sort. But Aśvaghōṣa's telling retains its aesthetic primacy in the face of such comic reduction, for Aśvaghōṣa managed to combine the possibilities for tragedy and comedy the image seemed to possess, but which later echoes only managed to preserve individually, and never combined. (The history of the image in later literature reads like the slow analysis of an unstable compound, dissolved into its component elements and never synthesized again). Aśvaghōṣa had use for this fall from heaven twice, once to evoke something tragic in the prospect of ruin from the perspective of the awakening Siddhārtha Gautama in the *Buddhacarita*, and a second time in his *Saundarananda*, in a more complex way, where we hear the image conveyed with the grim laughter of Ananda, the faithful disciple of the Buddha, and faced with the despair of Nanda, newly ordained. It is not at all clear which the reader will hold in mind, the comedy Ananda sees in the ruin of beings gullible enough to choose heaven over freedom, or the despair Nanda feels on hearing this scene played out for him and the ruin of his hopes. But Aśvaghōṣa has written it just so, and prepared us through the course of the long narrative for both, to hear in ruin what both characters are sensitized to hear in it, by turns sensing the tragedy and the comedy.

We will not be in a position to see just how this is possible without paying much closer attention to the texture of Aśvaghōṣa's verses in which his characteristic images are embedded, and at times, ambiguously conveyed. I take as one example of what is to be gained by attention to texture another verse concerning ruin, one long considered distinctive of Aśvaghōṣa. This is the only verse from Aśvaghōṣa's work we know to have been cited entire by a prominent literary critic writing in Sanskrit. In the eighth chapter of the Life of the Buddha, a charioteer returns to the palace to bring back news of Siddhartha's departure. And the result is the ruin of those left behind:

*hataṭviṣo 'nyāḥṣīthilāṃsabāhavaḥstriyoviṣādenavicetanāiva /
nacukruśurnāśrujahurnaśaśvasurnacelurāsurlikhitāivasthitāḥ //*¹⁰

It is impossible for a student of Sanskrit to miss the distinctive patterning of verbs in the last two feet of this verse, but even a reader innocent of Sanskrit with an attention for sound will hear it – *nacukruśurnāśrujahurnaśaśvasurnacelurās*ur – in the effect of the threaded sounds, *na*, *a* / *ā*, *r*, *s* / *ś* and *u*: these compose four verbs (that I have indicated in bold), and because of the negations (*na...na...na...na*), state no action, but for the word at the end – *sthitāḥ*, meaning not an active 'standing', but the passive 'stood'. Paraphrasing the last two feet in English:

They did not cry-out; and shed no tears; and did not sigh; and did not move, but stood,
As if painted, in place.

¹⁰ *Buddhacaritam*, 8.25

In these two feet, after a flurried denial of activity, a verbal root (*sthā*; meaning, to stand) is folded into a nominal form, the past passive participle, and rhymed with an arresting word that precedes it, *likhitā*, meaning painted: *likhitāivasthitāh*: thus, “drained of action,” the verse seems to say, “they stood, as if painted.”

This verse involves a grammatical dexterity to which the poet and critic Rājaśekhara, writing at the beginning of the tenth century, paid brief attention: the fact that the texture of the verse consisted in a distinctive arrangement of nouns and verbs (the first two feet consist entirely in nominal forms, and the last two feet seemingly verbs except for the last three words), which the learned critic counted as a distinctive effect of grammar on literary texture.¹¹ While this is true, what difference does such a textural difference make? Even the cursory glance at the last line I offered above should strike us: the cancelling out of action, and the statement that the people whose actions are denied, stand, as if frozen in a likeness of themselves on a wall. It is easy to show that the grammatical effects are not an idle conceit, nor is there here a simple case of a bald statement of simple ruin skillfully told. Here is the verse, in English paraphrase:

There were women, their splendor destroyed,
The blades of their shoulders and their arms loosening, as if they were senseless
with despair:
they did not cry out; and shed no tears; and did not sigh; and did not move, but stood,
as if painted, in place.

For the effect of the thorough-going nominalization in the first two feet of Sanskrit, I have offered a plodding, and brief use of predicative clauses heaped on one another.

One might be tempted to hear in the verbal texture of the last two feet in Sanskrit with its four threaded verbs a cacophony of jeweled women falling to the ground, a coherent re-arrangement in a limited space, approximating the confounding of bodies redistributed in predictable ways – an effect of the redistribution and recycling of phonemes across the line; I have tried to offer a flurry of movement and echo in the pattern of verbs in English, a weak trace of the phonetic properties of the Sanskrit. One might also maintain that this verse should be dismissed as a parlor trick, an empty cacophony of sound ornamented to please the ear and satisfy the pedant with its use of a particular verb form congenial to this echo-effect, relying as it does for its form on a particular type of verb, whose formation requires the reduplication of the initial syllable of the verbal root. (Such a criticism would stand as a complement to the critic Bhāmaha’s censure of a verb

¹¹ The verse is cited as an example of the work of a *nāmākhyaatakaviḥ*, a poet who uses a combination of verbs and nouns to effect a particular linguistic (*śabda*) texture. See *Kāvyaṁīmāṁsa*, C. D. Dalal, R. A. Sastry and K. S. Ramaswami Sastri Siromani (eds.), (Oriental Institute: 1934), 18. My thanks to my colleague Katarzhyna Pazucha of the University of Chicago for discussing Rājaśekhara with me.

Aśvaghoṣa used, *ajihladat*, an unpleasantly abrupt sounding aorist meaning to gladden (from the verb root *hlad*), because it was hard on the ears, and so presumably had no business in a line other than to satisfy the pedant).¹² Though it is tempting to try and defend the poet's display of grammatical virtuosity in this verse as an attempt at miming the sound of women, or the confusion of falling bodies, this is precisely the trap laid in the verse: for the only motion we are actually offered is couched in a buried metaphor offered in a simile expressing a brief paradox with throw-away eloquence: the women are as if senseless with despair, he says. A tree can be **vi-cit*, without mind, inert, dead, but not because of an emotional state, like despair, surely. But they are not, of course, unconscious, but merely seem to be (hence the simile marker, *iva*). I call this throw-away eloquence because it is in fact a trivial use of a word for being rendered inert and unconscious, but the true hand of the master may be seen in the fact that the tension lies not in the juxtaposition of a mental condition like despair and the insentient state they are in, but between their immobility and the word 'despair': for that word hides on its surface its etymological roots in the action of sinking (*vi-śad*). The women are not truly senseless, which is to say, insentient, though they seem to suffer the state of mind for which ruin is a metaphor, but they are truly fixed in place (*sthitāḥ*), immobilized, because of their sinking quality of mind, a condition that makes the brief grammatical paroxysm of motioning their description all the more terrifying. It is as if we hear what we should hear, a protest against the fate of women becoming objectified in a mere likeness of themselves, even as the grammatical form of the line seems to protest its fate: the subsuming of sinuous verbs into an empty, hollow pair of echoing nominal forms, that repeats the frozen grammatical form of the nominal first two feet. The last two feet of this verse form a line that mirrors in its texture just what the author here does when he folds all the resources at the command of narrative to representation in an immobile, and inflexible medium (the nominal predicative sentence), which in turn, in one last metaphor, is just what he says happens: they stood, as if painted. The bravado of absent motion renders palpable the cost of such a fate, which we can only weakly call 'ruin'. That the word I translate as 'painted' can also mean 'what is written', as in a document, (the root of the word is 'to scratch on a surface), only adds to our sense that we are here dealing with a power of representation, acutely self-conscious. It is just the trick we are likely to dismiss as empty sounds, the motions palpably absent, that allows the

¹² From the *Kāvyaḷaṃkara*: *yathā ajihladadityādi śrutikaṣṭam ca tadviduḥ / na tad icchanti kṛtino...* (1.53a-b-c). The offending verb is used by Aśvaghoṣa in the thirtieth verse of the second chapter in the *Saundarananda* to describe how the king gladdened his subjects with his conduct, (*vṛttena-ajihladat prajāḥ*) even as the cloud with its light, playful showers of rain. I take it that there is nothing 'light' or 'playful' (*salila*) about the verb, and contextually, agree with Bhāmaha, if this was the use he in fact had in mind. It is worth noting that Bhāmaha endorses the dictum that context ultimately determines whether a harsh sounding word has an aesthetic role to play in a verse.

description to swerve away from the image of the last line: Aśvaghoṣa's portraits of ruin are not reducible to the fixed images of ruin they state they present.¹³

Aśvaghoṣa's most characteristic images are like this. They exist when quoted without minute attention like a painted lamp (*citra-pradīpa*), (to use an image Aśvaghoṣa offers elsewhere for a man sporting only the trappings of a monk): they are not truly present, except as the gesture of light, motion and heat. Of course, to say as much is just to say he is a poet of distinction, and as with all poetry, one cannot afford simply to paraphrase him. But while all poets are unhappy in the same way in paraphrase, what is gained by attention to them in the details is, happily, different.

The path in this essay to his disjunctive style will seem a long one, a *mahā-yātra* of sorts to a single line of the *mahākāvya*; it is, but it has its roadside distractions, and a careful itinerary: the

¹³ I might, with equal effect, considered a verse that is the twin of the one I have cited, used in Aśvaghoṣa's *Beautiful Nanda*. Attend to Sundarī as she comes undone, separated from her husband Nanda. Surrounded by beauty, in the midst of an environment in which she and her lover formed a spectacle of love, thronged by people, she finds it desolate. Sundarī casts off her ornaments, with motions now longer graceful or sinuous. She is now unadorned, slumping like a creeper whose clusters of blossoms are rent. I introduce the verse with a leading line:
vibhrāntacitteva tadā babhūva // (S 6.33) ruroda mamlau virurāva jaglau babhrāma tasthau vilalāpa dadhyau / cakāra roṣaṃ vicakāra mālyam cakarta vaktraṃ vicakarṣa vastram (S 6.34)

She went out of her mind,
Wept; then grew languid; screamed; and then fell, exhausted.
She paced about; stood still; talked up a storm; brooded; then
Grew in anger, tore apart her garland, scratched at her face, rent her garment.

Biswanath Bhattacharya, who along with E. H. Johnston was among the finest critics Aśvaghoṣa has had, heard in the use of perfect verbs the suggestion of a natural spontaneity. If by that he means the absence of a subject, and the dissolution of a person into 'seemingly' autonomous rhythms, automatic and unprompted by reasons, then I would agree. There are no subjects in the four feet, and no objects in the first two. This is an image of a person reduced to a stream of disconnected actions, despite the sequence, which is what makes it 'mindless'. (I have tried to bring in the Biblical cadence of conjunctive clauses in paratactic prose used in the Hebrew Bible for concentration of activity in a short period of time to indicate stress, as discussed by Robert Alter in the introduction to his translation of the first five books of Moses, *Genesis*, (W. W. Norton and Company, New York, 1996). The rhythmic niceties of this verse are what are most distressing if you think about its implication for the person. It reduces a person to monotony, as if one forced to hear water drip for too long. (There is hardly any difference in the actions which do receive definition in the last two feet, on account of the phonetic blurring between them – the objects, on the other hand, you will notice, are definite creatures of their own). A bustle of energy leading nowhere, without definition, in a sharply individuated world of objects out of place. (How many actions cancel each other out, except for the purely destructive one's at the end.) How different this rhythm is from the narration of love, (discussed in section 4 of my paper) where an easy grace, combining words and actions, also in rhythms, seemed to dominate. But if you think about it, that rhythms, speeded up, would look something like this mindless repetition.

second section of the essay introduces the reader to several aspects of Aśvaghōṣa's literary style to which we must acclimate if we are to grasp aright his disjunctive style. The third section introduces the difference such a grammar might make for his faith. And in the fourth, at last, I offer a reading of what is to my mind one of the clearest examples of the power and the purpose of the disjunctive style by way of offering an extensive commentary on a single verse I call the verse of maimed splendor. Because the *mahākāvya* is also a creature of large-scale devices related to plot, I offer in the appendix a brief summary of *Beautiful Nanda*. Of course, my readers may wish to equip themselves with the translation of *Saundarananda* by Linda Covill, published in the Clay Sanskrit Library, under the title *Handsome Nanda*.¹⁴ (Poor Nanda, before he was handsome he was accounted 'fair' in E. H. Johnston's estimation. He is yet to appear in a translation under his true description, which is, quite simply, beautiful). I do recommend that readers acquire the book, for in this way we may we may indulge the fiction that we are the kin of the auditors of old: that we hear a telling not to hear a story for the first time, but to hear it again, for what me way learn to see through the optics and stethoscopes of art.

¹⁴ Linda Covill, (translator), *Handsome Nanda by Asvaghosa's*, (New York University Press, JJC Foundation, 2007).

2. Two Examples

I ask the reader to orient themselves to Aśvaghōṣa's style in general by considering two examples of lyrical intelligence. The examples involve intelligence at the level of an extended passage, (a connected sequence of five verses of four feet each), and a single sentence (two metrical feet) There is this progression in the examples I have chosen, and in the nature of my discussion of them: they involve, in sequence, increasingly minute focus: in the first example, I attend to the phenomenon of passage and steadiness (for which motion is a metaphor) at the level of metaphors which help bind vast stretches of text together where ruin is explicit.¹⁵

The second example is an example of a quality of attention in the syntax where the disjunction is implicit.

As there is with respect to even the very greatest of Sanskrit literature very little in the way of the kind of practical criticism that I think furthers not only understanding of authors as singular creators, and pleasure in singular creations, but also of poetry to come, the critic is in danger of wishing to say everything he can, serving not so much as critic but a realtor with respect to a particularly fine and distinctive property he cannot understand remaining so long unoccupied. Here I beg the reader's indulgence, and ask him or her not so much to wallow with me, but to ford in the middle of the current. Acclimating is a slow process, to climates no less than to climates of thought in verse. There is nothing like getting one's feet wet, and as I write with the expectation that at least some of my readers are innocent of literature in Sanskrit, and some sensitized in a way other than the one I will recommend. My comments, in line with my stated ambition to speak to the amateur, will presume no Sanskrit on the part of the reader.

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I first invite the reader to consider Nanda as Aśvaghōṣa presents him in a justly famous scene at the close of the fourth canto of *Beautiful Nanda*. After a long description of the couple in love in idyllic domestic environs, we catch sight of him, free of his beloved's sandalwood-scented arms, if not yet released from her thoughts, when he has set aside clothes tailored for love;¹⁶ he is

¹⁵ My discussion is indebted to complement such studies of metaphor in Aśvaghōṣa as already exist, with the intent of heightening our awareness for his characteristic handling of passage. There is a recent book-length study of Aśvaghōṣa's metaphors by Linda Covill, *A Metaphorical Study of Saundarananda*, (Motilal Banarsidass, 2009). See also, Laurie L. Patton, "R̥ṣis Imagined Across Difference: Some Possibilities for the Study of Conceptual Metaphor in Early India," *The Journal of Hindu Studies*, 2008: 1: 49-76. One reader, O. Bradley Bassler suggested that the phrase "topological dynamics" about summarizes my interest in metaphor in this section. I can hardly improve on this trenchant phrase.

¹⁶ *tataḥ stanodvartitacandanābhyāṃ mukto bhujābhyāṃ na tu mānasena / vihāya veṣaṃ madanānurūpaṃ satkārayogyāṃ sa vapur babhāra // Saund_4.38 //*

leaving Sundarī, and this is the last time in the course of the long poem that we will see them see one another:

Unmoving, blank-eyed, intent, desolate,
She strained to track her straying delight
As a doe, whipping its ears up
And head, all erratic regard
For an errant mate, lets slip
Rent-grass in ruin –
Nanda hurried on
Bent on seeing the Buddha; and yet,
His vision spinning back-around,
He moved but too slowly; looking on
Sundarī so, as if he could not
Look on enough – as a man might hold
Water with one hand, unable
To quench his thirst.

Respect drew him on;
Love drew him back. Unresolved,
He did not go; he did not stay:
A proud goose quickening against turning waves.

Swift was his descent, down from captivating heights
When she was out of sight, until he fell
Back, again, seized in his heart,
Hearing the tinkle of anklets.¹⁷

¹⁷ I should say that I have been engaged in a translation of *Beautiful Nanda* that employs both prose and verse to render some of the different narrative and descriptive effects. This translation, as are most of the translations offered in this paper, is part of that experiment. The Sanskrit for this stretch reads: *sā taṃ prayāntaṃ ramaṇaṃ pradadhyau pradhyānaśūnyasthitaniścalākṣī / sthitoccarṇā vyapaviddhaśaṣpā bhrāntasṃ mṛgaṃ bhrāntaṃ mṛgaṃ bhrāntaṃ mukhī mṛgīva // S 4.39 // didṛkṣayākṣiptamanā munes tu nandaḥ prayāṇaṃ prati tatvare ca / vivṛttadrṣṭiś ca śanair yayau tāṃ karīva paśyan sa laḍatkareṇum // S 4.40 // chātodariṃ pīnapayodharoruṃ sa sundarīṃ rukmadarīm ivādreh / kākṣeṇa paśyan na tatarpa nandaḥ pibann ivaikena jalaṃ kareṇa // S 4.41 // taṃ gauravaṃ buddhagataṃ cakarṣa bhāryānurāgaḥ punar ācakarṣa / sa 'niścayān nāpi yayau na tasthau turamaṃ taraṅgeṣv iva rājahaṃsaḥ // S 4.42 // adarśanaṃ tūpagataś ca tasyā harṃyāt tataś cāvataṭāra tūrṇam / śrutvā tato nūpuranisvanam sa punar lalambe hṛdaye gṛhītaḥ // S 4.43 //* This sequence properly would include the following verse, which I do not translate here, but discuss below: *“sa kāmarāgeṇa niḡrhyamāṇo dharmānurāgeṇa ca kṛṣyamāṇaḥ / jagāma duḥkhena vivartyamānaḥ plavaḥ pratisrota ivāpagāyāḥ // S 4.44 //*

In this, perhaps among the most successful descriptions in *Beautiful Nanda* for contemporary readers, all that happens is a man, looked on by his wife, walks down the stairs, looking on his wife until the end. At least, this is man trying to walk down the stairs, if one can call it walking, where one moves under constant threat of finding the ground absent at the foot of the stairs. This has been imperfectly seen in what in the last century has proved to be the most famous image from *Beautiful Nanda*, the goose or swan¹⁸ trying to swim against the flood, an image followed after the space of a verse, by the image of a boat, spinning helplessly in place.¹⁹

Further, in my translation of the passages cited, I have here silently omitted two metaphoric conceits that I discuss below.

¹⁸ A pleasant discussion in the Indology list-serve has helped me decide on not being too specific with the bird called *rājahamsa*; instead of Chapman's *Handbook of Birds in Eastern North America* cited by T. S. Eliot in his notes to *The Waste Land*, one might cite the book a student innocent of Indological studies might more readily believe a hoax given the apt name of the author: J. P. Vogel's *The Goose in Indian Literature and Art*, (Memoirs of the Kern Institute: No. II, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1962); Vogel seems sure the *rājahamsa* is a white goose, specifically, the *Anser Indicus*, but as Professor Dominik Wujastyk pointed out, Julie Leslie's work on the *kraunca* bird – memorably, the bird whose death has been linked to the birth of the *śloka* – has shown that in some cases a swan might be more appropriate. See her 1998 article "A Bird Bereaved: The Identity and Significance of Valmiki's *Kraunca*," in the *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 26 (5): 455-487; unfortunately there isn't a simple, general field guide we may consult, binoculars in hand, for the identity of the *hamsa*. Those interested in the finer points of the translator's wealth of indecision and fitful illumination may consult the learned discussion in all its many threads here: (<http://listserv.liv.ac.uk/cgi-bin/wa>)

¹⁹ Simona Sawney's discussion of this passage on the basis of isolated images in her book, *The Modernity of Sanskrit* is useful, given her careful sense of what Kalidāsa was to do with it in the *Kumārasambhava*, but one misses one image in her discussion, for elsewhere Kālidāsa does, I think, trump the image of Aśvaghōṣa's goose, and Shakespeare's first attempt at writing of motion in balance. In describing the madness of King Pururavas, where the goose is the source of the swell of water that presumably traps it, but it is not the water that holds it back, but sheer exhaustion from grief, and perhaps, the extravagance of wings: *pain for an absent lover fixed in his heart / wings shaking the surface of the lake / eyes seared with tears: / the young goose aches, exhausted, immobilized in distress* (*Vikramorvaśī*, 4.29; the play is now available in a fine translation by Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman as part of the Clay Sanskrit Library, entitled *How Urvashi Was Won*, (New York University Press: 2009). I should say Kālidāsa manages this partly because the last verb, *tammai*, in Prakrit, from the root *tam*, does mean to grieve as in distress, but also to grow exhausted, to stop (if the subject is breath), and crucially, to become immobile. It combines distress and absence of motion, a fine verb to trump Aśvaghōṣa's searing image. That having been said, Aśvaghōṣa's image would be improved upon even as Shakespeare improved his own first image. Kalhaṇa, writing many centuries later, found room for it in his *River of Kings*, III.90, where a person finds no quiet, like a flower which happens to fall at the confluence of two rivers, and moves in the whirlpool that results.

But to have a sense of what is at issue in this passage, we need to see the images not as isolated units of sense, but as stitched together in a compelling portrait of the incoherence of motion in one type of ruin. In addition, much of this passage is lost if we do not pay attention to what is worth calling a sense of passage, meaning by this not only movement, but also the defined space in which motion is possible. (The word no longer carries the latter sense, but I appeal here to its history, which survives in passageway, as in a corridor, for example, or in the French word *paysage*, meaning landscape). There are effects of scale here that complement the problems with motion that are important for Āśvaghoṣa's expression of ruin, for ruin in his work is always of people unfitted in an environment on account of passage.

Walking down a flight of stairs will seem too slender a conceit for such a burdensome conception; but this is precisely why I begin with this description. We are invited in this slender description, to consider the image to which the Buddha awakened: the ruin of beings from worlds they considered fixed environments, such as heaven.

We may as well begin with the metaphors for motion blocked. As with the famous image of the goose struggling against the waves. Shakespeare, we have reason to suspect, would have found it compelling, for he did in fact make use of an image very like it in his early 3 Henry VI, almost as if he were trying to improve on Āśvaghoṣa:

With this we charg'd again; but out, alas.
We bodg'd again, as I have seen a swan
With bootless labor swim against the tide
And spend her strength...

But this bare image alone does not seem to have satisfied the Kālidāsa of Stratford, being a kind of predictable Elizabethan ornament wanting improvement. Years later we find Anthony, describing Octavia's unwilling farewell to her brother, Octavius:

Her tongue will not obey her heart, nor can
Her heart inform her tongue – the swan's down feather,
That stands upon the swell at the full of tide,
And neither way inclines. (*Anthony and Cleopatra*, III.ii.47-50)

The reason I cite this here is to suggest that Shakespeare's dissatisfaction with his own metaphor of motion crossed, and his 'reduction' of swan to feather, thus suggesting not so much futility, (which requires sentience and the possibility of effort frustrated), but utter subjection to mysterious forces of depth and power, is palpable in Āśvaghoṣa's image of Nanda as a boat, spun around by the current following hard on the image of Nanda as a goose beating against the wave: (in Linda Covill's translation):

Kept back by his passion for love, and drawn forward by his attachment to dharma, he proceeded with difficulty, being turned about like a boat going upstream on a river. (S 4.44)

Caught between the desire to fulfill duty and desire, Nanda here belies the German sage Goethe's distinction in his *No End To Shakespeare* between ancient man conflicted between moral obligation and its fulfillment and modern man conflicted between desire and its fulfillment. The concluding image itself, *nivartyamāṇaḥ / plavaḥpratisrotaiva-āpagāyāḥ*, being turned around, like a boat moved against the stream, in the river, is a small miracle of pace, and suggestion: note its employment of the clipped bursts with the help of the words *plavaḥ* (boat) and *prati-srota* ((going) against the stream,²⁰ against the current, up-stream) placed after the long, slow word *ni-var-tya-mā-naḥ*, (being turned around, the participial ending stretching the word out), and before the three heavy, extended vowels of the locative use of the last word *āpa-gā-yāḥ*, 'in the river': the verse constitutes a small circuit of slowed and quickening motion, at last drained in that broad word for river. In addition, note that every word used to state the image has a connection with motion: *ni-vṛt*, to be turned about, to return, from the root *vṛt*, one of the most engaging verbs in Sanskrit, meaning as a verb of motion "to revolve, roll, turn, or advance"; *plavaḥ*, from the verb root *plu*, to "swim, cross (a river), to vibrate, to pulse"; *srotas*, from the root *sru*, (to flow, to stream, to gush forth) is a word that means rapid flow, and can mean the current of a river, or the river itself; but more basically, when used to indicate the quality of motion, it usually is a rush, or an onset, and turbulent. And the last word, *āpagā*, is a word for river meaning 'the moving water'.²¹

It is fitting that this image conclude with two syllables, *gā*, and *yāḥ*; the former a verbal root meaning motion, and the latter, sounding like another verbal root meaning, quite simply, motion: *yā*. One might think that we have here two verbal roots for motion to conclude an image in which two motions counter one another. But one echo of motion, *yā*, is a mere semblance. And as *gā* and *yāḥ*, are not truly two motions countering one another to hold motion in the balance, the very next line after this image shows Nanda not stuck, but walking confidently with quickening speed, believing (falsely as it turns out) that he has managed to resolve his dilemma: the line has a striking stride to its cadence: *tataḥkramairdīrghatamaiḥpracakrame*... then, with the longest possible springing strides he set forth, (advancing steadily); a line in which nothing crosses, or holds back the motion, but rather, through echo and reduplication, reinforces it, sending it along on its way (*krama...pra-cakrame*; note how *pra-*, the prefix meaning "forth", or "ahead", "in front of one", resolves the prefix meaning '*prati*' (meaning against) in the previous line, while offering a solitary echo to the conflicted motion suggested by the alliteration of 'p' sounds before: *plavaḥpratisrotaivaāpagāyāḥ*). The truth is, there was never going to be an equal contest between

²⁰ For the phrase "against the stream," compare this from *2 Henry IV* (5:2): "You must now speak Sir John Falstaff fair, which swims against your stream."

²¹ I do think it necessary to suppose that a further pun is hidden in the liaison between *iva* and *āpagā--*, namely *apagā*, meaning hidden, or concealed.

the two forces that held Nanda in balance. A situation the last two syllables of the line introducing the image of Nanda as a turned-about boat seeds in the mind of the reader awake to minutiae.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. The true frame for the passage of Nanda descending the stairs is formed by two kinds of immobility, a true absence of motion conveyed in the image of his wife's eyes: *niścāla-akṣī*, unmoving, and empty, with which the passage begins, and at the other end, by Nanda in water, a boat turned around, an image of dynamic balance, and not true absence of motion (as the equilibrium of forces is not, in physics, equivalent to the absence of force). I cited Shakespeare's laboring swan becoming the feather at tide because I think the relation between Shakespeare's two images is paralleled by Aśvaghōṣa's reduction of Nanda from the condition of a struggling proud goose to that of a boat. In Aśvaghōṣa's case, the superficial wave which one can see, and counter is replaced by two alarming images: the suggestion of depth and the hazards of current one can feel, but not see, and more alarmingly, in his situation not as a person controlling the boat, but as the hapless boat, moved twice mysteriously: once by an absent hand that steers him against the current upstream, and again, by the counter flow of the river. It is a marvelous image not only for the reasons I have suggested, but also for the resonance this would have for any Buddhist student. There is the river image of 'entering the stream' *sotāpanna*, the name of a kind of person, one who has begun the cultivation of mind on the path prescribed by Buddhist practice, but more importantly, we have the Buddha's word that his teaching goes against the 'stream' (*paṭi-sota-gāmi*; the Pāli is cognate with *prati-srota*), where the stream is the flood of desire centered on a particular conception of oneself as a fixed, invariant self. Between the two, the invisible hand that steers him, and the counter-current of the river, he turns-about, moved and moved-again, going nowhere.

In light of the frame of this depiction of Nanda walking down the stairs, the entire description takes on the character of a composition of motion. If the thought was that it was only ruin that contributed to this situation we are wrong. It is a more basic crisis of passage, where he cannot find steady ground even on land (hence the aquatic imagery at the close). An image of walking as falling becomes an image of losing the ground beneath one's feet. Drowning, or thrashing in water, is one kind of ruin (the ruin of one's environment, and one's ruin in the change of environment), and ruin in general but one way to endure or suffer passage, as movement through a variable environment that unfits one.

Before I turn to the description of ruin in terms of environments, I should like to consider again the motions that compose it, and their speeds. Once alerted to it, there is motion everywhere: in the contrast between the unmoving eyes of his lover, fixed in place, blanked, intent (*pradhyāna-śūnya-sthita-niścālākṣī*) on the one hand, and the ears whipping up, and the chewed-grass falling from a slack mouth, on the other: and at the end of the first image in the passage, we are to realize that the blank eye is fixed in the 'wandering face (*bhrānta-mukhī*)' of a still deer looking on its departing lover. There is much in this concentrated passage of the terrible stare of his lover that seeds everything else in the description of Nanda walking down the stairs. The combination of

motions, horizontal and vertical, for example, and the arresting quality of motion described as if suspended: like torn grass, caught in the process of falling.

Nanda is by turns *ākṣipta*, that is thrown, or cast forward, literally, but here meaning ‘overcome’, quickened by his desire to see the Buddha, and yet turned-about, and slowed, (*vivṛtta*) longing to see his wife again; he speeds in his descent when he can no longer see her, (a little flurry of motion, beautifully rendered by the texture of the line: *harmyāttataścāvataatāratūrṇam*, a line moving quickly, and with increasing emphasis, from the last phoneme of the word for ‘pleasing quarters’ to the last word which is an adverb of speed); he is then, in one last magisterial image, described as hanging-back again, (*lalambe*), when he is seized in his heart by the sound of her anklets. The American idiom there is fully justified: in old English we might have rendered the verb root *lamb* as to ‘depend from’, but it is indeed to dangle, to hang, (to hang from, as well as to hang on, as Americans might say today), but we might add, given that the word can also mean to sink (as in the sun at the end of the day), it is best thought of as a fall arrested briefly, even as the description of Nanda and his wife is a picture of ruin, repeatedly sped up, and suspended, until he reaches the ground, at last, but finds himself imaged as an inert object moved in water. In fact, I tend to think of it as one last pause, as a person dangling over the brink may have time to enjoy a brief sense of their lot, before at last being dropped in it.

It is worth pausing to note a discrepancy in this passage. While the description of Nanda is poignant, there is nothing in it to equal the ruinous image of his wife that frames his descent, all the more terrible for its mute, unwavering witness to his passage described in terms of a fall. It is difficult to render the effect of the new-grass that is let fall (*vi-āpa*) after it is rent in the mouth of the deer; *viddha*, the past participle of the root *vyadh* here qualifying the falling grass, is a terrible word, and entirely successful, as even the briefest of glimpses in Monier Williams’ entry in his dictionary suggests: “pierce, perforated, penetrated, stabbed, struck, wounded, beaten, torn, hurt, injured; cleft, split, burst asunder...; opposed, impeded; thrown, sent; stung, incited, set in motion...” What makes this terrible image so unsettling is the simple fact that the suggestion of falling grass torn and ruined can apply directly neither to Nanda walking down the stairs, though it is suggestive of the same, nor does it refer directly to his transfixed wife, as she stares blankly at him, imaged as the deer from whose mouth the grass slips: I would suggest instead that the falling grass conveys that state which the ruined couple compose, and which no one but the reader could see aptly described thus: for we are taken unawares by the sudden scene and the seeded violence of the imagery used in the depiction of it. And if the writing swerves away from the one motion that is its true subject, descent (*ava-tṛ*) between two very different states, these different motions conveyed are not truly antithetical to it: for a being that falls may describe various motions in its descent, (rotation around a fixed axis being the lot of bodies that are spun about before they are let fall), and the description of circular motions in the descent describes a fall no less surely because of them, as the spin takes away nothing from the fall. The description of Nanda’s descent, with its initial spinning description and subsequent eddies of images, keeps the fall in its unvarying, fixed and bleak focus. I cannot be sure of it, but I suspect that later

Sanskrit critics may have seized on *vyāpavidha* as one of the seed-words that sets the aesthetic flavor of the passage.

For the description of Nanda walking down and out is but an elaboration of a portrait of that passage painted in broad strokes I had occasion to quote earlier:

And how they fall from heaven –

Even now they have not had enough of these fields of sense. The spindrift gaze, the blasted brilliance – these lovers wretched even as their garlands fade. Apsaras look on the fall: some grabbing on to the shirts their lovers wear. Some look as if they might fall themselves, their pearls swaying, holding on as best they can. Some look on with unsteady eyes...

So the shining beings fall from paradise, screaming: “The grove of Caitraratha! The Heavenly Lake!

Mandākinī – O Beloved!

Consider the imagistic reinforcement: the image of Sundarī is not unlike that of an *apsara*, looking after her falling beloved, even if her eyes are steadier, focused in horror. Note also that without the time taken to portray Sundarī as the ruined witness of ruin in such an uncompromising way, the fall of Nanda would be closer to comedy than it actually is, his motions evoking not crisis, but through the exaggerated movements and abruptly violent transitions, something like caricature. It is by situating us near Sundarī that Aśvaghoṣa allows us a perspective on Nanda not available in the image of ruin in heaven. But the comparison is nonetheless there to be seen.

All that has transpired here is a man walking down the stairs and we are invited, in the metaphoric lacing of this passage, to consider a swift, terrible fall from heaven. The effect is prepared because of the description of the environment in which Nanda sports with his wife on high; we are invited to understand his world as an echo of heaven, and his sometimes rapid descent from the upper chambers, at times, something like a fall from heaven.

This is the first of what I mean by Aśvaghoṣa’s environmental conceits: Nanda with his wife, dwelling on high, pleasure their single concern,²² in a home designed to enable this life, lives in what is on some accounts paradise: a walled off space built for pleasure. We have circles within circles: the servants have the pleasure of their masters, their only concern; and their masters, are environments unto themselves; his wife is described as a female divinity, *sādevatānandana-cāriṇīva*, coursing in the garden called Nandana, (S 4.6), one of the most famous gardens in

²² *prāsādasamsthō madanaikakāryaḥ priyāsahāyo vijahāra nandaḥ // S 4.1 //*

Indra's heaven whose capacity to delight Nanda bodies-forth. This is reinforced by the fact that the couple compose a spectacle of love:

They sported and shone together as if challenging each other with the glory of their beauty: a Kimpuruṣa and a Kimpnarī standing by a mountain torrent in loving devotion. The pair brought ecstasy to each other, quickening their mutual passion...and in the intervals of quiet exhaustion, playfully intoxicating each other...²³

In truth, the parallels to heaven are everywhere apparent in the description of the couple. In a fine image, Aśvaghōṣa tells us that beautiful Nanda sports in a transporting place, a celestial vehicle fit for shining beings whose feet would not suffer the earth.²⁴ Two aspects of this are worth considering in more detail. The bounds of the space of pleasure, and the twin images of attaining celestial heights, on the one hand, and the descent of heaven, on the other. (Nanda's illustrious half-brother found himself in similar environs. Young Siddhartha's life at home is described as a dwelling among clouds where it was possible to dwell hermetically sealed from change in all seasons, to the point that the 'outside' became only a rumor in song).²⁵

Such dwellings seem worlds entire unto themselves and not of this world, a condition explicitly imaged as the palaces of the gods come almost to the ground.²⁶ This is heaven within reach. The Buddha was once described thus: "captive to women expert in recourse of pleasure...he did not leave the transporting place to touch the ground: like a man who has gained heaven through merit."²⁷ This improves on an epic conceit where homes in utopic cities are thought to be divine palaces.²⁸

²³ The translator E. H. Johnston added the remark that this description seemed in line with the prescriptions of the discipline of pleasure in *Kāma Śāstra*, ii.10, 15.

²⁴ 4.24: *vimāna kalpe sa vimāna garbhe tatas tathā cāiva nananda Nandaḥ*

²⁵ *tataḥ kadācīnṛduśādvalāni puṃskokilonnāditapādapāni / śuśrāva padmākaramaṇḍitāni gītairnibaddhāni sa kānanāni // Bc_3.1 //* It is perhaps worth noting that it is songs that Aśvaghōṣa says lure deer.

²⁶ *vāsaṃ nṛpo vyādiśati sma tasmai harmyodareṣveva na bhūpracāram // Bc_2.28c-d // tataḥ śarattoyadapāṇḍareṣu bhūmau vimāneṣviva rañjiteṣu / harmyeṣu sarvartusukhāśrayeṣu strīṇāmudārairvijahāra tūryaiḥ // Bc_2.29 //* This image of a divine palace come to earth, as Johnston notes, (page 25, translation) is again found in BC 18.87, when Anathapindika builds a vihara, the kubera-vimana

²⁷ *tataḥ sa kāmāśrayapaṇḍitābhiḥ strībhīrgrhīto ratikarkaśābhiḥ / vimānapṛṣṭhāna mahīm jagāma vimānapṛṣṭhādiva puṇyakarmā // Bc_2.32 //* Gary Tubb has called attention to the difference between Kālidāsa and Aśvaghōṣa on the grounds that Aśvaghōṣa would never, like Kālidāsa, see fit to speak of heaven touching earth by way of speaking of the felicities of life possible among men. I would nuance it to say that Aśvaghōṣa would not consider this anything more than a illusory attempt, and could not endorse Kālidāsa's conceit that an actual

But the full implications of this image of being suspended between heaven and earth are worked out more painfully by Nanda than by his half-brother Siddhārtha Gautama. Siddhārtha is a being who seems to walk as if suspended between heaven and earth, a being constitutionally not to be charted easily in this world:

Women looked down on the prince in the street, looking as if they desired nothing more than to come down to earth, and all the while the men with faces turned up looked to him looking for the world as if they desired nothing more than to go up to heaven. (BC 3.22)²⁹

But in neither case are the utopias that form their dwellings perfectly closed-off environments. Nor, for that matter is heaven, but it is easier to see this of a home, a space embedded in the world, than of heaven, a world entire unto itself, except for its dependence on time. Aśvaghōṣa points to both in describing Nanda's imperfectly realized pleasure on earth. Since Nanda has to descend on occasion, as Siddhārtha Gautama's feet did in fact touch the ground – the latter lured through music singing of gardens just outside the city, the former, constrained by the norms of inter-personal interaction he has suspended till now in the pursuit of pleasure alone, as the world downstairs beckons, a world of dust, change and obligations.

Hearing of his brother's departure from his house, empty-handed because all were too distracted in the time of love to offer him welcome and alms, we hear this: "Nanda started, resembling in the rattle of his beautiful ornaments, clothes and garlands, a tree of Paradise shaken by the wind (4.31)" This is a harbinger, surely, of what we shall learn from Ananda later about the signs indicating an imminent fall from heaven: the clothes of the shining residents of heaven retain their dust, their magnificent garlands wither, sweat appears on their limbs, and they lose their delight in their palaces (11.52). It is such seeding that makes the prior descriptions of them more poignant, and the scene of heaven prospective. There is also this simpler truth in the language used to describe the conditions for utopia as suspended existence: to portray ruin is simply to provide a study of the motions that constitute the achievement of utopic forms of life in reverse.

While these senses of environment are surely important to keep in mind, there is another large-scale effect dependent on our seeing an environmental quality to the forms of life Aśvaghōṣa describes, but which provides not only the condition for ruin through transition, but allows us a

piece (*aṃśa*) of heaven itself could descend to earth (as opposed to a transporting heavenly dwelling seeming to touch the earth).

²⁸ Consider the line "*vimānam iva siddhānām tapasādhigatam divi*" in the Ayodhya chapter of the Valmiki Rāmāyana, 5.19: "a palace in the sky that perfected beings had gained through ascetic effort (*tapas*)."

²⁹ *taṃ tāḥ kumāraṃ pathi vīkṣmāṇāḥ striyo babhurgāmiva gantukāmāḥ |*
ūrdhvonmukhāścānamudīkṣamāṇā narā babhurdhāmiva gantukāmāḥ |

sense of a perspective in ruin. To see this, it is worth quoting Harold Bloom on one of Shakespeare's effects:

“Shakespeare invented our realization that we grow most aware of lovers only when our distance from them suddenly increases, and that when we have lost them, particularly to death, we can be visited by an ecstasy that masks as their enlargement but actually constitutes a reduction.”³⁰

The ecstasy of enlargement that is actually a reduction is a fine way to speak about one of Aśvaghōṣa's characteristic insights into ruin. The ecstasy that enlarges a temporary state into an environment conceals the reduction that is visited upon us in ruin, masked as a temporary derangement of proximity, a crowding-out of the particular beyond all recognition in an unsustainable scale, more suitable to that of an environment. Our absorption empties us out into a wilderness in which we cannot dwell, and makes a cipher out of persons.

In my translation of the passage describing Nanda walking down stairs, I elided two metaphoric conceits silently. Both are conceits introduced to describe Nanda's backward-glance, as he tries to keep his wife in view. The first describes the manner of the glance, the second attempts to offer us his wife, as imaged through the optic of his ruin. The first is a disarming image; in Linda Covill's translation:

Nanda hurried his departure, then lingered with a backward glance at her, like an elephant watching a playful she-elephant.

Here we have a slow turn, where it is the gaze that turns around while the body remains invariant, unlike the image that ends the passage, where the person entire is turned about. It is an image in keeping with the arrested motion, for it intrudes in the description to describe his slowing down, incongruously, interrupting his departure with a rhythm in keeping with the time of play in love, slowing to keep in view his tongue-in-cheek and sporting mate (4.40d). But the image following, in 4.41, is more involved, and more interesting, taking us out of the time of play, though showing us the consequences of love glimpsed in ruin. Here is Covill again:

But a glance at Sundarī, her waist compact between her swelling breasts and thighs like a golden fissure in a mountain, could no more satisfy Nanda than drinking water with one hand.³¹

³⁰ Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, Riverhead Books, New York, 1998), 565.

³¹ One of Aśvaghōṣa's techniques for binding discrete verses together is to reinforce a connection through the repetition of words, or through phonetic similarity. Thus 'kareṇu' of the first image, the female elephant, and the last word of that verse, is re-called in its echo to 'kareṇa', the last

It is an image presenting the sight that cannot satisfy him (as a man tries to cup water with one hand), abruptly taking us out of a sense of leisure at ease. She comes into view, first entirely as one would expect, as a woman possessed of a vanishing, emaciated waist (*udara*) framed by the swelling thighs and breasts, (an image of beauty), but then, intriguing, if we stay just with the words describing the object of his quick glance, as ‘a golden fissure in a mountain’ (*Sundarīmrūkma-darīmiva-adreḥ*). However we parse the exact object of Nanda’s glance, we are dealing here with a view of Sundarī which involves her vanishing into a metonymy, a curious image where the girl’s waist is described as a vanishing point, an emaciated interiority (the word ‘*udara*’ meaning belly can also mean what is interior), hedged about, even as the woman is squeezed into the image of herself as a slender waist, a single fissure in an impassable mountain. I have dropped this image because I think it of vital importance, and because I have not been able to do it justice yet in translation. I read this precisely as an ecstatic glance, a brief image interrupting the smooth flow of the description of Nanda’s departure, and attempt at playful vision, announcing the theme of ruin through the conceit of persons becoming as large as environments, which is always a reduction, a brief hallucination possible only through growing distance either felt or anticipated with premonitory horror.

The abrupt intrusion of mountains, a magisterial overcoming of the trite conceit of swelling breasts, and the implied distance in the perception of a woman as a fissure, (rendered in the distancing image of a waist disappearing between breasts and thighs), is a triumph of imaging motion through its symptoms in perception. Her body has become a total environment for him, crowding out everything else in his possible field of vision. To place oneself, in a person, as one would in an environment, (it is her body that provides the horizon to his vision of her – surely only possible in a visionary description of the ecstasy of desire and motion), is a counter-point to the effect of a vanishing perspective, his vision of her as a fissure, glimpsed as if she is receding from view. This ambiguity of perspective, the effect at once of imminence, and recession from its object, is intentional: it mirrors the double-movement only spoken about earlier, where he pivots in place, even as he moves away. It is not the least of Aśvaghoṣa’s small-scale effects.³²

word of the next verse, which is ‘with one hand’ in Covill’s translation. Both verses form a unit, describing two perspectives on Sundarī enjoyed by Nanda. Thus the word ‘*paśyan*’, ‘seeing’, is repeated in both verses. (See below for more on this technique).

³² Note the attention to Nanda’s continued dependence on sensory awareness and the embedding of the narrative’s sensory range within the bounds of Nanda’s possible experience: we have a description of touch, then of sight, and finally of sound...the tinkle of anklets which seizes Nanda. Eventually, this constriction of the senses will reach its apotheosis in a hallucinatory ecstasy consequent upon his distance from his lover that requires memory for a bridge, resulting in a complete sensory confounding of Nanda’s immediate environment. That passage, unfortunately, is outside the scope of this essay, as its technique is distinct from the work of disjunctive style.

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My next example offers a miracle in language—the privilege of enjoying that rarest of aesthetic phenomena where we can hear characters change through hearing themselves. My interest, however, does not lie in this remarkable feature alone, but in the mirroring of the consciousness of separation in an ambiguity of syntax that will allow me to offer the reader the first example close to the texture of what I call Aśvaghōṣa’s disjunctive style.

Consider a line Aśvaghōṣa has that remarkable woman Sundarī say when she learns that her husband, beautiful Nanda, a man thus far in the narrative besotted with her, has not returned when promised; you may for now take these words to be offered for a representatively beautiful woman in love with a hitherto representatively beautiful, and besotted man.³³

Ratipriyasyapriyavartino me priyasyanūnaṃhṛdayaṃviraktam(6.15a-b)

This is a line which says, in a recent translation by Linda Covill, the following: “My lover loves love and loves me; surely his heart has hardened...”, which is rather pleasant on two counts: first, in English, there is a notable texture to this line; and second, the thought paraphrased here invites comment: “my lover loves love and loves me”—we are too often given to think that this is a thought it is only recently possible to have, namely, where the tension between two potential objects of desire in love, love itself and a particular person, is the source of indecision. Roland Barthes’ suggestion in his *A Lover’s Discourse* that there is a singular amorous perversion under the influence of which it is love that a lover loves, and not a person, was anticipated by Sundarī, and offered not as a perversion, but a condition possibly underwriting the norm.

³³ I have devoted an essay to pleasure described in terms of an environment in another piece. Here I would like to say something about my generalization here. The word *sundarī* might give one pause. The world of pleasure as an ideal for urban sophisticates is presented with intelligence by Shonaleeka Kaul in her “Pleasure and Culture: Reading Urban Behaviour Through Kāvya Archetypes,” in Upinder Singh and Nayanjot Lahiri, (eds.), *Ancient India: New Research*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2009, 254-281. The important difference between Aśvaghōṣa’s depiction of the environment of pleasure and the theorized world Kaul discusses is the status of the wife as lover in Aśvaghōṣa (cutting through Kaul’s recognition of the Brahmanical division of a woman into ‘dutiful wife’ and ‘creature of pleasure’), and the fact that interiority is not consequent to the restriction of a wife to the world of duty. It is significant, I think, that Nanda’s wife, to whom he is devoted under the norms of domesticity as he understands it, is called *sundarī*, a term usually used (among others) of women who are contrasted with the ideal wife. See especially page 223 of Kaul’s article. I am indebted to Mudit Trivedi for bringing Kaul’s work to my attention. No essay on the characterization of women in the work of Aśvaghōṣa would be complete, or reliable, if it did not keep in mind the ways in which Aśvaghōṣa writes sometimes with and against a convention of literature; or that he distinguishes, in terms of personation, between the focal women, characters in the story, and anonymous women of pleasure in the palace or in heaven. This requires a separate study, which to my mind does not exist.

The possibility of the tension is preserved in the order of the Sanskrit sentence: we might think her capable of asking: does he love me *because* he loves love? (The serial order of two objects in a list, after all, can mask the most important relation that Buddhist writers sometimes couch in a serial order, that between cause and effect, and it would be a significantly different thing to say that “he loves love and he loves me”, rather than saying that “he loves love and so loves me.”) This line, taken on its own, seems to hover precariously between them, but thus far, in paraphrase, we have not been given reason to think that there is anything like a recognition on Sundarī’s part of even this much ambiguity in what she has said, though we have been alerted to the possibility of it.

Let me pause to offer another reason why this propositional paraphrase is important. It is possible to think that there is no clear distinction between the concepts of love and pleasure in *Beautiful Nanda*, and to account this a weakness it has taken our modernity to overcome. I agree that there is something to be said for the blurring of the line between love and pleasure, but what some have taken to be a weakness, namely Aśvaghōṣa’s apparent lack of discrimination between words for wife and lover, is a virtue in his description of what is involved in Nanda’s being a creature of pleasure as I understand the requirements of his narrative.³⁴Critics would have done well to consult Sundarī before expressing final judgment on Aśvaghōṣa’s sense of the difference it makes to be centered in love or pleasure. In the passage beginning with the line under discussion here, Sundarī anticipates with shock the possibility that Nanda’s love is a symptom of his addiction to pleasure, a condition fatally impersonal, not for not requiring an object as love does, but by being satisfied by a bewildering number of possible objects, evaluated by criteria rooted in the ultimately impersonal satisfactions of sensory experience. But more on this below.

I have said the English translation of Sundarī’s words succeeds in alerting the reader to consider again how much has been said. Of course, there is more in the Sanskrit than meets the eye in paraphrase in English. I am pleased to say that the use of alternative alliteration of l-s (lover lovers love and loves me) and h-s(heart / hardened) in Covill’s English presents something of the texture of Sundarī’s words, or at the very least, alerts the reader to something textured in the Sanskrit. If anything could argue us into seeing that small differences in similar textures can make all the difference to the work of a line, this line would be chief among them.

³⁴ See in this respect Fritz Blackwell and Prem Kumar, “Mohan Rakesh’s *Lahrom ke Rājhaṃs* and Aśvaghōṣa’s *Saundarananda*: A Contemporary Play and its Classical Source,” *Journal of South Asian Literature*, (formerly *Mahfil*), (Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University, vol. xiii, 1977-1978), 45-53. The article, despite its shying away from a close reading of *Beautiful Nanda*, is to be commended for its bothering to treat the Sanskrit at all as relevant to contemporary fiction. Simona Sawney’s more recent discussion of these two works, Rakesh’s *Lahrom ke Rājhaṃs* and *Beautiful Nanda* in her *Sanskrit Modernity*, unfortunately does not pick up on the subject introduced in the earlier article.

At the risk of pedantry, but because I do not wish to alienate a reader innocent of Sanskrit, I offer a hideous creature, the grammatical gloss mapping the Sanskrit line, where the line seeks grammatical and not semantic equivalence for now. I have used this convenience to map the grammar of the Sanskrit line, that words stated in bold qualify one another, and those in italics their partners in italics, as similar cases in Sanskrit indicate words that modify one another. A semi-colon separates each word or compound that stands as an independent nominal unit in the sentence, and the “||” indicates a metrical break:

Of the one in love with pleasure (*rati-priyasya*); of the one engaged in love / devotion (*priya-vartino*); my (me) ||of lover (*priyasya*); surely / now (*nūnam*); heart (*hṛdayam*); hardened (*viraktam*):

This is the map for the line: *ratipriyasyapriyavartinomepriyasyanūnamhṛdayamviraktam*. Reading backwards as is advised in many introductions to Sanskrit helps: hardened is the heart, surely, of [the] lover of mine, he who is engaged in love, he who is in love with pleasure. It is important to state that this is mostly a simple line, if by simple we mean that it can be translated word for word quite easily by a student with less than one year of Sanskrit. (Indeed, one could say this about almost all of Aśvaghoṣa). Its difficulty lies not with grammar, construed in terms of declensions and cases, but with syntax, and with syntax motivated by the representation of an uncomfortable thought manifesting in the surface of what one says, but not necessarily with one being entirely aware of all that one has said. (Sundarī catches up to it though, as though to console us when we take it that we might be over-reading).

I have said that the sentence “My lover loves love and loves me” with its alliteration helps cue us to the thought and texture of the line in Sanskrit. I attend first to the paraphrase. Notice that my map does not say “...and loves me”. It says: ...of he who is engaged in love (*priyavartinah*). It may say more. It may say: “...of he who is engaged in love of...”, where we look an object to ground our sense that love, like consciousness, is intentional, and requires its object. To get at Covill’s line, which given what Sundarī goes on to say is important, (my lover loves me), you have to effect a grammatical reading that does something interesting. You have to allow that *priyavartino* takes as a further genitive the ‘me’ that follows it in the sentence; all this, to get “...of he who is engaged (*vartin*) in love (*priya*) of me (*me*) – if one wanted to avoid this, one could simply have written *matpriyavartinah*, and saved oneself the trouble.

The trouble here courted is easy to gloss: the word ‘me’, which is “mine”, or “my”, is already doing yeoman work in the sentence, by completing the word ‘*priyasya*’ (‘of lover’) that follows.³⁵ We have to use it if we want the subject of the sentence to be: the heart of my lover..., which it

³⁵ I would like to record my debt to Professor Gary Tubb of the University of Chicago for helping me see the way in which this verse makes the point I was hoping to make without the benefit of this detail of its syntax. It does seem at times the ideal reader of Aśvaghoṣa’s simple Sanskrit truly is the committee, and not a person.

clearly seems to be. Diagrammatically, we may say that the first person possessive pronoun is pulled in two directions:

priyavartino ← me → *priyasya*

A double duty reinforced by the effect that is already achieved by having me and priyasya need one another across a verse boundary. The semantics of these three words express a closed loop,

My lover, engaged in love of me

A circle for which the center is the first person pronoun, ‘me’, “my”, or Sundarī’s possessive self-reference. But everything about the syntax, and the grammatical relations, suggests not the finality and closure of a loop, but objects tearing apart, even as Sundarī’s self-reference looks in two directions at once, and a word must be wrenched to complete the closure so desperately here sought.

We have two elements expressing a suggestion of a distance between her and her lover: first, the words ‘my’ and ‘lover’ separated by the meter, subtly distances the man who she claims is her lover from possession. Secondly, there is a hesitation between saying “my lover who is engaged in love” which reinforce (though not repeat) her first qualification of him, as one who *isratipriya*, a lover of pleasure, and saying something else, something she wants to be true, that he is one engaged in love of her. It is this latter sense that introduces the closure. Even here, we see a portrait of ruin as giving way before fall, followed by a sense of falling away. The closed loop is a symptom of separateness that has barely begun to be recognized which I would associate with the giving way before the fall, and the rest of the line begins to suggest the inevitable:

The heart of my lover, in love with pleasure, engaged in love of me, surely, must now be disaffected.

The line might suggest something like this in English, with the underlined indicating the false closure, while the distance between the word ‘heart’ and its state, its estrangement from passion indicated in the word ‘disaffected’, may subtly point to the overall distancing effect of the line. For note how Sundarī desperately seeks a ruin other than the one she is experiencing to account for her condition, and explicitly takes note of not the giving way she experiences between her and her lover indirectly suggested by the texture of her words, but only of that falling away which she claims is Nanda’s self-estrangement. Whether Sundarī is given to have awareness of how much she has said is another matter, one I discuss below.

We are not finished with the texture of the line. I have tried to address the line at the level of proposition alone. But there is the phonetic texture of the line to consider. The smoothness and fluency of Covill’s English rendering, *my lover loves love and loves me*, belies a different emphasis in the Sanskrit:

ratipriyasyapriya-vartino me / priyasya

We have here not simple repetition but technically different words that are of the same stock: *priya*, if masculine, means that which is devoted, dear one; *priya*, if neuter, means love; the word 'love' is bound between the word for 'lover'. The repetition is thus, not entirely of whole cloth, a fact echoed in Covill's English to some extent by using love as a verb and as a noun. But to render the effect of Sundarī's words in English would require a Tennyson awake to the possibilities of prepositions and conditionals, and yet more:

In Love, if Love be Love, if Love be ours,
Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers...³⁶

Here, in Merlin and Vivien, Tennyson achieves something of the hesitancy in assertion and the distancing effect of repetition with small differences effected in Aśvaghōṣa's verse. Consider the phonetic reinforcement of Sundarī's uncomfortable situation: she has said, awkwardly perhaps, that her lover is in love with love, and that he is committed to her, but the line squeezes her (through the possessive pronoun 'me') in between the shifting senses of love repeated in unstable combinations. But it is the repetition not of a word but of phonemes that at last underscores the fragility of her situation. She must want to say that her lover is a lover (*priya*) of pleasure (*rati*), to be sure, and that he is also engaged (*vartin*) in love (*priya*) of her (me). The distinction between these is however belied by the anagram of *r-a-t-i* (pleasure) in the word she has chosen for his being devoted to her, *vartin*. These two conditions, stated to be distinct, now seem too close for comfort.

I ask the reader to note the offending 'v', which does not seem to have any place in the line alternating between the conjuncts 'r' and 'p' until now, as all other phonemes seem paired or echoed through-out:

rati-priyasyapriya-vartino me / priyasya ...

The abrupt 'v', however, will recur in that marvelously affecting word chosen to close this sentence: *virakta*, meaning disaffected, disjoined from passion, discolored, a word which gathers the *a*, *i*, *r*, and *t* of *rati* and *vartin*, but adds a harsh syllable even more abrupt than the intruding *v* – the consonant *k*, a sound which stops short the closure the line would otherwise enjoy by assonance and alliteration of the line's first and last words, and defeats the small closure effected by Sundarī's words before.³⁷

³⁶ My thanks again to Jane Mikkelson of the University of Chicago for bringing this verse to my attention.

³⁷ It is beyond the scope of this paper to connect my remarks in any systematic manner to the sensitivity to phonetic texture (In Sanskrit, *śabda-guṇa*) evidenced in the work of critics writing in Sanskrit. My sensitivity in this paper to the virtues of particular phonemes, and combinations

The word *virakta* is of importance beyond its use here to arrest closure, though this is more than Sundarī can know. Consider this portrait of Nanda in passage where Nanda is described after his forced ordination, a remarkable image that might stand as a synecdoche for a theme of passage that runs throughout the long poem:

Now look at Nanda, broken even as a newly seized elephant is broken-in. Ochre stains his mournful habit of bark. The full moon will pass into the dark fortnight and Nanda seems even so: an obscure moon at the close of night, sprinkled with the rays of a rising sun.³⁸

The cloth that marks out his new condition is one in a way drained (*virakta*) of color – an embodiment in advance of his passage beyond passion – but tinged nevertheless with a certain diffuse light; the description of his drained clothes (*virakta-vāsāḥ*) are echoed in his being subdued, no longer independent (*cintāvaśāḥ*), and all this picked up by an image of obscure light befitting the horizontal moment. Nanda is on his way to change. There is a startling line in 11.6a-b: *svabhāva-darśanīyo'pi vairūpyamagamatparam*³⁹ – a line telling us not only that he is utterly deformed through ascetic practice, but also indicating transition, understood as passage to a state akin to a distant horizon (*vairūpyamagamatparam*). The theme of extreme transformation is important in general, but for our purposes, note how Sundarī speaks of his heart being disaffected, when at the same time, unbeknownst to her, he is forced to put on robes best described with the

of phonemes has been whetted by considering the comments of Vāmana and Abhinavagupta on particular phonemes and phonetic combinations, for which I am indebted to Gary Tubb's "Abhinavagupta on Phonetic Texture", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 105, no.3, Jul-Sep., 1985, 567-578; see especially page 578 for a translation of Abhinavagupta's comments on the value of attention to phonetic texture in the appreciation of poetry in general. There is as yet too little criticism of Sanskrit literature that takes into account the differences in sense these differences in sound can make.

³⁸ *nandas tatas tarukaṣāyaviraktavāsāś cintāvaśo navagr̥hita iva dvipendraḥ / pūrṇaḥ śaśī bahulapakṣagataḥ kṣapānte bālātpena pariṣikta ivābabhāse //* (S 5.53); I have retained E. H. Johnston's use of the word "mournful" for *virakta*.

³⁹ Which, it is worth noting, indicates a departure from the tradition, which noted his beauty even as a monk. This is a more complex image than I have pointed out in the main body of the text. There is a juxtaposition of the sort of wasting one's body that is symptom of being in love, and a certain forced circumstance in which Nanda now finds himself in as a monk. The verse goes on: *cintayāpsarasāṃ c'aiva niyamenāyatena ca*. This is a line which suggests not only a collusion of sources, his obsessive thoughts of pleasure (his thought stuck on *apsara*-s) which accords with the traditional use of wasting in love as a trope, and the requirements set on him by his new-found discipline, but also a squeezing of Nanda between these two forces, one formerly internal, the latter, formerly external to him, now jointly internalized. For an observation regarding the natural waste of the body in separated, unrequited love, see Makaranda's comments, in Bhavabhūti's *Mālatīmādhava*: "Alas, the implacable Love God / Bears hard on Mādhava's tender limbs, / working a cruel change from mind to body / like horn-fever wasting the young elephant." Act I, line 39, in Coulson's translation. Michael Coulson (translator), *Three Sanskrit Plays*, (Penguin Classics, 1981), 325.

same words and is truly disaffected, though neither in the way she thinks, nor for the reasons she fears. Her fears are, however, eventually proved sound, even if their target for now is more elusive.

Let us return to Sundarī. It is true as we have seen that the heart of her lover is now disaffected, or estranged. But this is a heady pair of adjectives. From what is such a heart estranged: passion itself, or from her, its contingent object? In formulating this much Sundarī has stumbled on what I take to be among the core veins in the mine of pleasure displayed by Aśvaghoṣa: the line between love and pleasure is not absolute, and while a life oriented by pleasure as guiding principle may for a while be oriented to a single person as the font of pleasure, it is neither necessarily so, nor in the long term can principles of pleasure guarantee this inter-personal bond of love. How can they? Pleasure in a deep sense is impersonal, as Sundarī goes on to reveal in the very next verse she is given to say, when she begins stating her certainty that Nanda has found another, thus resolving the ambiguity of her first words.

This surrogate object of her lover's affections is introduced in this remarkably impersonal way: *rūpeṇabhāveṇa ca madviśiṣṭā . . . dṛṣṭā...anyā* (S 6.16a-b), where the first ellipsis indicates a gap of one word and the metric boundary, and the second, a gap of two words. Let us attempt to stagger it in English: *There is some other woman, more distinguished than I in beauty, in sentiment....he has seen her*. These ellipses interrupt the introduction of the shadowy substitute for her husband's affection, and hedge her disclosure of this woman in the language of inferential reasoning: he has seen some other woman then, for sure... (*dṛṣṭāniyatamato 'nyā*, S 6.16b). Sundarī is drowning, her formerly fluent speech disjointed, even as it offers the form of the smoothest logical links.

Consider how this substitute object of pleasure is grasped almost as elusively as a Lockean substance. As described by Sundarī, she is a being that exists as nothing if not related to Sundarī, (*rupenabhāvena ca madviśiṣṭā*) and to Nanda (*priyenadrṣṭā*); taken on her own, this woman is just termed *anyā*, an arbitrary other, the other woman⁴⁰ --for there may be many candidates, all of them more than suitable enough in terms of providing satisfaction according to these impersonal criteria of pleasure.⁴¹ The fluid delights and the stylized excellences of the women in heaven are

⁴⁰ The word "alterity" in its widespread use in criticism hides its original sense in "alter," once meaning "another of a pair"; intriguingly the dual sense survives in English in such locutions as 'the *other* woman'.

⁴¹ The literary personation of Aśvaghoṣa's two women, Sundarī in the *Saundarananda*, and Yaśodhara in the *Buddhacarita*, requires further study. I have found it to be generally true that the lines composed for them in the presentation of their grief are more interesting from the point of view of literary and dramatic texture individuating them as persons than any others offered to any character in the two long poems. See in this regard Sheldon Pollock's remarks concerning the deliberate (and rare) 'sperrung' in Yaśodhara's cry of lament in *Buddhacarita* 8.68. Sheldon

what constitute the substitutes for Nanda's affections as planned by the Buddha; apsara-s in Aśvaghōṣa, are not persons, but pleasure bodied-forth in multiple bodies.⁴² In offering Sundarī a glimpse of the truth, even while allowing the reader reasons to discount what she is saying in a fever of anxiety, hurt and anguish, Aśvaghōṣa has offered Sundarī a line of sly intelligence.

Love, as Sundarī cruelly realizes, is a ship best not steered with pleasure as its rudder alone. Could not the Buddha sympathize with her, and then agree when she cries with bitter irony: "all praise unto such a fickle soul-mate," *namo 'stutasmaicalasauhr̥dāya* (S 6.18d), a bitter utterance that finds its own temporary quiet in the measured cadence of wisdom: *necchantiyāḥśokamavāptumevaṃśraddhātumarhantinatānarāṇām* (S 6.19a-b): "let such women as do not wish to come unto grief deposit their hearts in the trust of such men". Such men, we might add, as are steered by pleasure. The tour de force that is Sundarī's talking-out of her anguish, essaying a measure of her situation, collapses the ambiguity of the sentence with which I began into one eventuality: that Nanda has become estranged of her, and that he was, indeed, in love with pleasure. I suggested that in the line that begins her thinking out loud, Sundarī might have overheard herself. We can hear her do so if we pay attention to the way in which her speech changes right after speaking the lines I described as expressing, partly unwittingly, ruin that is the giving way before the fall, and the fall. I suggested that the rest of her speech is unsure, telegraphic and elliptical. We only have to pay attention to where this hesitancy alternating between bluster and despair begins to overhear her overhearing the terrible implications of her own gloss on the situation. In reporting her speech I excerpted only the first two feet (a-b) of a four-foot verse. Covill has the verse say:

My lover loves love and loves me; surely his heart has hardened (a-b), since if he still loved me, he would have cared about my request and been sure to return (c-d).

The translation is too sure-footed. She does say that he would have been 'sure to return' if he still loved her. But note how she says it: "...it would not be the case that he did not come back" (*nasana-āgataḥsyāt*), a cumbersome double negative. I take it that Covill has noticed something important about the discontinuity of texture between the first two feet and the rest of the line, given her discontinuation of alliteration after the first two feet. The rest of her line, after the smooth lyricism of the first two feet, becomes unwieldy, weighed down by the logical form of the conditional in which she casts her thought:

Pollock, *Aspects of Versification in Sanskrit Lyric Poetry*, (American Oriental Series, Volume 61, New Haven, Connecticut, 1977), 141.

⁴² I do not take the time here to demonstrate this. See the descriptions in S 10.35-10.51, and particularly, the Buddha's question: *etāḥ katham rūpaguṇair matās te sa vā jano yatra gatam manas te //* (S10.48c-d), with the telling contrast between 'jana' and the plural females consisting in *guṇa-s*.

6.15a-b: *ratipriyasyapriyavartino me priyasyanūnaṃhrdayaṃviraktam*

6.15c-d: *tathāpirāgoyaditasya hi syānmaccittarakṣīnasanāgataḥsyāt*

The heart of my lover, in love with pleasure, engaged in love of me, surely,
must now be disaffected –

For if there were, still, passion in him,
he would have a care for my request,

It would not be the case that he would be one who has not come back.

Sundarī here is beginning to grow uneasy, but she has still not heard herself clearly enough. For she has still not heard the possibility she herself expressed, that he can be passionate, just not about her. This possibility I would suggest is increasingly evident in the anxiety ridden line that declares a reason for it not being possible that he not be estranged from passion (an awkward sentence, but one burdened with the weight Sundarī's sentence is forced to bear). It comes into its own in the next line, which finally seizes on the possibility that Nanda is simply more in love with pleasure than with her. And here, Sundarī at last catches up with her own words, and sees through the hollowness of her own conditional reason so desperately seized on, realizing the possibility she has ignored till now. Here is a rendering intended to capture some of Aśvaghōṣa's effects:

The heart of my lover – he loves love, he is in love with me – surely,

Is now disaffected –

For if there were, still, passion in him,
he would have a care for my request;

it would not be the case that he would be one who has not come back –

Then it must be...

someone else; my lover has seen her – she must be
more beautiful, more refined than I.⁴³

At the outset I suggested the first line introducing this dramatic verse was a line in which someone is capable of hearing themselves and so changing. I have also spoken of it as a kind of ambiguity. The critic Daṇḍin allowed for something like this effect when he noted that we are capable of understanding contradiction in an utterance if it is used in literature to express a particular state of mind.⁴⁴ But simple contradiction, in a way, is a much cruder state of mind than the one Sundarī finds herself in.

⁴³ I have added the first two feet of 16.6: *rūpeṇa bhāvena ca madviśiṣṭā priyeṇa dr̥ṣṭā niyatam tato 'nyā*, a line I discussed above as introducing a shadow to compete for his affections.

⁴⁴ It is one among a few instances where inconsistency in the propositional content of an utterance (or an inconsistency between two utterances) is not only recognized as such, but counted a literary virtue: in particular, Daṇḍin states that even inconsistency of meaning can be expressed in

A pause for breath is in order. This was a long discussion of the importance of one line. In effect, I have already introduced to the reader two aspects of what I mean to call Aśvaghōṣa's disjunctive style: (1) the fact that the literary properties of the sentence works against a direct propositional paraphrase, in some ways counter to it, and (2) that the counter-thrust of a sentence is often a fateful realization on the part of a character to some feature that proves vital to the story, and (3) there is usually a phonetic signal for such a break, a literal interruption of the sentence, though not always consciously realized as such. (In our example, the break was suggested by the 'k' in "viraktam"). Often, it will have to do with the consciousness of dramatic characters speaking their minds and so changing. But the awareness may also belong entirely to the narrative voice alone.⁴⁵ (It usually takes moments of crisis to bring the disjunction even implicitly into the voices of characters in the story).

This is far from sufficient to characterize the style over-all, even though it goes some way to sensitizing the reader to what wants attention in the narrative voice. It would, for example, be

literature given a particular state of mind, namely where a character is depicted discomfited in the extreme (*abhiṣangah*); *Kāvyaḍarśa* 3.133. Note that this form of inconsistency is said to be distinct from the form of inconsistency resulting from "doubt". Students of comparative criticism may take the opportunity to consider how the particular literary effect I have here sketched falls somewhere between two of the seven varieties of ambiguity William Empson anatomized in his *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, namely the fourth and the fifth varieties. The fourth case is one where two or more meanings that do not agree may combine to express a complicated state of mind on the part of the author; the fifth concerns the case where an idea is only discovered by the author in the process of writing, and is thus not part of the expressed meaning of any one statement. Of course, to make these examples apply, we would have to translate them into the context of personation in dramatic narrative. The result of this, in turn, would bring us to the phenomenon I described at the outset of this section as the depiction of change through over-hearing oneself speak.

⁴⁵ There are examples to be discussed that require more space than is here available, for they involve features of Aśvaghōṣa's style that are closely related but distinct from what I call the disjunctive style. I treat cases of these independently in forthcoming papers. One example of the narrative voice saying more than characters in the story can be aware of is evident in the description of a mirror used by Nanda and Sundarī; the word "vyākula," "occluded," used to describe the mirror mars the pleasing portrait of pleasure in love is a fateful adjective. (As I discuss in my "Pleasure in the Mirror of Nanda and Sundarī," (forthcoming), the technique owes much to a surprising description in Vālmiki's *Rāmāyana* (in section III.XV), and a fateful metaphor ("like a mirror *dimmed* (*niḥśvāsāndha*) with sighs, the moon shines unclearly," in III.XV.13c) that rudely interrupts an idyllic description of the love of Rāma and Sītā in exile in beautiful environs). For another example of a literary technique I consider complex words. In "Aśvaghōṣa's Uncanny "Empty": Marginal Notes on a Variety of Buddhist Ambiguity" (forthcoming) I discuss Aśvaghōṣa's use of complex words, given which characters at important times say things that can be seen to be true in a way fateful in the narrative, while not being in a position to see why, or understand all that they have said. But these conceits are not idle, and the poet's keeping alive the semantic fields that contribute to this particular literary effect creates a sustained form of ambiguity important to Aśvaghōṣa's Buddhism, one which the disjunctive style also furthers. I say a little more about Aśvaghōṣa's commitments as a Buddhist in section 3.

important to contextualize the sort of thing I mean by disjunctive style by relating it to a more important theme in Aśvaghōṣa, his bringing the phenomenon of passage into view, a feature I have only hinted at here and there. In the next section by way of offering some context for my remarks on style I frame the achievement of a style as a resolution of a possible tension in our author's orientation to language used as literature. What wants resolution is the lack of fit between the author's faith and the commitments tacitly encouraged by the use of language as literature in Sanskrit.

3. Style as Resolution of Faith and Grammar

While we have not yet been acquainted with an example of the style I call disjunctive, we have seen every device the poet will use to employ it, from the use of imagery to ambiguity in syntax, not without touching on the abrupt interruption of the phonetic texture of a line. What I mean to call the disjunctive style is Āśvaghōṣa's way of maintaining a distance akin to irony in the face of his own powers of description, while taking away nothing from the success of that description where success is understood both with the literary tradition, as language made self-consciously beautiful, and more tangentially: for the disjunctive style is Āśvaghōṣa's way of pointing to a truth concealed in the time of pleasure he bodies forth in beautiful language, a condition of life and language that conceals the truth of ruin. One may put it thus: if a writer may be thought in part to compose an environment, the disjunctive style allows Āśvaghōṣa to describe its attractions without remaining stuck in it, obdurate in his ability to see the dis-ease that lies in the ease and leisure he has portrayed as memorably as he has embodied ruin in his visionary descriptions. What makes it more than a case of simple irony, however, is his capacity to seed the disease he sees in the attentive reader through the least effects of literary texture. (It seems to me certainly not the case that he as a writer enters into a description withholding all commitments – for which, see below).

If I am right, then he has found more than a literary equivalent for the attitude towards different life-worlds recommended by Buddhist cultivation (crudely put: to pass through all and belong to none), even as he adapted the literary environments composed by poets before him. For what he has found is a way of rendering an environment in which it is possible to see the reasons for both the attitude of the enchanted and that of the awake.

I want to say that Āśvaghōṣa's disjunctive style adopted in the description of pleasure is also a resolution of a problem that he as a Buddhist poet and some of us as his readers, whether antecedently committed to Buddhism or not, face: given the success of his portrayal of the couple in love, a sensual, loving and attentive depiction, how do we condone a narrative that ruins the couple through devices of image or plot that can only seem forced? We cannot forget the seductive portrait, or help feel that something artificial has been done to ruin it, as didacticism may be felt to intrude into lyrical poetry and mar what was otherwise of a unity. Let us keep our sense of the problem as an aesthetic one, though understanding 'aesthetic' broadly to include fundamental visions of our orientation to the domain of sense: are we given passage from pleasure to ruin, or is the break simply not justified? Is this a clumsy attempt by Āśvaghōṣa the Buddhist to overcome his own seduction in the face of pleasure, otherwise so beautifully and convincingly rendered? It is in no small part because of the abrupt ruin of pleasure that many have felt the narrative as a whole to suffer the ruin that Nanda and his wife do, without ever recovering.

Here I should say that I am not interested in the question of plot, or to put it another way, in the course of pleasure, bifurcated between an experience of love between people, and the pleasure in freedom, though I do think this is in some sense what the telling is concerned with and makes for one of several threads that bind the work entire. Nor are we faced with a simple problem of the discontinuity between the lyrical sections on pleasure and the seeming didacticism of the rest of the narrative.⁴⁶ What we are after, instead, is a question of the consistency of literary texture in lyrical stretches describing, alternatively, the time of love and ruin. Do Āśvaghōṣa's faith and grammar come apart in the narration of pleasure, such that his commitments as a Buddhist critical of an unreflective immersion in sensuality are suspended until such time as pleasure is ruined, or that he can set about with careful art to take apart what he portrayed together in pleasure? It is useful to put the question in this way: can Āśvaghōṣa write about pleasure immanently, in a way that is true to pleasure in pleasurable language, and yet remain true to his commitments as a Buddhist, such that he would revise nothing about it, even in light of what we as readers will know as Nanda acquires the discipline and knowledge of an itinerant Buddhist monk, and what Āśvaghōṣa already knows? It should come as no surprise that I take there to be no true discontinuity of literary texture. And my belief is based on my suggestion that there is such a thing as his disjunctive style. There is the discontinuity, to be sure, of ruin, and ruinously effected by abrupt techniques. But it is the ruin that is not truly discontinuous given the use of disjunctive style to narrate the time of pleasure, and so seed the narrative with a portrait of ruin as giving way before the fall, even as it reaches its apotheosis of union.

To show something of this is the burden of the next section. Here I should like to pause to consider the matter in terms that Āśvaghōṣa has provided at the close of his work. For there is this complication in speaking of a disjunctive style at all: how do we speak about disjunctive style as an aesthetic resolution of Āśvaghōṣa's situation? The complication has to do with one way in which literature is understood: as language made beautiful through ornament for the sake of pleasure. It is worth stating that Āśvaghōṣa's aesthetic problems are more systemic (if not deeper) than I have suggested in my motivation of disjunctive style. For the very medium seems antithetical to his purpose. It would appear that whether or not one is describing an environment fitted for pleasure, ornamented language is fitted to do very little else but please through the generation of beauty in a vehicle rendered fit to mirror its contents chosen for literary

⁴⁶ For such a view would ignore the great skill involved in making an epic quest of inner states achieved and explored through self-cultivation, a rendering of the geography of the mind as a fit scene for dramatic action. Perhaps more importantly, it ignores the latent didacticism of descriptions of pleasure, no less active than in the description of Nanda's efforts at self-cultivation. There are norms governing the composition of aesthetic environments after all. The only truly didactic moment as such in the work entire is one in which we are presented with a senior monk criticizing Nanda for not understanding the nature of beauty, and in fact, being in love with love because of his root conceit of being beautiful himself (a Proustian insight!) – but this, we are encouraged to realize by the narrative, is a prime instance of didacticism failing to cotton to the visionary source of Nanda's troubles. What Nanda lacks is perspective and orientation, not a practical syllogism.

transformation – for the objects chosen for representation in a medium made beautiful through ornament are most aptly objects or situations that are already best described as beautiful. What is one to make of truth in a context where truth is judged as fitness of sound, sense and content, but only where all are accounted beautiful, except that we are faced with reflections of delightful things in a wilderness of mirrors to beauty?⁴⁷ And if we discount talk of truth in terms of pleasing fitness in these terms then is difficult to know what one is to make of talk of truth given the strange powers of intensification that is the power of ornamented language self-consciously used, the power as the critic Bhāmaha once put it, to take its object ‘out of this world’ (*lokātikrāntagocara*),⁴⁸ and with it, presumably, the reader, with this over-all effect: the confrontation with beauty of sound and sense, of object and description, furthering pleasure, and at the very least, the promotion not so much of irreality, as a reality whose brightness one might say can only induce one to blink when returned to ordinary things in more quotidian light.

A Buddhist writer we might think may not lightly discard perspective on the way things are, a perspective which does not hinge on the intrinsic worth of facts as they are suited to beauty in representation; nor is the reinforcement of an orientation to pleasure in the sensorium to be lightly regarded. Nor, on my account, would this be desirable if one wants to achieve what I mean by a disjunctive style. For on my reading what disjunctive style offers us is truth of pleasure as pleasure, both pleasing and ruinous, even where we are not conscious of the latter. While a complete reading of Aśvaghōṣa’s aesthetic situation as a writer drawn from terms immanent to the Sanskrit literary tradition, as well as the philosophical commitments of Buddhism and its highly developed rhetorical practices and criticism is out of the question given our short compass, it is worth seeing the way in which talk of truth and ornament is introduced by Aśvaghōṣa. At the close, I shall shamelessly exploit a remarkable image to connect my sense of his disjunctive style to one of the striking images he offers to help orient the reader to his work over-all. While I cannot offer the reader a criticism which fully squares what I call disjunctive style with the categories of Sanskrit critics, I think I can show how one may begin to make sense of disjunctive style being a way of writing imminent to ornamentation in language, without endorsing the truth

⁴⁷ No sustained discussion of truth in poetry in secondary literature offering a *Cook’s Tour* of the issues as discussed by a variety of critics in Sanskrit is known to me. But an example may suffice. One way of speaking of truth in poetics is through the concept of *sākṣāt vivṛṇvātī*, description that can serve as immediate witness (to the way things are). This is Daṇḍin’s term, introduced to help us understand how *svabhāva-ukti*, speaking of how things are in themselves, is the prime *literary ornament*! (A remarkable topic, which requires far more study, but a compelling and incisive introduction to the relation of ornament and talk of things as they are, is offered by Yigal Bronner, in his *Extreme Poetry: The South Asian Movement of Simultaneous Narration*, (Columbia, 2010); see in particular section 7.3, “Speaking Crookedly and Speaking in Puns,” 214-220.

⁴⁸ Ka, 2.85, bronner, 216

of ornamentation entirely. (A stance towards language that exactly mirrors what I expressed earlier about Aśvaghōṣa's obdurate perspective on the environments he ambiguously composes).

Aśvaghōṣa offers us a brief concluding post-script consisting in two verses at the end of *Beautiful Nanda*. I here quote from Linda Covill's translation does help us get a sense of the conclusion at a glance, even if the English is just a little too telegraphic:

This composition on the subject of liberation is for calming the reader, not for his pleasure. It is fashioned out of the medicine of poetry with the intention of capturing an audience whose minds are on other things. Thinking how it could be made pleasant, I have handled in it things other than liberation, things introduced due to the character of poetry, as bitter medicine is mixed with honey when it is drunk. Seeing that the world generally holds the pleasure of sensory experience uppermost and is resistant to liberation, I, holding liberation to be paramount, have described the truth in the guise of poetry. Knowing this, that part which relates to peace should be carefully extracted from it, not the entertaining part; serviceable gold necessarily comes from ore-born dust.⁴⁹

These are the last words of Aśvaghōṣa in *Beautiful Nanda*. The familiarity of many images in this statement (notwithstanding the surprising last image) has tempted some people to read it weakly, and from a weak reading either endorse Aśvaghōṣa's defense of his art in a conspiracy of pious approval, or claim with a knowing smile that he is here, as poets often are, simply being disingenuous in disowning his art. The weakest reading simply divides *Beautiful Nanda* in two parts, and thus, into two kinds of narrative, that of pleasure, which is the honeyed invitation, and a second part which is barbed, describing freedom, Nanda's goal, and the fruit of our working-through the seductions of the narrative—in short, offering us the bitter-pill of denouement. This is a reading that silently seeks approval in another image from the Buddhist tradition, one where we are to understand the Buddha's teaching to be a raft we had better discard once we have used it to effect our crossing. Aśvaghōṣa's art would thus be a raft to ferry the literate but doctrinally tone-deaf for their salvation across the river of pleasure.

Though any talk of a break in the literary texture of the book appeals to something like this image, it is, quite simply, not an image to which Aśvaghōṣa appeals. The image that must trump all others is the final one:

⁴⁹ *ity eṣā vyupaśāntaye na rataye mokṣārthagarbhā kṛtiḥ śrotṛnām grahaṇārtham anyamanasām kāvyopacārāt kṛtā / yan mokṣāt kṛtam anyad atra hi mayā tat kāvyadharmāt kṛtam pātum tiktam ivaṣadham madhuyutam hṛdyam katham syād iti // S 18.63 // prāyeṇālokyā lokam viṣayaratiparam mokṣāt pratihatam kāvyavājena tattvam kathitam iha mayā mokṣaḥ param iti / tad buddhvā sāmikam yat tad avahitam ito grāhyam na lalitam pāmsubhyo dhātujebhyo niyatam upakaram cāmikaram iti // S18.64 //*

Knowing this, that part which relates to peace should be carefully extracted from it, not the entertaining part; serviceable gold necessarily comes from ore-born dust.

This must be the touchstone for any reading of Aśvaghōṣa's style.

It helps to work our way to the striking image implicitly upsetting the value of literary ornament – the gold now imaged as ore-born dust, truth as revealed by ornament – as we have in other extended passages of Aśvaghōṣa, by seeing individual verses cascade, and a sequence of images compose an internal commentary of sorts. We can help ourselves to re-reading Aśvaghōṣa's statement of defense without claiming for him, with a wink, the dubious praise of being disingenuous, simply by seeing that by poetry as the product of his art we may mean more by 'poetry' than *kāvya* as he might have understood this particular word, or indeed, that by *kāvya* we can mean, as the tradition eventually did, more than simply language rendered beautiful through literary ornament *for the sake of pleasure* alone. In other words, by *kāvya-dharma*, (a phrase weakly read as "character of poetry" in the above translation)⁵⁰ he may have meant something very specific: a set of conventions that prescribed not only manner but also subject, scenes and plot devices—the description of sunrise, for example, or an amble in the garden whose presence was required not so much by manuals of architecture, or canons of realism, but by the dicta that governed the production of poetry. We do not know exactly which conventions these were (though we may at times reconstruct them) but we can say more about that complex word, "*dharma*".

While I think that the word "dharma" here must mean something like the above sense of normative convention I sketched above, it is also true that the word carries expressive connotations beyond: it affords the greatest possible contrast between two sources of orientation and value not only at the level of aesthetics, but of competing forms of life. Rather, we should say, the phrase '*kāvya-dharma*' may be used to implicitly contrast two kinds of aesthetic orientation, where 'aesthetic' is extended to include the source of orientations to value in the sensory experience. Consider that by "the norms of poetry", that is, the properties of language valued and prescribed and the dictates of particular genres, Aśvaghōṣa meant to express not simply what went into a work to elevate it to the condition of *kāvya*, but also the conditions for finding such properties valuable: either a normative orientation to language grounded in particular forms of life which were lived at leisure, with the values of power and pleasure as experienced

⁵⁰ It helps to compare our phrase with similar constructions: thus, consider Bhārata's term "*nāṭya-dharma*" in the *Nāṭya-śāstra*, meaning something like the conventions governing representation that help transform the familiar into a work of art, (he uses it with reference to the work of poets as well as actors), an extension of the world capable of having aesthetic effects on the an audience. But also consider that after the eighth century, the phrase *kāvya-dharma* in the hands of Jain poets comes to mean something like literature that is secular (*laukika*), used in opposition to *dharma* as a subject for literature. These uses, I think, help situate the resonance Aśvaghōṣa's phrase might have held, along with the associations "characteristics / norms of poetry" rightly suggests to us.

say, at court, as its orienting concerns, or even a life oriented around *kāvya* alone, where literature was a professional activity, requiring a distinct form of life. To consider that poetry may have constituted a form of life with norms of its own, and that some Buddhist authors, despite the rhetorical brilliance of their own literatures, might have regarded such a form of life as a disreputable one, it is worth recalling the former poet Vāgīsa's confession, where he says that he was "intoxicated with *kāveyya*, (Pāli for Sanskrit "*kāvya*")", wandering from village to village, city to city," until he met the Buddha who had gone beyond all pleasures (In *Theragāthā*, *The Songs of the Elders*, verse 1253).⁵¹ To see *kāvya* as involving a form of life either at the level of production or reception offers us the broadest possible view on the tension our author may have felt in having produced a work that seems to promote values that constitute, at the very least, a principled alternative to the values of the tradition to which he belongs. We may suppose for the remainder of this discussion that is just such orienting values that are embodied in language self-consciously fashioned to be literature. *Kāvya* has its values with which to shape a counter-world, and Aśvaghōṣa wishes to distance himself from them while engaging in what he calls a semblance (*vyāja*) of such activity, using such an activity as a pretext (for we may translate *vyāja* this way) for something very different.

I ask the reader to keep in mind that by disjunctive style I can mean a literary style, and yet intend it to accommodate Aśvaghōṣa's intended distance from *kāvya*, which I do not read as disingenuous at all, but a careful rejection of the reason for valuing language made beautiful through ornament and a distinct conception of truth in language. It is worth, however, seeing how Aśvaghōṣa thinks he can achieve his immersion in a medium without being contaminated by it.

Keep in mind the specificity of reference to *kāvya*. Thus, if Aśvaghōṣa says that

⁵¹ There is, of course, other evidence that suggests not simply a confrontation on the part of Buddhists with literature *per se*, but an anxiety of precedence. The Buddhist encyclopedia, the *Mahāvibhāṣa* (different editions of which were compiled in Kashmir a little earlier than Aśvaghōṣa's time), records an ill-tempered (and humorous) consideration of the *Rāmāyana*, a work crucial to Aśvaghōṣa's own conception of his work as epic echo and answer to the work of the 'first poet'. The entry reads: "In 12,000 verses, Rāvaṇa carries Sīta off by violence, and Rāma recovers Sīta and returns. The Buddhist scriptures are not so simple, their forms of compulsion and meanings are respectively immeasurable and infinite." (See K. Watanabe, "The Oldest Record of the Ramayana in a Chinese Buddhist Writing," *Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, January, 1902, 99-113. Of course, this is reductive. But this example shows both, that there was tension between forms of literature treating of subjects in form and in content other than Buddhist writings, and also that there was pride in the linguistic qualities of Buddhist writings – as neat a case as the wish to rid oneself of influence (understood to be a relation between texts) as one could wish for. I hope to treat the issue of Buddhist scripture as literature of importance as literature to Aśvaghōṣa, being a different orientation to language than that provided by *kāvya*, elsewhere.

This work, whose contents (or denouement)⁵² is that goal of life, freedom, was composed for the sake of quiescence, and not pleasure....,

we can understand the parallel he draws between the auditors whose minds are on matters other than quiescence gained through a work whose subject is freedom, on the one hand, and the recourse he is obliged to find in the customs and manners of *kāvya* if he is to grip his audience at all, on the other. But we can also then appreciate the audacity of the move. The parallel he draws between auditors for whom pleasure is paramount and the customs of *kāvya* effectively underscores the close connection between the content of literature understood as a form of language made beautiful with its purpose: pleasure. But does it also not then quite obviously disavow any strict identification of content and purpose – for is Aśvaghōṣa not suggesting that in his work language is indeed made beautiful through ornament, as it is in *kāvya*, but not to promote pleasure alone, but rather to turn an unwilling audience unwittingly to his subject: freedom, while yet holding out the possibility of finding the work pleasurable up-to a point?⁵³ Simple minded didacticism in poetry, unlike Aśvaghōṣa, simply identifies content and purpose.

There another way of being didactic worth calling the pied-paper fancy. This would be to suppose that we have here the vain hope of a didactic writer that he can fool us into wisdom by charming us anywhere if the way be made pleasant enough for the duration by distraction. In effect, this counsils us to underscore the ultimately distinct character of content and purpose in a work. I am tempted to read what Aśvaghōṣa is saying differently, partly because of the subject of his work. Even as Nanda is a being of pleasure overcome by ruin and forced into recognition of the value and pleasure in freedom through re-evaluation of his former orientations to pleasure, Aśvaghōṣa's work cannot afford to entirely separate out pleasure and freedom as subjects: the description of pleasure beautifully rendered cannot be mere convenience, as it is integral to the subject. At the level of literary manner, I am tempted to think that there is something more at stake in the pleasing descriptions of things accounted beautiful by those oriented to pleasure than mere convenience or goad alone.

At this point I would content myself with the following: Aśvaghōṣa has at least gestured towards one kind of use of language that is not obvious: a language rendered beautiful that can further pleasure, but not pleasure alone, but even a quiescence otherwise only consequent to the recognition of freedom—he claims to be able to secure these effects through atopic and individual

⁵² The word “*garbha*” Aśvaghōṣa here uses is a delightful term. It does point to the contents of the work, but the word also came to mean something particular in dramaturgy: the highest pitch of a plot.

⁵³ Because Aśvaghōṣa here discusses an audience that takes pleasure in *kāvya*, I here ignore a complication that should be pursued in any complete discussion of Aśvaghōṣa's poetics, namely the possibility of an audience that can take pleasure in depictions of freedom in the Buddhist sense, just as the life of itinerant contemplation is construed to be a pleasing, sometimes even a ravishingly happy, form of life in Buddhist literature.

contents in language that has been seemingly fitted for something else, namely pleasure in beauty alone. If freedom is partly achieved, on Aśvaghōṣa's own narration, through re-orientation to pleasure centered in beauty, then we have reason to expect that this turn-around may well be bodied forth at the level of style. What we would like at this point from Aśvaghōṣa is not so much a pious receipt of his intentions, but some sense of how the duality he seeks for his language is to be made possible, and how it is to be understood. This is just what I would claim he offers us in the very next line when he says:

“thinking: ‘how could it be made *hr̥dyam*?’” –

which is to say, how his work is to be made “delightful,” “pleasing,” “charming,” even “savory,” possessed of the properties he disavows as an end in itself. The image he offers must be taken seriously, however familiar to our ears:

Thinking, ‘how it could be made delightful?’, I composed what is distinct from freedom in this work according to the norms of literature, as bitter medicine that is to be swallowed is mixed with something sweet.

I think the force of this image as an explanation of some features of Aśvaghōṣa's work will be missed if we do not take a word seriously, the word translated above as ‘mixed’. For the word ‘*yuta*’ does not simply mean ‘mixed’, but ‘joined’, in the sense of conjunction of otherwise disparate things (That is a word worth marking, for I do intend the echo here to my sense of disjunction in disjunctive-style). While I think there is too much concession in this image to the utter distinctness of freedom and pleasure, there is something to be said about the distinction between freedom as a subject Aśvaghōṣa is interested in, and the world he is required to introduce and fill in certain ways by the norms of *kāvya* (*kāvya-dharma*). But the important thing about this statement is not the initial concession to the distance between freedom and the normative world of *kāvya* but their conjunction in Aśvaghōṣa's art. It is easy to see how a bitter pill may be sugared. But how exactly is the sugar to be seeded with the bitterness of freedom as a subject? Read for this implication, the image announces the conjunction in literature of beauty rendered to further pleasure with something of the taste of freedom that is his true subject: and the ability to do something like this just is what I mean to bring to view by speaking of his disjunctive style.

Our situation is more complicated than a simple weakening of the identification of content and purpose, or its utter distinction as some might be tempted to read in the first words of Aśvaghōṣa on his own art. For we are dealing not only with the furthering of two effects on the reader, pleasure and quiescence, but also seemingly, of two kinds of subjects, what is suitably recounted through beauty to further pleasure, on the one hand, and freedom, on the other. The latter requires a perspective on beauty at least different in emphasis than the one encouraged by the normative orientations of literature.

No doubt Aśvaghōṣa means his remarks to hold true for his work entire. I will assume the fiction for now that we may speak of these images as holding true for even a single instance of unified description, perhaps, even a single verse. I invite you to consider such a verse as a hypothesis: it will describe a time of pleasure, beautifully, in terms that seem to promote the values that literature finds in beauty, and yet also promote, subtly, something else, something which, from the perspective of the norms of literature, can only taste bitter. This something else will further our appreciation of freedom, and promote not only the experience of pleasure, but quiescence and disengagement from the sources of pleasure in beauty narrowly understood as a pursuit in the domain of the senses, a perspective antithetical to the perspective required for freedom.

This hypothesis is the first suggestion I find in Aśvaghōṣa's images for thinking of a type of language which enjoys the basic ambiguity necessary for the literary style I call disjunctive, such that, a piece of language can involve itself in properties that may further effects otherwise incompatible at the same time: it must be such as to suggest beauty pleasant enough to further pleasure in the minds of those not oriented to freedom, and at the same, promote in its effects, quiescence, and a turn away from pleasure in sensory experience as source of value. The hypothesis allows me to claim that what is achieved in narration through the work as a whole is already a *fait accompli* for its author, and would be for the reader as prepared, or a reader willing to re-read the work again. But it is not sufficient for us to stay with just this image as an apt rendering of what is involved in disjunctive style. We want one thing more, and that is a sense of what is meant by the concealment of such a duality from a possible auditor not alerted to it, and how to think about the resulting ambiguity in terms of truth to reality. For this is something Aśvaghōṣa himself introduces as a concern.

Before directly considering his statement on this subject it is helpful to consider a tension he could not but be awake to. Indeed, as a Buddhist learned in his own scriptures this would simply be received wisdom. The tension concerns the difference between two kinds of language, and the difference this difference makes for truth in language. In Buddhist scripture, 'what was made by poets' (*kavi-kṛtam*) is often opposed to what is true. To say this is not to say that poets are liars, a line of thought which involves us in questions of intent that are not relevant here. It is instead a concern with the fact that the particular sort of language created by poets is an unsuitable medium to preserve truth. I quote here, at length, a remarkable sermon in Pāli from the *Samyutta-Nikāya* where The Buddha once recounted the following story in his inimitable style addressing this concern:

Monks, there once was a time when the Dasarahas had a large drum called 'Summoner.' Whenever Summoner was split, the Dasarahas inserted another peg in it, until the time came when Summoner's original wooden body had disappeared and only a conglomeration of pegs remained.

In the same way, in the course of the future there will be monks who won't listen when discourses that are words of the Tathagata – deep, deep in their meaning, transcendent, connected with emptiness – are being recited. They won't lend ear, won't set their hearts on knowing them, won't regard these teachings as worth grasping or mastering. But they will listen when discourses that are literary works – the works of poets, elegant in sound, elegant in rhetoric, the work of outsiders, words of disciples – are recited. They will lend ear and set their hearts on knowing them. They will regard these teachings as worth grasping & mastering.

In this way the disappearance of the discourses that are words of the Tathagata – deep, deep in their meaning, transcendent, connected with emptiness – will come about.⁵⁴

Consider this remarkable image: the work of poets is akin to the function of pegs that hold the breaking or torn skin of language together, and used to replace the original skin of language until the language communicates nothing, until all that is left are these local substitutions, and the 'pegs' are rendered functionless because of the disappearance of the body of the drum—mere ornament, serving to communicate nothing. (The contrast, presumably, is to the rhetorical style of the Buddha's utterances, which communicate what must be communicated, in a style suited to communicate and preserve what must be said). In other texts, we see that 'what is made by poets, poetry' is contrasted to what the Buddha speaks, which is to say, the truth.⁵⁵

Schooled thus by the Buddha in the subtle dangers of modifying language through poetic arts, what shall we say of truth in Aśvaghōṣa's language on our hypothesis of the dual properties he seeks to effect? Recall the hypothesis: Aśvaghōṣa has claimed for himself the invention of a kind of language that can involve itself in properties that may further effects otherwise incompatible at the same time: such as to suggest beauty pleasant enough to further pleasure in the minds of those not oriented to freedom, and at the same, promote in its effects, quiescence, and a turn away from pleasure in sensory experience as source of value. Aśvaghōṣa addresses this duality, at the level of purpose, and content, in what he goes on to say helping himself to the striking image of smearing, of artifice (*vyāja*):

⁵⁴ *Ani Sutta* translated from the Pāli by Thanissaro Bhikkhu; S. ii. 266 in the *Pali Text Society Edition*.

⁵⁵ It is used, for example, in works of the Mahāyāna tradition, to discount the scriptures recorded and transmitted as the word of the Buddha: “*yadetattvayedānīm śrutam, naitadbuddhavacanam / kavikṛtaṃ kāvyam etat / yatpunaridamaḥ bhāṣe, etadbuddhabhāṣitam, etadbuddhavacanamiti / etacchrutvā sacedbodhisattvaḥ kṣubhyati calati, veditavyametatsubhūte - nāyaṃ vyākṛto bodhisattvastathāgataiḥ / aniyato 'yam.*” Aṣṭasāhasrika Prajñapāramita, P.L. Vaidya (ed.), (Darbhanga : The Mithila Institute, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts: no. 4, 1960), 164. My emphasis.

I have recounted what is the case, the truth (*tattva*) in the guise of poetry (*kāvya*) –

This works at the register of purpose to say the following: I have used *kāvya* as a *pretext* to speak of reality, understanding them we might say as the Buddhists would, as distinct, but unlike the received wisdom on the topic, as obviously not incompatible. At the level of content, however, this is an even more interesting thing to say. For while it is one thing to suggest a distinction between semblance and reality, here we are invited to see how the opposition already offers us the resolution: just as semblance may be said to ‘hide’ or conceal what is the case, so poetry (understood as language which through ornamentation offers us a world of semblances) is fitted to offer us not just semblance, but what semblances conceal, which is to say reality. This then, is Aśvaghōṣa’s art: not to make language beautiful through ornamentation, and so fit for presenting us things made fittingly beautiful, but to use ornamentation to present in language such things as are concealed in perspectives attuned to beauty naively understood.

His art is in a sense other than *kāvya* strictly understood: here we are to see that *kāvya* is not the true substance, but merely an appearance, a semblance of *kāvya*. And if we allow the difference between *kāvya* and all *we* can mean by poetic art for now, we can see that he is perhaps saying something a little more than simply reneging on the what his art narrowly comprehended by *kāvya-dharma* provides. His art is the concealment of truth in a language that is a semblance of language-made-beautiful-through-ornament. This does not mean that he is not offering us a poetics. For he has. A poetics where ornament has only a superficial place in guiding us to the work and character of extraordinary language, where truth is present and concealed. This is an achievement, for it is not at all obvious that ornament and truth can sit together. My attention to disjunctive style as a distinguishing feature of Aśvaghōṣa’s art is intended to follow precisely Aśvaghōṣa’s suggestion to look past the literary tradition’s typology of literary ornaments (understood as beautifying textures of sound and figurations of sense) in his work.

Note furthermore that here there is no question of ‘overcoming’ or progressing beyond his art: what I take from Aśvaghōṣa’s statement is that where it matters each offering of *kāvya* conceals the truth in itself, and not that it points us past itself to some domain outside itself. He offers us his last striking image as a direction to the reader: an image which reminds us of the finding of ‘serviceable’ gold, as Covill translates it, or rather, the extraction (the verb in Sanskrit is not stated but implied) of serviceable gold from ore-born dust. There is not a little delightful play in this, given the allusion to one of the striking images used by the Buddha, and in a word used to offer the last words of the author. For “*upakara*”, the word here translated as “serviceable”, is a goad: *upakara* also means something you can use to your advantage, as ornament, or decoration.⁵⁶ And we can see this quite easily to be the implicit inversion it is: what was taken by

⁵⁶ (This should not surprise us, did not the AN ii. 27, the *Ariyavamsasutta*, liken the Buddhist adept to an ornament of finest gold?)

poets and their critics before as *alamkāra*, valuable ornament, is here but ore-born dust. There is gold, but hidden. The image is not one of throwing away a ladder. It is, on the contrary, an image of taking time with, of care, of precision, of delving. For the true allusion here is to the quality of mind recommended by the Buddha in a lengthy analogy of the work of mind cleansing itself in meditation to the sifting of dust and fine grained dirt. I offer here Aśvaghōṣa's own description of the Buddha's words in Linda Covill's translation from the close of the fifteenth canto, lengthy though they are, to contextualize the image.⁵⁷

To obtain gold, a dirt-washer discards first the large bits of grit, and then, to refine it further, he discards also the tiny bits of grit. After this cleansing, he retains particles of gold. To obtain liberation, a man of focused mind will likewise abandon first gross faults, and then to further refine his mind he abandons also subtle faults...

Just as in this world a goldsmith takes gold that has been washed with water and separated from the dirt in gradual stages, and heats it in the fire and turns it frequently, so the practitioner of yoga, having first cleansed his mind of defilements so that it is completely separated from faults in this world, then makes it calm and concentrated.

⁵⁷ Note also the following description from the Pansadhovaka Sutta, *Anguttara Nikāya*, Pali Text Society, A. I. 256. I offer here the translation of Thanissaro Bhikkhu for the diligent reader concerned with long background to Aśvaghōṣa's image. Note how Aśvaghōṣa mimics the canonical style of Buddhist scripture that a young T. S. Eliot once characterized as the most masterful use of 'extended metaphor' in literature:

"There are these gross impurities in gold: dirty sand, gravel, & grit. The dirt-washer or his apprentice, having placed [the gold] in a vat, washes it again & again until he has washed them away. When he is rid of them, there remain the moderate impurities in the gold: coarse sand & fine grit. He washes the gold again & again until he has washed them away. When he is rid of them, there remain the fine impurities in the gold: fine sand & black dust. The dirt-washer or his apprentice washes the gold again & again until he has washed them away. When he is rid of them, there remains just the gold dust. The goldsmith or his apprentice, having placed it in a crucible, blows on it again & again to blow away the dross. The gold, as long as it has not been blown on again & again to the point where the impurities are blown away, as long as it is not refined & free from dross, is not pliant, malleable, or luminous. It is brittle and not ready to be worked. But there comes a time when the goldsmith or his apprentice has blown on the gold again & again until the dross is blown away. The gold, having been blown on again & again to the point where the impurities are blown away, is then refined, free from dross, pliant, malleable, & luminous. It is not brittle, and is ready to be worked. Then whatever sort of ornament he has in mind – whether a belt, an earring, a necklace, or a gold chain – the gold would serve his purpose.

"In the same way, there are these gross impurities in a monk intent on heightened mind: misconduct in body, speech, & mind. These the monk – aware & able by nature – abandons, destroys, dispels, wipes out of existence. When he is rid of them, there remain in him the moderate impurities: thoughts of sensuality, ill will, & harmfulness. These he abandons, destroys, dispels, wipes out of existence. When he is rid of them there remain in him the fine impurities: thoughts of his caste, thoughts of his home district, thoughts related to not wanting to be despised. These he abandons, destroys, dispels, wipes out of existence...

And as the goldsmith brings gold to a good state for working at will into various ornaments of many kinds, so too the monk of cleansed mind pacifies his mind, so that it is under his control...

Following through on the allusion we might say Aśvaghōṣa recommends for the reader not only the role of a dirt-washer and goldsmith, but strikingly, the quality of mind associated with the adept meditating. Here thought in language works with language, against ornamented language, to win through to the truth concealed. In his description of his poetics, Aśvaghōṣa adds an important word: *niyatam*, inevitably: there is no other way to get gold but through sifting ore-born dust; just so, there is no truth outside the domain of language concealing what is the case. This cancels the language of mere expediency. I would suggest that it is the poetry that teaches us to effect this process,⁵⁸ and *kāvya*, ornamented language, the domain, where we shall have to learn to read inside out, as it were, in the refining fire of intelligence alert to the author's purpose and alive to his art. And what is the truth that the disjunctive style harbors in a wilderness of ornament? But this, the dissociation (*viprayoga*) that is the inevitable truth of disparate things however otherwise secure their conjunction our need makes them out to be.⁵⁹ It is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss the sense in which the disjunctive style allows Aśvaghōṣa a powerful variety of mimesis, mirroring as he does in his concealment of truth in ornament the situation not only of readers, but beings experiencing themselves as creatures of sense, the situation of us all, immersed in a world of pleasure, seeking perspective within it. The truth, in Aśvaghōṣa's art, as in his faith, is to be found nowhere else.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ In the fifth chapter of Aśvaghōṣa's *Buddhacaritam*, this is the truth young Siddhārtha Gautama cottons on to, and the language he uses to express and justify his decision to leave home. The term, *vi-pra-yoga* used again and again by the Buddha to-be also means "disjunction"; I intend the echo with the term "disjunctive style", but cannot develop this here.

⁶⁰ I would like to record here my debt to conversations with David Shulman and Velcheru Narayana Rao, and thank them for encouraging me to develop these points taking Aśvaghōṣa's last words into account. I am also indebted to Rosemund Tove's discussion of the charge of "didacticism" as pressed against Elizabethan and Renaissance poets in English by twentieth century critics in her *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery: Renaissance Poetic and Twentieth-century Critics*, University of Chicago Press, 1947. I shudder to think what she would have to say of my anachronistic use of "content" in the above remarks, though much that is important in the above remarks can be translated without too much distortion into the idiom of critics working in Sanskrit, though even here anachronism is difficult to avoid entirely.

4. The Verse on Maimed Splendor

If there is such a thing as disjunctive style, there is no place to look for it as promising as the celebration of the union of Nanda and Sundarī in the time of love. Here, at last, I offer a reader of the disjunctive style in full effect. Close-reading here does duty for the quality of mind like a dirt-washer and a gold-smith, refining attention, and refining again, sifting through the dross of detail all the while.

I read the opening lyric as introducing the reader to the pair in what I take to constitute two rather different aesthetic registers. It is only when both registers are grasped that we may claim to possess a compelling sense of the time of pleasure. The initial portrait, with its complex voicing, can and has been missed; what has been missed, in effect, is the disjunctive style, and the seeds of ruin understood as giving way before the fall.

The effect on the whole of a battery of introductory verses 4.5-4.11 appears to suggest that we are to seize the couple together if we are to get the measure of either. There is a fairly simple, if charming example of underscoring that our two individuals are a worthy couple on account of their suitability to one another:

This pool of lotuses, this woman grew to effulgence with the dawn of Nanda in
her family.
The pair of them captivating beyond bound,
With their confirmed beauty, the grace of their bodies conforming to their looks...⁶¹

And so on – the narrative goes on to reinforce the fact that the two are a couple with something that appears at first blush to be merely elegant variation. Linda Covill has verse 4.7 in the introduction say,

If Nanda had not won her, Sundarī, or if she, arch-browed, had withheld herself from
him, then the pair would have surely appeared impaired, like the night and the moon
without each other.

This reads, in English, as a passage under-scoring the virtues of togetherness affirmed. There is nothing to give us pause here, nothing in their joint splendor to suggest impairment of any kind. But this is a more canny verse than may be apparent.

Ought we to have expected anything else but affirmation of the virtues of togetherness? A verse between the two I have just cited ought to have given one pause. In verse 4.6 the couple are presented as something semi-divine, and she is described first, if I may rudely paraphrase the

⁶¹ *bhūyo babhāse svakuloditena strīpadminī nandadivākareṇa // S4.4c-d // rūpeṇa cātyantamanohareṇa rūpānurūpeṇa ca ceṣṭitena / S 4.5a-b / manuṣyaloke hi tadā babhūva sā sundarī strīṣu nareṣu nandaḥ // S 4.5c-d //*

poet, as something divine, sporting with Nanda as her dwelling, as if he were the Nandana gardens in heaven,” (*sādevatānandanacārīṇīva* S 4.6a).” Nanda imaged as the Nandana gardens, the place that gladdens and delights, is a contextually apt line, for as one Buddhist text has it, you do not know pleasure until you have experienced the Nandana gardens, and Nanda is indeed a creature capable of playing the role of pleasure embodied.⁶² To preserve the effect of fitness in pairing, the poet might have provided something to gloss Nanda’s effect on his wife that would give us the sense and texture of ‘**priyānandakaraś ca Nandaḥ*’,⁶³ ‘Nanda was a bringer of unmitigated joy to his lover,’ a line which could preserve the reinforcement of his name, and encode a sense of the fitness of each member of the couple for one another. But Aśvaghōṣa does not do so. We are offered, instead, the following contextually awkward line to introduce him: *kulasyanandījananaś ca Nandaḥ*, “and Nanda, generating joy for his kin.” This you will agree is slightly odd in a context where we expect to find reinforcement of the couple being fitted for one another. Picking out Nanda with his genealogy is an obtrusive move, refitting him in another story, one in which Sundarī plays no constitutive role. The reference to Nanda’s kin will seem the more intrusive, and perhaps deliberate, when we realize that this is how we were introduced to

⁶² Nanda is a creature in love with love, but more importantly, is a creature constituted as a creature ‘of’ pleasure. In ‘Pleasure in a Time of Leaves,’ I offer a reading of this line that links it to a theme consistently developed with variation through the narrative as a whole. The root of the technique is an old staple, long familiar to Indo-European poetics: the anagrammatic distribution of a proper name. In verse 7.1c as Nanda is distraught away from his wife, we get the following: *na nananda nandaḥ*, where Nanda is described literally beside himself, distributed inside out through the anagram, and negated. This, after 4.40, where we hear “*nanda na nandanah*,” when he is away from his wife, might reinforce the aspect of their being an essential couple. But this is but a stage in the drama. For negated, he is recomposed by the Buddha who quickens his nature as a creature of pleasure as a form of shock therapy, orienting Nanda to heaven, the women there, and new found delights: *nando nandanacārīṇīḥ* (S 11.1b). He might have been ‘like’ a divine garden for his lover in his time with her, but he slowly becomes an individual truer to his own nature, capable now as an agent of coursing in his own gardens seeking pleasures removed from her. In ‘Pleasure in a Time of Leaves,’ this effect is considered a part of what I call a “fateful literalization” of the divine metaphors used of the couple (signaled by the simile marker ‘*iva*’ no longer being needed), and part of a complex dramatic technique used throughout the narration of pleasure – all this through anagrams of his name, seeded throughout the narrative. (The Russian linguist and critic Vladimir N. Toporov pointed to this feature in Vedic, stressing how a name may be encoded at least twice in a verse, once as itself, and again in anagrammatic form, and may be used at distance from one another for complex effects; see his “Die Ursprünge der indoeuropaischen Poetik,” trans. Peter L. W. Koch (from the Russian), *Poetica* 13, 3-4, 1981: 189-251; see also Calvert Watkins’ extension of this poetics of oblique distribution of an overt reference by way of finding a syntactic analogue in poetry where constituents may adjoin one another or be separated by other elements: Pindar’s Rigveda, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 122, no.2, 2002, 432-435 – both discussions, particularly that of Watkins, were important for my initial formulations of disjunctive style, though I cannot record that debt in full here).

⁶³ A reader familiar with the story may anticipate that this is used in one place, 4.23, only in the mirror scene.

him at his birth, when he is construed as a being independent of his wife: *nityānandakaraḥkule*, a bringer of constant joy to his family (S 2.58); again, note the twining of his name. The break in the symmetry of epithets strikes the first note of discord.

We are being not all that subtly signaled that not all is well with the pair. Nanda as yet has not found his feet in the story proper to him, and he can and will find his way into a story of his people, a story that is traced from one Gautama, Kapila, to another, Siddhārtha. (Gautama is the first word, and the most important word in the first verse of the long-poem). Thus, when Nanda finally wins through to the un-housed freedom taught by his illustrious cousin, the Buddha says to him: “The King Śuddhodhana is my father” – it finally befits you to call attention to this. After all, no one ought to praise a man that, even when fallen from the dharma of his fathers, still brings up his family (*adyāpadeṣṭumtavayuktarūpaśuddhodhano me nrpatiḥpiteti/ bhraṣṭasyadharmātpitr̥bhirnipātādaślāghaniyo hi kulāpadeśaḥ* (S 18.31).” This story, Nanda coming into his own, as it were, is a fuller weave of which but a thread intrudes in the description of the couple as indissoluble pair.

Keep this in mind, as we review the verse 4.7 I introduced in Covill’s translation: “If Nanda had not won her, Sundarī, or if she, arch-browed, had withheld herself from him, then the pair would have surely appeared impaired, like the night and the moon without each other.” E. H. Johnston offered “they would fail to reach excellence were they not together,” which is, of course, the right proposition here. But there is an effect, I think, that is not quite consonant with reassurance or affirmation, but brings forward the consequence of the interruption I discussed above, and this effect bears emphasis. Consider Covill’s “then the pair would have surely appeared impaired.” This ought to give pause in English (with the words “pair / impaired”), effecting through the alliterative binding of words a pause that might correspond to a pause the Sanskrit offers.⁶⁴ Consider the difference, in English scansion, if we allowed the adjective ‘impaired’ to move much closer to the word ‘the pair’, and did not allow any conditional or distancing clause to keep them apart (“then,” “would have,” “seemed”). Let us use instead a modal affirmation of their disjointed condition. Consider the effect in the above line, of something like

The pair performe impaired...

This I think allows for an under-tow in affirmation that produces a different effect. And this is comparable to the sort of effect that Aśvaghōṣa has introduced into his own verse, in the last two feet: *dvandvaṃdhruvaṃ tad vikalaṃnaśobhetānyonyahīnāvivarātricandrau*. We have at long last the spur indicative of disjunctive style.

Attend to what one may sense on a first pass through the line in Sanskrit. To reach the proposition that “the pair would performe not shine, were they bereft of one another,” one has to pass through

⁶⁴ *tāṃ sundarīm cen na labheta nandaḥ sāvā niṣeveta na taṃ natabhrūḥ / dvandvaṃ dhruvaṃ tad vikalaṃ na śobhetānyonyahīnāv iva rātricandrau // S 4.7 //*

the seeming statement saying “the pair was perforce impaired, maimed – *dvandvaṃdhruvaṃ tad vikalaṃ* – hearing which (and not taking in the line entire at a time with one’s eyes, at a glance on a page), one experiences a pause, cued by alliteration and word-order. One experiences, I think, a momentary possibility: that of ‘*dhruvaṃ*’ modifying ‘*dvandvaṃ*’ (thus dictating ‘firm’, or ‘enduring’ in the sense of an ‘inseparable pair’). Yet as the line proceeds, one lets ‘*dhruvaṃ*’ slide into an adverbial sense, given the anchor of a demonstrative and then the verb, thus ‘inevitably’ or ‘without fail’; yet here its role being to underscore with modal force a defect in the pair considered apart, even as the demonstrative (*tad*) is separated from the noun it qualifies (*dvandvam*).

This passing ambiguity reinforces the disturbance with which ‘*vikala*’ follows and disrupts the alliterative effect of the group of words preceding it, in turn, reinforcing what is no doubt intended to be disturbing eventuality: the couple maimed, a seemingly natural pair that must nevertheless come apart. Let us call this collocation of effects all together the disjunctive force of the line. A study can reveal that such ‘disjunctive force in a line’, or less accurately, but more evocatively, this disjunctive style, is characteristic of Aśvaghoṣa’s narration of pleasure. To give but one example we encountered before: *sādevatānandanacāriṇīvakulasyanandījananaś ca nandaḥ* (S 4.6a-b), again, reinforcing the interplay of phonetics and semantic force: the ‘k’ of ‘*kula*’ brings one up short, interfering with the possible pleasure of hearing ‘*nandana-*’ repeated without delay in ‘*nandī-*’, in ways analogous to the way ‘*vikala*’ behaves in the verse that follows it.

The effect of the verse as a whole, one I call the verse of maimed splendor, as with many verses of Aśvaghoṣa’s, is underappreciated, if it has been seen at all. It affirms, at this juncture, as does Covill’s rendition, the fact that the couple ought to be a pair, and also, that the two individuals did something to secure this in the past. But it does so with a tone that introduces a measure of unease that one might just feel to be at odds with the proposition affirmed. In doing so, it promotes a worry one might have had in the verse that failed to match Nanda to Sundarī, as she was paired with him imaged as the Nandana gardens, an environment unto her. To what extent does Aśvaghoṣa allow us to rest content with the depiction of union as a secure achievement on the part of two individuals in seemingly perfect fit? The effect, instead of promoting our sense of indissoluble unity on the part of the pair, leaves us with a picture of maimed splendor (*śobha* that is *vikala*) that is aesthetically more compelling, in that it threatens to crowd out the prospect of union held out, but not concretely imaged. And this is a fleeting effect, one the poet will work very hard to help the reader miss in the verses that which follow.

One may appreciate the effect on a first pass through the verse of maimed splendor as a whole in terms of the grammar, here understood not as syntax, but as a choice of number in declension, whether or not to use the dual case, for example, or to mention each individual separately, and couple them with a conjunctive particle. Only three words gather the two individuals mentioned, one by one, into a unity in the last two feet of the verse:

dvandamdhruvaṃ tad vikalaṃnaśobhetānyonyahīnāvivarātricandrau

One is “*dvandam*,” the couple; the second, “*anyonya*,” which is “one another,” a phrase in turn qualified by the negative word “*hīnau* (*hīna* used in the dual case)”, a word meaning ‘forsaken’. Consider that: the two words stressing togetherness and inseparability are introduced as qualified by words that are negative. The first is marred with the adjective ‘*vikalam*’, which is a terrible word: literally meaning deprived of a limb, amputated, maimed, crippled. (It has several psychological extensions, including confusion, agitation and depression – I keep with the more striking physical roots of this word, which seems here intended). And *hīna* is a word of destitution, especially taken with the word ‘*anyonya*’ here expressing quite forcefully the loss of togetherness: one, bereft of the other. I am happy to note that Covill’s last line, “like the night and the moon without each other,” in its distributive style “the night and the moon,” instead of “the night and moon,” strikes exactly the right note suggested by the verse as a whole: disjunction, even as the verse states the opposite, and serves to segue into a tour de force of celebration of union.

It is no accident, I think, that in the next six verses two verses resolutely employ dual declensions, and the following four employ ‘*paraspara*’ (a word underscoring mutuality and reciprocity, whose form shows its sense *para + para*) and ‘*anyonya*’ (again suggesting mutuality, *anya + anya*) in a linked manner to tie the verses together. I frame this body of verses introduced by the last line of the verse we just discussed with just these terms highlighted to see their importance:

dvandamdhruvaṃ tad vikalaṃnaśobhetānyonyahīnāvivarātricandrau // S 4.7c-d //
kandarparatyorivalakṣyabhūtaṃpramodanāndyorivanīḍabhūtam /
praharṣatuṣṭyorivapātrabhūtaṃ*dvandam*sahāraṃstamadāndhabhūtam // S 4.8 //
parasparodvīkṣaṇatatarākṣaṃ**parasparavyā**hṛtasaktacittam /
parasparāśleṣahr̥tāṅgarāgaṃ**parasparam** tan mithunaṃjahāra// S 4.9 //
bhāvānuraktauḡiriniṛjharasthaukiṃnarīkiṃpuruṣāvivobhau /
cikrīḍatuścābhivirejatuś ca rūpaśriyā**nyonyam**ivākṣipantau // S 4.10 //
anyonyasamṛāgavivardhanena tad *dvandvam***anyonyama**rīramac ca /
klamāntare'**nyonyav**inodanenasalīlam**anyonyam**māmadac ca // S 4.11 //

The effect of this deliberately threaded texture stressing mutuality in these verses, even on a purely grammatical register, I suggest, is to the swerve away from the offending closing line in the verse of maimed splendor, leaving us with what that verse promises in its sense but does not deliver whole-heartedly, an affirmation of togetherness. The requisite reconstitution of togetherness may be glimpsed by juxtaposing the lines at the beginning and the end of this section I have excerpted:

Dvandvamdhruvamtadvikalaṃnaśobhetānyonyahīnāv (S 4.7c-d)

...

tadvandvamanyonyamarīramac ca (S 4.11b)⁶⁵

On a syntactic level the closing frame joins again what was disjoined in the verse stating union (the words distributed across the first line), thus helping reaffirm at least the semblance of togetherness. On a simple note, the use of adverbs stressing mutuality, and collective singulars such as ‘*dvandva*’, allow one to use single person verbs, instead of distributing the actions to persons separately construed, as in 4.7 – these are small elements that go into reinforcement of togetherness. Verses like 4.9 in this larger body of verses, also help to reaffirm the togetherness of the couple as something continuously achieved through sequences of coordinated actions on a semantic register:

With their eyes for one another, each
Seeking another’s searching glances,
With their thoughts stuck
On each other’s words, and the dye
On their painted-bodies a hostage
To their twining embrace, they were
a couple: each seized with the other.

We are indeed, as they are, seized, or carried away (*jahāra*) in the grip of the breathless portrayal of consummate union. Or consider a little gem, 4.11, that stresses the waning and waxing routines of pleasure, for which I offer an attempt at characterizing texture:

With the passion of each
for the other quickening
to increase, the pair pleased
each other, and diverting themselves
after, in eventual fatigue,
in their slow, intoxicating play,
they begin, again, turning
each other on.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ The use of ‘*dvandva*’ in 4.8 carries over, I think, the frame of 4.7c-d ‘*dvandvam...ratricandrau*’, signaling a verse taking up the dual construction, but also serves to bind this sequence of verses along with the end frame in 4.11.

⁶⁶ This is a verse that is conjunctive, from the ‘*tad*’ and ‘*dvandvam*’ emphatically stressed, the use of conjunctive particles, and the smooth distribution of nasals and repetitive cadence (and rhyme in the last two feet) all working together to give the verse overall a powerful sense of unity:
anyonyasamrāgavivardhanena tad dvandvam anyonyam arīramac ca / klamāntare
nyonyavinodanena salīlam anyonyam amīmadac ca //

The achievement, reconstituting togetherness after promoting subtle doubts, is less impressive unless we realize the degree to which such verses answer the challenge posed by the picture of maimed splendor in 4.7 that frames this portrait. The challenge is more deftly answered by these verses than mere employment of dual constructions, or adverbial modifiers.⁶⁷ The only words in the verse of maimed splendor, as I call 4.7, that may signal the bringing of two individuals together are verbs of achievement, rendering one individual as an agent, and reducing the other to an object: *tāmsundarīṃcennalabhetanandaḥsāvāniṣevetanataṃnatabhrūḥ*, and the two feet, on the whole, offered up in a hypothetical mood, and an over-all disjunctive syntax. That promotes the sense of unity to be a high-wire act, where the two individuals must meet somewhere in the middle: to begin, she is at the outer bound of the line, and he at the end; they briefly almost touch in the middle, but the foot-break introduces another pass, and he is pushed out almost to the outer bound of the line at the other extreme, their roles as subject and object reversed, but the description of her at least encompasses him; as a map of their place in the line will suggest –

tāmsundarīṃcennalabhetanandaḥ | sāvāniṣevetanataṃnatabhrūḥ

She, Sundarī (both in the object case)]...**Nanda** (as agent)//

She (as agent) ...**him** (object), **She whose brows were curved** (as agent) –

The first ellipsis indicates a separation by three grammatical items in Sanskrit, and the second ellipsis one verb—there is no distance between “him” and “she whose brows were curved”. In fact, in Sanskrit, at the end, words for Sundarī envelop the reference to him. It reads as follows in English in Covill’s translation, wherein one cannot manage the effect of collapsing distance in Sanskrit:

If **Nanda** had not won her, **Sundarī**, or if she, arch-browed had withheld **herself** from **him**

They are getting closer in Sanskrit, indicated by their proximity in the last two words, *tam natabhrūḥ*, and this can even be glimpsed in English, given the proximity of “herself” and “him” at the end, a fitting end for the clause where the verb (*niṣeveta*) indicates worshipful, adoring approach.

⁶⁷ A contrast between the line 4.7 and Kālidāsa’s celebration of unity of a pair in his *Kumārasambhava* 7.66 (also *Raghuvamśa* 7.14) is not out of place. In particular, look to the employment of collective singulars to reinforce togetherness, with no use of a true dual: *parasparena spr̥haṇīyarūpaṃ / na ced idaṃ dvandvam ayojayiṣyat / asmin dvaye rūpavidhānatnaḥ / patyuh̄ prajānām vitatho ’bhaviṣyat*. I owe this reference to E. H. Johnston, *The Saundarananda of Āśvaghōṣa*, (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, reprint: 1975), n7, 147; he does not, however, present the contrast as I see it. In Kālidāsa’s line, there is a telescoping of the different registers of Āśvaghōṣa’s two registers, 4.7, and 4.8-11 when presenting the couple, leaving no room for the vision of maimed splendor as an under-tow to the description of togetherness. The unity of the couple, in Kālidāsa’s verse, is a secure achievement.

The hypothetical mood assures us of this unity being a past achievement, perhaps, but at the cost of the verse as a whole suggesting that it is not a secure achievement. The verses that follow, on the other hand, devolve into verses such 4.9 and 4.11, celebrating actions performative of togetherness.

As to rhythms in pleasure, there is a suggestion in 4.7 worth taking note of. Consider again the verse translated above with its stress on the necessity of the pairing of Nanda and Sundarī. Sundarī and Nanda are in part to be held together by their innate qualities, to be sure, but there is the suggestion that such pairing requires constant vigilance, and a constant sequence of activities, any one of which imperfectly performed might yield a moment of separation. They are, in this respect, importantly different from the momentary eclipse in the phases of the moon. A sequence in the time of love warrants attention. Consider the surprise as the reader continues with the narrative and finds Nanda compared with an obscured moon, perhaps to recall what he may have erroneously supposed, that Nanda and Sundarī are in fact accurately described apart, as the moon apart from the night? We are apt to forget, in considering the verse comparing them to the night and moon, that the moon being a creature of passage will suffer eventual obscuration, and that the night will be without the moon for a time. The difference, however, is marked: the moon must inevitably return. Nanda need not.

The full moon will pass into the dark fortnight, and Nanda seemed even so: an obscure moon at the close of night, sprinkled with the rays of a rising sun.⁶⁸

So Nanda, when he is forcefully ordained, passes on, not as a measure in the cyclical rhythms of the love of the couple (such as are suggested in the love-games the couple play), but out into another world altogether. The time of love, with its rhythms, is a time of pairing constantly maintained, and brief un-couplings, quickened again into togetherness. As such it is a time of great vulnerability. The next three verses, verses employing and reinforcing *paraspara* (mutual) and *anyonya* (one and the other, each together), words formed by compounding words for ‘an other’ (*paraḥ, anyaḥ*), celebrate togetherness as an achievement. This is no frozen tableau, but a dynamic one, moving from stasis to movement, again and again. And in each verse, cued by the verse of maimed splendor, if the disjunctive style is apprehended, one senses the imminent possibility of catastrophe, of that one time the couple will not meet one another in the middle of the tight rope.

The overall suggestion of the verses that frame the time of pleasure is a delicate act of saying one thing while giving a powerful impression of something contrary. It is an effect, it is worth noting, generated by holding out something briefly as a tantalizing possibility, then taking it away.

The effect, one I hope to discuss in more detail elsewhere, connecting it with a more detailed treatment of Aśvaghōṣa’s narrative machinery, may be put impressionistically thus: many of

⁶⁸ *pūrṇaḥ śaśī bahulapakṣagataḥ kṣapānte bālātpena pariṣikta ivābabhāse // (S 5.53c-d)*

Aśvaghōṣa's lines give one the sense of things being effortlessly brought together only for them to be forced apart just at the point of their maximum coincidence, forcing the reader to keep in mind the threat of disjunction being around the corner, even as one is invited, to see the virtues of union. This creates a powerful variety of ambiguity. One may put the ambiguity across in two statements we are left with on a reading of the verse of maimed splendor: "the enduring pair", and "a pair perforce impaired." These are, so to speak, the joints in the environment of pleasure, joints we are alerted to through self-conscious narrative technique. Of course, everything else will seem to assure us that this is but a momentary hallucination, a trick of fear, a shudder drowned in the rhythms of exultant sighs to come. We, however, know it to be but the first glimpse of that giving way of union that will precede the inevitable fall.

More examples of disjunctive style could be shown. I will leave the reader with the simplest example I owe to the keen eye of a reader more awake than I.⁶⁹ Consider now the title of the work. Does not one hear in Saundarananda, however briefly, two names: Saundarī and Nanda? This is a misreading encouraged in several places in the work itself by use of this epithet *saundarī* as a name instead of others he tells us are possible⁷⁰ and the fact that Nanda is himself best described as beautiful, *saundara*. Some have misread it before, as the article "Classical Sanskrit kāvya (200-1200)" in the Encyclopaedia Britannica does, offering us as it does the title "Saundarānanda (sic)", and understanding this to mean "Of Sundarī and Nanda".⁷¹ I do not excuse the mistake, but do wish to stress its naturalness, for we are cued by the poet and tradition to expect it. The work might well have been called "Of Sundarī and Nanda," and were it a comedy, it would take its place along with "Mālavika and Agnimitra," or "Mālati and Mādhava" as pleasant romances of memorable couples; it would have made a beautiful story on its own, and many would feel that this is as it ought to be. But the man absorbs the story, and the woman, brilliant in her introduction, is reduced to but a shadow in the longer shadow of his eventual freedom. The titles swerves in a manner I have called disjunctive from the conjunction of a pair we might want to see, even as the plot itself swerves from the order prescribed for the genre of the long poem, the mahākāvya, which Daṇḍin says in the passage I have had occasion to mention above ought to show us the separation of lovers followed by their marriage. As in many lists, the order is important. Aśvaghōṣa begins with a couple united, and shows us the perfect married couple enduring a consummate separation, so writing one of the most compelling portraits of ruin

⁶⁹ Offered by Professor Gary Tubb as a comment to this author's presentation of some of this material in the course of a talk at the University of Chicago.

⁷⁰ *akṣmyā ca rūpeṇa ca sundarīti stambhena garveṇa ca māninīti / dīptyā ca mānena ca bhāminīti yato babhāṣe trividhena nāmnā* (S 4.3)

⁷¹ "Saundarānanda-kāvya." *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online.* Encyclopædia Britannica, 2011. Web. 22 Aug. 2011: <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/525496/Saundarananda-kavya>>.

ever offered in Sanskrit. All this in what to many is the simplest language kāvya would ever exemplify, in metaphor and in syntax, a style seemingly plain enough to offer even the least experienced student of Sanskrit an aperitif for the main course that lies ahead. In many ways, it is the simplicity that makes its delicate textures an ideal introduction to the phenomenon of style in Sanskrit.

5. The Embrace of Color and Leaf

My reason for burdening the reader with Aśvaghōṣa's keen intelligence in verse stems in part from my desire to see some justice done for his lyrical strengths, but also from my concern with presenting a convincing example of style as an aesthetic resolution to an aesthetic problem born from faith. In a recent example of critical intelligence brought to bear on the *Saundarananda*, Simona Shawney has recently recommended that we consider the poem not only an attempt to stage Nanda's sustained efforts to overcome his seduction with pleasure, but as an indication of its own seduction by the erotic story, a seduction that must be overcome by poet and reader.⁷² This is helpful in suggesting, as it does, that the narrative is, for want of a better word, thicker than has been assumed by many critics thus far. It is, unfortunately, misleading in its talk of 'overcoming'. That word suggests having to leave the narrative of pleasure behind, and this, it strikes me, runs counter to an effect promoted by Aśvaghōṣa everywhere in the *Saundarananda*.

I find it helpful to talk of pleasure as an environment to bring out what Aśvaghōṣa has achieved in his narration of Nanda as a being 'of' pleasure turned from pleasure grounded in the senses as the sole measure of experience to welcome a refined pleasure in freedom un-conjoined, as he puts it at the end, to any possible life-world: be it that of the gods or men. Think of the narrative of pleasure as attempting the construction of a semantic environment, for example, and one can say, more truly of Aśvaghōṣa's *Beautiful Nanda*, that its description of pleasure is so constructed as to incorporate a multiplicity of semantic orientations in this environment. The description, in other words, is ambiguous. It can be received, in the way that those potentially seduced, and those already approximating the insights of a Buddha, such creatures as can walk about a world of beautiful things without getting stuck. It is in part the disjunctive style I have endeavored to present that enables the reader to proceed in such a way as to either get stuck on pleasure, or be instructed in it, in a manner analogous to the way in which the very different characters of the narrative are depicted. There is room for the perspectives of inhabitants like Nanda, who are enraptured and forced out of pleasure, and the Buddha, who enters and leaves such an environment without getting stuck, leaving the beautiful things in a sense as they are, and beholding them with a different eye. An alert reader may find himself, within the space of the narrative, contemplating the sort of cues enabling an analogue to the Buddha's insight. But this is a larger matter than disjunctive style alone can convey.

I should like to leave the reader where I began, with talk of images of ruin. The particular image I close with is a convenient summary of Aśvaghōṣa's art, touches upon the fundamentals of his faith and grammar, and one that gave me reason to use the word 'disjunctive' for one way in which he embodied his faith.

⁷² Simona Shawney, *The Modernity of Sanskrit*, (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London, 2009), 70.

The image concerns leaves. ‘Of all the things Homer said,’ the critic Simonides wrote, “one thing exceeds all others: the tragedy of man is the tragedy of leaves.” In the literatures which can look back to Hebrew and Greek, leaves have long been an inescapable image prospective of death, and the scale of death, and the utter fragility of our mortal beings. This has not been quite the fate of literary leaves in Buddhist literature. Leaves are certainly mentioned, sifted and winnowed when on the trees by the wind, (as with flowers torn in the mouths of birds), and when fallen on the ground they are a vision of the indefinitely many, symbol of trivialities, or sometimes of the vastness of possible consciousnesses beyond our ken capable of counting them all – sometimes the solitary leaf is a fragile and desolate token of time and death. Sometimes it is not the leaf itself that is important, but its changing color, evocative of different moods and tastes in different seasons, invitations to leave of one’s own free will. Then there is Aśvaghōṣa’s image of disjunction, written in a style that is attentive, but not disjunctive.

In his *Life of the Buddha (Buddhacaritam)*, Aśvaghōṣa has the young prince Siddhartha Gautama offer this to his charioteer at their now legendary moment of separation:
sahajenaviyuyjanteparṇarāgeṇapādapāḥ /anyenānyasyaviśleṣaḥkimpunarnabhaviṣyati,
(Buddhacaritam, 6.49) which says, in rough and ready paraphrase, that “trees are disjoined from the most intimate, innate color of their leaves: how could one not be uncoupled from another?” Or, one might put it: how could one not slip from the embrace of another, for *viśleṣaḥ* is the coming undone of a twining embrace that seems to unify what is otherwise distinct.

This is a verse that can make some claim to be of interest on its own terms in a history of literary figuration, especially given its peculiar attention to the ruin of leaves at the moment of separation before their fall. That is important, for not all writers have attended to ruin of this kind. Consider, to take one example, Virgil’s magnificent line from the *Aeneid* (book 6, 307-9) beautifully rendered by Robert Fitzgerald:

—as many souls
 As leaves that yield their hold on boughs and fall
 Through forests in the early frost of Autumn

And compare the distinct kinds of attention: one that considers leaves that yield their hold on bough, with trees that yield their hold on the color of their leaves before they fall. That, at the level of image alone, introduces a distancing effect: for the connection between a tree and its leaf, and that between a tree and the color of its leaves is surely not the same thing. For the last genitive, the “its” in “its leaves” is ambiguous. It takes a special quality of attention to want to render this difference palpable: a difference as tenuous as the otherwise intimate connection between a tree and its colored leaves is here claimed to be. (The effect is much clearer when one follows through on the metaphor; are our most cherished bonds with people to be likened to the relation, not between a tree and its leaves, but between a tree and the color of its leaves? – to be awake to the undertones of the word *rāga*, that it can mean color as well as passion, lends a

certain aura to the verse, but does nothing to take away from the sting of it, or render it a more natural thing to say). Truly, as Nanda says of the Buddha, he is someone who habitually sees distinctions (*viśeṣadarśims*).

Then there is the way in which Siddhārtha says it. The tone is assured, as befits the young prince at the threshold of his former life, in a somber, and contemplative mood, and offered as the words of a would-be teacher inclined to persuade: it is a minor gem in the mouth of a nascent teacher of wisdom, involving a particular example, entire unto itself in a line, and a general lesson to be drawn from it. But even here, in this didactic mood, note the quality of mind that would insist on separating the word ‘innate’ (*sahaja*, in the instrumental, *sahajena*) from the noun it qualifies, ‘color of leaves’ or ‘color of a leaf’ (*parṇarāga*, in the instrumental, *parṇarāgena*), a separation effected by the verb *viyujyante*, meaning disjoin. Here it is simply not the case that this is an effect of verse intruding into order of thought and natural order of speech. It is verse exploited to render salient a quality of attention that is not commonplace, not least for its ability to attend, with accuracy, and not indulge in a tragic sensibility. The attention is clinical, and is not offered in a style I have called disjunctive. It is a verse recognizing disjunction, or rather, seeing disjunction as it is. A quality of attention like this in a time of flowering trees, and leaves in color, paying attention to discolored times ahead and their conditions in the present would require what I call disjunctive style. The disjunctive style is a style that captures the truth of the Buddha’s insight, the turn that precedes the fall, even in a time where leaf and color embrace.

The true trick is to note that the recognition of the turn in beautiful things that precedes their overthrow need not imply a reversal of judgment. In the Aṅguttara-Nikāya, we hear the Buddha say: “*tiṭṭhanticitrāni tath’evaloke / ath’ etthadhīrāvinayantichandanti*”: “beautiful things stay as they are in the world. . . . heroes, instead, discipline their delighting appetite.” Aśvaghōṣa has offered us in his disjunctive style a way of embodying the occasion for such a sensibility in language, a way of attending to the ruin that is giving way before the fall that all those who find pleasure in beauty will suffer, while ‘letting the beautiful things be as they are.’ To write about the truth of pleasure and pleasurable, and yet ruinously well – this is Aśvaghōṣa’s achievement. His own colophon says of him that he was a venerable monk, a great poet, and a greatly eloquent speaker. I would add to this only that he be listed as among the very greatest poets, in every speed, at every scale, of each kind of ruin.

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Appendix: The Story of Nanda

With the majority of great works of literature in Sanskrit, we overhear familiar stories retold, but retold more strangely, perhaps. What A. K. Ramanujan said of the *Mahābhārata* was once true of most stories told in the use of language called *kāvya*, whether in what we would call verse, or prose: we do not hear it for the first time. This was true for Asvaghosa's *Buddhacarita*, and his *Saundarananda*. At least, we should like to think we do not hear it for the first time. Most must follow the advice of one professor, V. Nabokov, who expected all his students to re-read, which is just to say, read well. As painful as this is, as a lover of minutiae, I begin with something like a renaissance painter's cartoon, to approximate the effect, lest the verses we are meant to overhear retold turn to something else, a disagreeable way for getting on with a story we do not know, or reproduce the experience in part of the first year student, looking for verb, and noun, in stunned disbelief that this, once, could have been music for pleasure.

Aśvaghōṣa's story of Nanda, the Buddha's cousin in the long Sanskrit poem, *Saundarananda*, or *Beautiful Nanda*, repeats in broad outline the basic narrative long-familiar in the Buddhist tradition. I say "Beautiful Nanda", and not "Handsome Nanda", as Covill says, or as Johnston had it in 1932, "Nanda The Fair". The basic narrative is embedded in a longer story to which I cannot do justice here, despite its being of central importance for seeding the narrative of Nanda. The first two chapters introduce the city, Kapilavastu, and King Śuddhodhana respectively. The third retells the story of Siddhārtha Gautama in brief, and it is only in the background of his awakening that we begin the story of his half-brother Nanda in chapter four. What follows is a cartoon of the story that takes fourteen chapters to unfold.

Nanda, beguiled by his half-brother, none other than the Buddha, is teased out of his domestic bliss, where he had lived with his wife, transported in pleasure, environed in delight. The separation is catastrophic for his wife, and initially, for Nanda. Failing instruction in the pleasures of mendacity – he cannot, he says, face the pleasures of a forest life⁷³ – he becomes persistent and eloquent in stating his wish to continue in his domestic orientations. He argues his way to the decision to return home, to continue in the work of love, where he can indulge desire and keep in

⁷³ The pleasures are not the result of imposition. In an earlier rendition of Nanda's story, there is an artful moment when the Buddha, entering Nanda's monastic cell shortly after his ordination, asks (vasana): "*kacci Nanda, imasmiṃ sāsane abhiramasīti?*" Warren's 'are you content,' cannot do justice to this delicious juxtaposition. As for Aśvaghōṣa's version, consider Nanda's remark: *vanavāsasukhāt parāṇmukhaḥ* (8.13a-b). Let us draw out the sting in this in demotic English: I cannot face the pleasures of idyllic dwelling. Again, for the use of 'ram', see...; it is a humorless appropriation of Buddhism, whether Asia or Europe, that misses the central thought of leisure, happiness and ease as the life they wish to see themselves fulfill, and exemplify.

Nanda's story is 182, in ii, 92. See *Jātaka*, together with commentary, edited V. Fausboll, and translated T. W. Rhys Davids, vol II., London, Trubner and Co., 1879, 92.

with such duties as are enjoined upon him by the ethos of domesticity.⁷⁴ (he does not wish to be a painted copy of a monk, like a lamp) He is, nevertheless, dramatically re-oriented by the Buddha to a prospect of heaven. (The Buddha intercedes when arguments and stern-brows on the part of a senior monk fail). Nanda is transformed by his vision of heaven. He now strives to earn his way to pleasures un-housed, if I may use Othello's felicitous phrase, superior to any he has known before. It is not long, however, before he is shocked by a horror revealed by Ananda who is presented as finding remarkable humor in Nanda's conceits. Ananda reveals the bounds set on heaven by time – indicated that in this, pleasure is something 'housed' just as much as domestic bliss – and the consequent, undignified ruin of those who once enjoyed heaven. Nanda, dismayed, requests instruction in a form of pleasure not so indexed. And striving, reconstituting himself in line with Buddhist self-cultivation, wins through, leaving nothing to do but marvel in praise at the un-housed freedom that is his.⁷⁵ He can then say: "my mind is stuck no longer, not on my own home, nor my wife, not the apsaras, not the gods."

⁷⁴ 7.47a-b: *yāsyāmi tasmād gr̥ham eva bhūyaḥ | kāmam̐ kariṣye vidhivat sakāmam*

⁷⁵ this summary, is more of the story of Nanda in the Saundarananda, then a brief of the book. Mahakavya is more than lyric, it requires careful handling of plot and drama and time-scale. Nanda's story is self-consciously embedded in a much larger story, which is indicated by the frame: Gautama, and Siddhartha Gautama. Revolution in the consciousness, and in the possibilities of a life.