External Examiner's Report on the Dissertation of Zuzana Špicová
"'For Bhīṣma's Destruction!'
Ambā, Śikhaṇḍinī and Śikhaṇḍin in the *Mahābhārata*"

Submitted in 2021 at the Faculty of Arts,
Institute of Asian Studies, Literatures of Asia and Africa

I.   **Brief summary of the dissertation**
[It is advisable that the summary provided here should be no longer than one paragraph in length (longer summaries are superfluous as both an abstract and an author's overview are mandatory components of the dissertation).]

The dissertation focuses on one particular narrative within the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*: the narrative of the Kaurava patriarch Bhīṣma, and in particular the narrative of how his death came about. The approach is narratological, and the early chapters set up this approach by introducing the terminology and method of narratological analysis which is then applied in the subsequent chapters. In exploring the narrative of Bhīṣma's death, particular attention is paid to the creativity of the various characters who supply different parts of this narrative, and to the characters who make up their audiences. It is shown that as the narrator of the *Ambopākhyāna* (Mbh 5.170–193), Bhīṣma himself constructs important aspects of this narrative and that his contribution interacts intertextually with other better-known narratives that involve similar themes. The central chapters focus on the successive characters Ambā, Śikhaṇḍinī, and Śikhaṇḍin, and the final chapter integrates the discoveries of those chapters into an explanatory overview of Bhīṣma's life and death.

II.   **Brief overall evaluation of the dissertation**
[It is advisable that the evaluation of the overall level of achievement provided at this point should be about a paragraph long. A brief evaluation of this kind is particularly helpful in the case of longer reports, since the examiner's overall opinion on the quality of the dissertation can be clearly expressed here, before a more detailed analysis of the individual aspects of the dissertation is provided.]

The project undertaken in this dissertation is original and extremely interesting, and the results are significant. By setting aside the habitual Indological approach to the *Mahābhārata* which sees it as an almost accidental text built up over a long period of time by redactors with various interests, the candidate is able to approach the text as a single, integrated work of art. Although this dissertation is not original in seeing the text as a unified whole, it is original in applying a narratological approach

to the narrative/s that explain Bhīṣma's death. The approach is extremely well introduced and the key insights that it yields – primarily that Bhīṣma is an unreliable narrator who carefully manages his own story – are very well established and discussed. The dissertation shows a high level of engagement with a body of modern theoretical literature, a high level of engagement with long and difficult ancient Sanskrit text, and a knowledge of Sanskrit sufficient for its purpose. Although there are weaknesses in some of the sub-arguments and in some aspects of the candidate's coverage of the scholarly literature on the *Mahābhārata* (see below), the overall achievement of the dissertation is considerable: the argument is convincing, the contribution to the understanding of Bhīṣma's story is robust, and the prospects for future application of the narratological method to other aspects of the *Mahābhārata* are exciting.

III. Detailed evaluation of the dissertation and its individual aspects

[Please provide a detailed evaluation of the dissertation. Among other things, this evaluation should consider the criteria listed below (preferably providing examples from the text to illustrate all critical points). You can either organise your comments separately, according to the individual criteria, or formulate a longer overall summary addressing all the criteria at once.]

1. Structure of the argument

[Is the argumentation lucid throughout? Is it always clear what the author is attempting to express and why he/she is doing so at specific instances in the text? Is the dissertation clearly structured? Is the dissertation aimed at achieving a clearly set objective and is the author successful in following this objective?]

The argumentation is clear, cogent, and well structured, as facilitated by the initial "outline of the thesis" (pp. 22–27) and by the introductions and conclusions to the various chapters and subchapters. The overall objective of the dissertation is clearly stated (p. 22), the divisions into chapters and subchapters correspond to the various logical steps in moving towards its achievement, and overall the dissertation is successful in doing what it set out to do.

Sometimes the introductory overviews or statements presented at the beginnings of chapters and subchapters contain claims that seem slightly problematic or mysterious at that stage, and that are only explained and argued for later, within the body of the chapter or subchapter (for example, see the mention of the *sīmāvṛkṣa* on p. 247). This became less and less of a problem as the dissertation proceeded, simply because this reader learned to expect the introductory overviews to report the results of arguments that at that stage had not yet been made.

However, since this is a general feature of the presentational style, it might usefully have been signposted in the introduction, so that the reader would know of it in advance; either that, or the insertion of phrases such as "In this subchapter I will argue that …" would solve the problem. On some occasions (see details below) discussions of specific minor points are placed later in the text than they probably ought to be, but in general the dissertation made very good sense when read from beginning to end in the presented order, and as a reader I felt that I was in safe hands.

2. Formal aspects of the dissertation

> [Is the author coherent in the use of abbreviations, syntax of bibliographical references, transcriptions of foreign terms, etc.? Are the footnotes formatted correctly? Is the language of the dissertation grammatically correct and free of linguistic infelicities? Is the dissertation visually well-presented, and graphically well-formatted?]

Overall the dissertation is extremely well presented. However, there are a number of minor deficiencies and inconsistencies in this regard.

It is clear that the candidate is not a native English speaker, and with this in mind, she is to be congratulated on expressing herself so clearly. At no point in my reading of the dissertation did I feel that I had failed to understand what was meant. However, the structure and syntax of the sentences was sometimes idiosyncratic, and I would recommend that if any parts of the dissertation are presented for publication in English (which they ought to be), they should first be edited by a native English speaker. I shall not here present a list of syntactical infelicities, but one recurring idiosyncracy was in the word order of questions: "Why Bhīṣma died?", although comprehensible, is not good English, regardless of specific dialect; it should be "Why did Bhīṣma die?".

There are some spelling errors/typos, for example "reat" (p. 15 n. 9), "androgyneous", "impotant", "discerneable" (p. 16), "fact" (p. 26, plural s missing), "Devānāgarī", "Nīlakaṇtha" (p. 31), "Tharpar" (pp. 51, 325), "what" (p. 64, for "that"), "expendable" (p. 83, for "expandable"), "Ayodhya" (p. 120 n. 92), *itihāsam* (p. 144, underdot missing), "necessary" (p. 180, for "necessarily"), "ascesy" (p. 223, for "askesis" or "asceticism"?), *vasusambhava* (p. 224, underdot missing), "Abhimayu" (p. 229). This is not an exhaustive list. Overall, however, the dissertation has been carefully proof-read and is relatively free of such errors. The punctuation is generally excellent, though sometimes a comma is used to join two statements in places where a semicolon would have been better (e.g. p. 32, beginning of last paragraph on page).

The referencing is clear and consistent, but I found it unfortunate that the references were collected together at the end into several different lists. The

rationale for this is clear: there are two main categories, primary sources and then secondary sources, with the primary sources being subdivided into Sanskrit texts/translations and "later Mahābhāratas", and the secondary sources being subdivided into "literary theory/narratology" and "Indology". These divisions reflect the different types of primary source that are used in the dissertation, and the different academic disciplines that are used as lenses through which to view them. However, in my view the bibliographical details should be presented primarily for the benefit of the reader, and in that respect the only relevant criterion is that the reader is able swiftly to locate, in the bibliography, any particular source that is referred to in the body of the dissertation. It is unnecessary and unhelpful to require the reader, before looking up a particular surname in the secondary-source list, to determine correctly whether the source is a narratological or an Indological one, and then to locate the correct list to look in from among several. All secondary sources should be listed alphabetically by surname, in one list. Likewise if some of the primary sources (the "later Mahābhāratas") are to be referred to in the same way as the secondary ones – i.e., by surname and date – then it is best for the reader if they are incorporated into the same list as the secondary sources. As for the "Sanskrit texts and translations", it is easiest for the reader if these too are presented in the same single list, and the way they are presented there should match the way they are referred to in the dissertation. For example, if the *Mānava-Dharamaśāstra* is referred to by title, chapter, and verse (e.g. "see *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* 4.22"), then the reader will visit the bibliography primarily in order to find out which edition those chapter and verse numbers refer to, and so the entry needs to be under M for *Mānava*, not under O for Olivelle. Listing this source under O presumes that readers are already in possession of the very information that they are probably visiting the bibliography in order to find out. If on other occasions the author refers to, for example, "Olivelle 2005: 233", then there needs to be an entry under O as well, and so where the same source is referred to in two different ways in the dissertation, one bibliographical entry can redirect the reader to another; in this particular case one would put, under *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, "see Olivelle 2005". The basic principle is that readers are going to visit the bibliography in order to locate an entry for a specific text-title or for a specific surname (and date), depending on the nature of the reference; and they should be enabled to find the entry they are looking for as quickly as possible. In practical terms, the only permissible separation into two lists would be to separate sources that are referred to by title (e.g. *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*) from sources that are referred to by surname and date (e.g. Olivelle 2005). Such a division – which is optional – may or may not map onto a notional (and in fact probably incoherent) division between "primary" and "secondary" sources. I make these points not because of any arbitrary preference for one system over another, but because on many occasions it took me longer than it need have to find the item I was looking for.

The sources for "Sullivan" are alphabetically out of place at present. The sources Chopra 1988 and Tewary 2013 are mentioned in the same way as bibliographical sources (p. 11) but are not included in the bibliography, presumably because they are not written sources. To avoid this problem, the title "bibliography" might have been replaced by "list of references".

In general, I would suggest that scholarly sources should be referred to and listed according to the date of first publication, if possible; so with Hiltebeitel 2011a, 2014, and 2016, it would be better for these to be Hiltebeitel 2005a, 2001, and 2005b respectively. If the first "edition" cannot be accessed by the author and so its page numberings cannot be used, then a reprint should be used instead, but the date (and ideally the other details) of its first publication should be provided within the bibliographic entry, for the reader's convenience.

The use of the first edition is particularly helpful where subsequent editions are electronic editions without page numbering. For example, the reference on p. 40 to Meister 2011 has no page number, presumably because the edition consulted had no page numbers. It is not clear from the bibliography whether this is an electronic version of a previously printed source; but if it is, then it would be more helpful to refer to the printed edition and thus to give the page number for the quotation.

Within the body of the dissertation, I found the italicisation scheme rather mysterious at times. The italicisation of text-titles and Sanskrit words is standard, but some words were italicised that are effectively ordinary (albeit technical) English words – for example: metaleptic, paratext, palimpsest, formulae, and various others. Many English words are loanwords from other languages (or neologisms based on loanwords), but once they have passed into English they are English words, and so they do not need italics. When titles of articles or book chapters are mentioned within the body of the dissertation, they should be presented in non-italic style, with inverted commas around them (conversely, there is no need to use inverted commas around italicised text-titles or book-titles). The English plural "s", when placed at the end of italicised Sanskrit words, should in my opinion not be italicised, so that it is clear where the Sanskrit word ends, and that the "s" is a plural marker. At present in the dissertation both conventions – italicisation and non-italicisation of the plural "s" – are in evidence, which is not ideal.

3. *Use of sources and/or material*

[Does the author work transparently with secondary sources? Are all relevant sources made use of? Are the primary sources used properly and reference made to their original language wherever appropriate? Are the sources employed in a methodologically correct manner? If the dissertation is based on data collection, is the methodology used for data collection and analysis coherent? Are all the individual steps in data analysis justified and well executed? Is the method of data collection and

processing in line with the main research question or hypotheses tested? Does the interpretation of the results proposed by the author follow from the results of the empirical research or sources on which the work relies?]

The candidate deals sensibly and respectfully with the work of other scholars. Overall the coverage of relevant scholarly literature on the *Mahābhārata* is good, but mention is made below of some places where it might have been improved. With one or two exceptions (see below), the candidate's knowledge of the relevant *Mahābhārata* passages is exemplary. The *Mahābhārata* text is used well, with the original Sanskrit quoted as necessary and the candidate's own translations provided (see below for some comments on individual translations). The integration of modern, novelistic versions of the story of Ambā/Śikhaṇḍin into the discussion and argument is a feature of this dissertation and is done well, with appropriate methodological sensitivity.

There follows a list of points where I thought the dissertation showed weaknesses or errors, sometimes of presentation, sometimes of fact, and sometimes of interpretation. These are arranged broadly in order of appearance. Most of them are very minor points. I have marked with an asterisk those points which I consider least minor – which is not to say that I consider them to be major.

In the abstract (p. 6) Saṃjaya is labelled a "bard". I think this is the only time that he is thus labelled. The label is presumably intended to refer to his caste grouping (his *sūta jāti*), but it is problematic because although in the secondary literature *sūta*s are sometimes stereotypically said to be "bards" and/or "charioteers", Saṃjaya never really acts in either of these capacities. Perhaps if Dhṛtarāṣṭra has not been blind, Saṃjaya would have driven his chariot into battle; but we do not know this. His capacity as a textual performer seems to be due to his being given the divine eye more than anything else.

In the discussion of Sukthankar on pp. 30–31 the candidate says that Sukthankar "warned not to see [the reconstructed text] as an archetype". This is true, but nonetheless it is, precisely, the archetype, since "*the oldest form of the text which it is possible to reach, on the basis of the manuscript material available*" is a good definition of what the word "archetype" means in textual criticism, as confirmed by Sukthankar's stemma of *Ādiparvan* versions. On this vexed question, the candidate could usefully have referred to Simon Brodbeck, "Translating Vaidya's *Harivaṃśa*" (*Asian Literature and Translation* 6.1, 2019), pp. 28ff. That article is also relevant on the question of the genre-label "epic".

On p. 31, when the candidate writes that "Only sixteen of the manuscripts bear dates", it should be specified that this is a comment on the *Ādiparvan* only.

On p. 32 n. 26, the word "probably" is out of place, since there is hardly any doubt over Nīlakaṇṭha's dating: for details, see the recent work of Christopher

Minkowski.

On p. 39 n. 33, the quotation from Hämeen-Anttila is potentially damaging for the candidate's project, since it suggests that the discipline and approach of narratology may have been constituted on the basis of only a subsection of the relevant data, and if this is so then its applicability to the *Mahābhārata* would, in the first instance, be moot. Yet the candidate is very confident in applying a narratological approach to this text, and the overall frame of the dissertation is that the project can tell us new things about the *Mahābhārata*, rather than telling us about whether narratology, as hithertofore conceived, is universally valid.

On p. 43 a distinction is made between "events I" and "events II". I think it would have been beneficial to discuss this distinction in a bit more depth here, perhaps with the use of an example or two from some very well-known narrative. This is partly because the distinction might seem at first glance to be slightly arbitrary (or based on interpretation), and partly because the labels "event I" and "event II" do not in themselves carry any indication of what kind of difference is being drawn (they are not intuitively compehensible labels, and they are thus relatively unhelpful as labels). In a related fashion, when these terms are used in the subsequent chapters, it might have been helpful to summarise briefly what they mean, and/or to refer back to this introductory discussion here.

On p. 48, where the candidate writes that "The *Mahābhārata* … to some extent, includes information of early auditors' comments on its parts, in the form of listeners to what is considered Vyāsa's narrative, i.e. the intratextual audiences around Janamejaya and Śaunaka who might represent the authorial audience". I think this is problematic, and the candidate signals ("to some extent", "might") that she thinks so too. How would we know whether the responses of characters within the text match or even resemble the responses of ancient flesh-and-blood audiences? Any view on this issue is a guess, and so it should not be allowed to seem as if the approach of the dissertation depends upon any such view.

On p. 49 n. 41, reference could profitably be made to Shubha Pathak, "'Epic' as an Amnesiac Metaphor: Finding the Word to Compare Ancient Greek and Sanskrit Poems" (in Pathak, ed., *Figuring Religions: Comparing Ideas, Images, and Activities*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013).

*In general I found the candidate a bit swift to bracket out the context of Ugraśravas's performance(s) to Śaunaka and the *ṛṣi*s. So for example on p. 55 we read of "Sauti's repetition", but on the basis of the narratological approach we might rather suppose that Ugraśravas Sauti is presenting an interpretation or a version of Vaiśaṃpāyana's performance, for the benefit of his specific audience which is rather different from Vaiśaṃpāyana's. I can see why the candidate would want to minimise the possible interference of this dialogical situation, but nonetheless I think the problem should be faced up to and discussed. On the face of it, we would expect Ugraśravas Sauti's performance to be doing rather more than merely "fixing" (i.e.,

making permanent, pp. 55, 56) Vaiśaṃpāyana's prior performance. On p. 68 we read that "The tertiary narrator and any others on the higher levels have to be considered only when there are sufficient textual signs of their importance in the specific situation"; but no argument has been presented to show that such textual signs are absent in the case of Ugraśravas. The interplay between Ugraśravas and Śaunaka in the first few *parvan*s shows us, for example, that Śaunaka is particularly interested in the Bhārgavas, etc., so I would say that there certainly are textual signs that the contents of Ugraśravas's narrative would be constrained or affected by his dialogical situation. The method by which the candidate argues that Bhīṣma's narration is unreliable – namely that it differs in significant ways from the more authoritative account given by Vaiśaṃpāyana – is not available to us in the case of Ugraśravas's narration because Ugraśravas's narration is "higher" than Vaiśaṃpāyana's.

*Relatedly (since the double-placement of an authoritative Vyāsa is the text's only real remedy for the above problem), I also found the author a little unforthcoming on the status of Vyāsa. Vyāsa is clearly the compiler/author of the narrative that Vaiśaṃpāyana presented to Janamejaya at the snake sacrifice, but on p. 66 he is also said to be "perhaps, the author-editor of the finalised text" (i.e., presumably, the whole *Mahābhārata* text as presented to the flesh-and-blood audience), and likewise on p. 91 it is said that he "might be also deemed to be identical with the narrator/editor [of the whole *Mahābhārata*]". It would have been helpful to give some examples from within the text (e.g. 1.13.6–7, etc.), to show that this suggestion is not just something adduced by the later tradition. This issue is relevant also on p. 70, when we read that "It is the implied author [i.e., Vyāsa] who communicates with various audiences of the text". For this to apply to Śaunaka as well as to Janamejaya, Vyāsa has to be the implied author also of the parts of Ugraśravas's presentation that were not presented previously by Vaiśaṃpāyana; and yet Vyāsa's authoring of those parts is not nearly as clear or explicit as his authoring of what Vaiśaṃpāyana presents.

On p. 69 n. 64, the quotation provided is from Dhand's 2004 article in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, not from her 2008 book as currently claimed.

On p. 71 the candidate writes: "I argue that their personalities still have to be taken into account when they narrate with the boon of divine vision, and much more so when they narrate without it". The candidate should be careful to announce "I argue that" only in connection with things that she actually does argue. Many scholars sometimes claim "I argue that X" when in fact they assume that X; or they claim "I would argue that X" without saying under what conditions they might do so, and then go on, again, to assume that X. In any case, in the present instance it is not immediately clear how the interpreter would apply different gradations of taking the narrator's personality into account; and so if the point is relevant to the arguments that are made in subsequent chapters, then it might reasonably be explained in a bit

more detail here, perhaps with an example or two.

On p. 78 Vaiśaṃpāyana is called "the implied author"; but he is not really the implied author, since his role is presented as that of a passive conduit (as per p. 82, where he is rather "the conveyer of the voice of the implied author").

On p. 83, "8 verses" should read "8 lines". Likewise on p. 136, "aforementioned verse" should read "aforementioned line".

On p. 91 we read that "it is unclear if it is Ambā who is excluded from the [book 13] narration, or either of her two interchangeable sisters". I don't think this is unclear: one of the two interchangeable sisters is excluded – not Ambā, who was paid for with *vīryaśulka*. Discussions later in the dissertation show that this is the candidate's view, so it seems odd not to state it here.

On the same page it is said that "[Bāhlīka's] presence is logical" when Bhīṣma discusses what to do with Ambā, but this needs some explaining since Bāhlīka has apparently settled elsewhere (*pitṛbhrātṝn parityajya*, 5.147.27).

On the same page, in n. 74, the claim that "daughters of the kings of Kāśi in the text usually need divine intervention to get pregnant" is underdetermined by the evidence presented. This is one of a handful of places where the candidate makes incidental claims that she does not support with evidence. In general, such claims should either be properly supported, or omitted.

On p. 93 the full reference for the passage discussed should be provided. Subchapter 2.3 is slightly unfortunate in that its subdivisions for "summary", "context", and "style and narrators" are at a different level of subheading than the congruent subdivisions for the other accounts discussed previously.

On p. 94 n. 75, last sentence of footnote, "Bhīṣma" should read "Arjuna".

On p. 107 it is said that the Śālva that Kṛṣṇa fought against is "presumably a diiferent Śālva than Ambā's would-be husband"; this is enlarged upon slightly on p. 235, but the point should be supported, at its first mention, with a bit more discussion of the issues involved. The reader should not be asked to presume.

On p. 108 n. 79 a distinction should be made between *upākhyāna* titles that are contained within the critically reconstituted text, and *upākhyāna* titles that are only known from paratextual data such as colophons. In this respect the contents lists in Mbh 1.1–2, although paratextual in some sense (as mentioned on p. 195 n. 157), are nonetheless part of the text in a way that the colophon data are not.

On p. 114 n. 87 I am not sure that the candidate should be so sweeping in her dismissal of the vocatives. For narratological purposes the vocatives may not be very useful, but in many contexts it is nonetheless clear to whom they refer, and their content is an important aspect of what is being said – for example, where they highlight a specific aspect of the addressee's personal history or skill-set.

On p. 115 and on several occasions thereafter (especially in subchapter 3.5), there is some potential ambiguity in the use of the idea of credibility. Because the idea of credibility (whether a character is likely to be believed) and the idea of

reliability (whether a character is likely to be telling the truth) are somewhat intimately related, it is not immediately obvious that credibility should be grouped together with authority. In my own personal experience, authority makes people incredible. The performance of authority very often includes the deliberate utterances of untruths, because nothing demonstrates authority more convincingly than being able to claim what is not the case without being countermanded. In this perspective, someone who is authoritative is almost by definition lacking in credibility, even if lots of people go along with what the authority says because they have no choice. For any discerning seeker after truth, the credibility imputed to another should closely approximate to their reliability, because it is no good believing someone who is not telling the truth. So in this dissertation, if both terms are to be used, it would be desirable to differentiate them carefully, and to explain why credibility is being grouped with authority. It might perhaps be preferable to eliminate the concept of credibility altogether, since even unreliable/unauthoritative individuals *can* be believed (e.g. by someone who has just met them, etc.).

On p. 119 n. 90, I think *Virāṭaparvan* is probably intended where it says *Vanaparvan*.

On pp. 123–124, since this is the first mention of the Bhārgavas' prophecy, the chapter and verse reference should be given.

On p. 129 n. 100 there is mention of "scholarly debate", so some scholarly references should be supplied in order to support the point.

On the whole the candidate's translations are very convincing, but there are some exceptions. On p. 143 some explanation should be given for the translation of *yaśas* as "energy". On p. 147, the translation of *tāṃ* should be reconsidered. A few lines later, "spies" should probably be singular (*cāreṇa*). On p. 167, isn't *dvitīyaṃ* "a second one" rather than "twice"? On pp. 193, 223, and 252, the translation of *daiva* as "fate", although reproduced by many scholars, is in my view perverse and misleading, as this translation seems deliberately to obscure the divine aspect behind the Kurukṣetra events (i.e., the divine plan, that which the gods are doing) which the word *daiva* naturally and regularly alludes to. I suspect that the translation "fate" is part and parcel of the old diachronic approach whereby it is fantasised that there once was a (superior) proto-*Mahābhārata* that did not feature the divine plan and instead presented a story at the human level only.

On p. 143 n. 115 it might be relevant to mention that Karṇa calls Bhīṣma a brahmin (5.21.9).

On p. 157 and possibly elsewhere, the letters labelling the various *pāda*s of a verse are presented in a somewhat haphazard manner, when a sixteen-syllable line is identified with just one *pāda*-letter, or a d-*pāda* is labelled with the letter c. Here it seems that the candidate is using the letters a and c to indicate specific lines rather than specific *pāda*s. In John Smith's electronic text the lines are marked a, c, and sometimes e, but the lines thus identified are actually lines ab, cd, and ef according

to the lettering used in the critical edition.

On p. 160 the candidate should explain why it is "surprising" that Bhīṣma does not kill Śālva. My suspicion is that it would be bad form to kill a high-ranking *kṣatriya* at a *svayaṃvara*; it should be enough (as it is here) to demonstrate one's superior martial skills.

*On p. 165 and in the discussion of the *pativratā* intertextuality (which in general I thought was one of the strongest aspects of the dissertation), I don't think that the general structure that is sketched out really applies to all the stories mentioned. It seems to me that the intertextuality discussed here is not with a general *pativratā*-story genre, but with certain specific stories, namely all those mentioned here by the candidate *except* the story of Sāvitrī. The Sāvitrī story is not really discussed in this subchapter and it doesn't fit the sketched pattern, specifically in point 3 "faced his [the husband's] suspicion". As the candidate admits (p. 174), Sāvitrī "does not face the suspicion literally"; it is true that she proves her *pātivratya* to Yama before the couple are reunited, but there is no suspicion at all – Yama comes for Satyavat not because he suspects that Sāvitrī doesn't completely love her husband, but because it is his time to die. I think the discussion here would perhaps be strengthened if the Sāvitrī story were set aside; the Sāvitrī story certainly has something in common with the other stories discussed here, but it doesn't share some of their most salient points in the context of the discussion.

*Another aspect of the discussions in this subchapter is the ambiguity between choosing someone and actually marrying them. Here I think the important thing is sexual intercourse: an unconsummated marriage is no real marriage at all, since the whole patriarchal point of marriage is to legitimise the production of heirs. Accordingly, the eight types of "marriage" as enumerated in the lawbooks are in fact eight different ways for a man to achieve sexual intercourse with a woman. For example, Ulūpī is Arjuna's "wife" not because they fell in love and decided to spend time together and work together as a team, but because they once had the kind of sex that can make a son. So I would disagree with what Morales-Harley says as quoted in n. 129, to the effect that choosing each other constitutes a *gāndharva* marriage; rather, I would say that a *gāndharva* marriage is when a man and a woman choose each other for sex and then have sex. So I very much doubt that there was a *gāndharva* marriage between Ambā and Śālva as suggested on p. 168 at n. 130: the word *manasā* is conspicuous in all the verses referred to here, and is significant in suggesting that this "choice" had not been followed through sexually.

On p. 165 the allusion to "proper" and "loose sense" *svayaṃvara*s would be more convincing if the candidate were explicitly to draw on existing scholarly literature: Jamison, McGrath, also John Brockington, "Epic Svayaṃvaras" (in Raghunath Panda and Madhusudan Mishra, eds, *Voice of the Orient: a Tribute to Prof. Upendranath Dhal*, Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 2006). Likewise on the following page (and elsewhere), the mention of "'*tena satyena*' sentences" would be

more convincing if the candidate were explicitly to draw on existing scholarly literature on the *satyakriyā*: Burlingame, W. Norman Brown, Thompson, etc.

On p. 169 it should be properly demonstrated (rather than simply claimed) that the story of Nala and Damayantī is "set in earlier times" than the story of Rāma and Sītā. Also, I am not sure that this is the real point here, since the story of Sītā as told in the *Mahābhārata* can be "somehow aware of" the story of Damayantī as told in the *Mahābhārata* regardless of which story is set earlier.

On p. 173 n. 135 some reference to scholarly literature on the *rākṣasa* marriage (e.g. Jamison) is required in order to support the point. As I recall, Jamison makes it clear that the girl crying and struggling is an important part of proper *rākṣasa*-marriage protocol, and so it seems to me that that is what Ambā should have done when Bhīṣma abducted her, whether or not she was happy to be abducted (as "Śālva" claims). So I am not sure that "her" claim that she cried and struggled really answers "Śālva's" claim that she was happy to be abducted by Bhīṣma.

With regard to the idea of being *anyapūrvā* (p. 177), please see Simon Brodbeck, "The Rejection of Śakuntalā in the *Mahābhārata*: Dynastic Considerations" (in Saswati Sengupta and Deepika Tandon, eds, *Revisiting Abhijñānaśākuntalam: Love, Lineage and Language in Kālidāsa's Nāṭaka*, Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2011), pp. 222–227; also Simon Brodbeck, "Mapping Masculinities in the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*" (in Ilona Zsolnay, ed., *Being a Man: Negotiating Ancient Constructs of Masculinity*, London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 131–132.

On p. 177 n. 137, when it is said that Rukmiṇī "belonged to another [i.e. other than Kṛṣṇa] first", I don't think this is right, since the wedding had not happened yet, and the only thing we know about Rukmiṇī's own thoughts on the matter is that she wanted to marry Kṛṣṇa (Hv 87.15) before her father betrothed her to Śiśupāla apparently without consulting her. Hv 87.14–15 seem to link to the story of Nala and Damayantī, so perhaps it is truer to say that Rukmiṇī "belonged to another [i.e. Kṛṣṇa] first".

*On p. 178 when it is said that "Śālva does not believe her [i.e. Ambā]", I am not sure that this is the point. In Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* it does not matter whether or not Rāma believes that Sītā has had sex with Rāvaṇa; after killing Rāvaṇa he rejects her because in principle there must be some doubt over this. Likewise in the end it does not even matter that the gods intervene to reassure him of Sītā's purity or that Sītā walks through fire to prove it, because the removal of his own personal doubt is beside the point, as the events of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* show. The intervention of the gods allows the couple to be reunited briefly and for Sītā to conceive Kuśa and Lava, but that is all. It does not allow them to be reunited properly as king and queen, because only those who were present on the occasion of Sītā's fire-ordeal could possibly be convinced, beyond any doubt, that Sītā did not have sex with Rāvaṇa; most of Rāma's subjects were not there on that occasion, and it is their opinion that counts. So in the case of Ambā and Śālva, even if the gods had appeared and

12

convinced Śālva that Ambā had always loved him and had never even wanted Bhīṣma (or his brother) for a moment, still Śālva would have had a valid and serious objection to taking her back. To dispel this objection, the gods would have had to appear and perform their miraculous verdict in full public and in the hearing of his court and subjects, as they do in the case of Śakuntalā. In light of this, it seems to me that Ambā was doomed as soon as Bhīṣma decided to send her back to Śālva. As the candidate shows later in the dissertation, Bhīṣma is careful to make sure that he himself passes the responsibility for having made this decision on to others. No details are given about who said what during those consultations, but in light of the other stories mentioned, it seems rather unlikely (to me at least) that no one could have foreseen Śālva's subsequent rejection of Ambā. Probably, from the point of view of the Kaurava discussions on that occasion, the issue of what might happen to Ambā afterwards was much less pressing than the question of whether they were prepared to keep a woman who professed an ongoing attachment to a man other than the one she had been abducted in order to be married to. Rāvaṇa kept Sītā under those circumstances, refusing again and again to give her back to Rāma; and as a result, he got killed. But even if Rāvaṇa had given Sītā back (like Bhīṣma did), Rāma (like Śālva) would have had the same problem as he actually had after killing Rāvaṇa to get her back.

On p. 179 n. 139, the reference seems wrong.

On p. 181 (and in the table of contents), subchapter 3.7 should be 3.8.

*On p. 186 the candidate says that "it is not completely clear if this [vow never to kill a woman, a former woman, or one with a female name or appearance] is a separate vow or if it was, at least implicitly, a part of his famous vows of giving up kingship and women". This is an interesting point and I think more could have been said about the first possibility, i.e. that it was a separate vow. On the face of it, it is hard to connect this vow with the situation preceding Satyavatī's marriage, except by considering combat to be some kind of analogically sexual union. It might be easier to see this vow as an intensified form of an important aspect of the general *kṣatriya* code, namely not to fight against any woman (as discussed in the *Rāmāyaṇa* in connection with the killing of Tāṭakā). In this respect the vow might be compared to some other personal vows which go unmentioned until they become relevant within the narrative, for example Yudhiṣṭhira's vow never to refuse a challenge, Arjuna's vow to kill anyone who tells him to give Gāṇḍīva away, Arjuna's vow to kill anyone who makes Yudhiṣṭhira's blood flow to earth, and Karṇa's vow never to refuse a brahmin's request. These are all private formalisations or intensifications of general *kṣatriya* principles, and they are taken very seriously by the individuals concerned. On such private vows, see again p. 131 of Brodbeck's paper "Mapping Masculinities" (mentioned above).

On p. 193, regarding 5.49.33 and the mention of Śikhaṇḍin having attacked the Kaliṅgas, perhaps this could be an allusion to Aśoka?

On p. 196 it is said that the births of Dhṛṣṭadyumna and Draupadī were chornologically later than the birth of Śikhaṇḍinī, but the supporting details and argumentation are not supplied until p. 214 n. 171. It would be better if that footnote were moved to stand earlier.

On p. 198 it is said that "in various manuscripts ... masculine grammatical forms can be found in places where the reconstructed text has feminine forms and *vice versa*". Some examples should be provided in order to support this claim.

On p. 200, when 5.170.13 is mentioned where Bhīṣma refers to himself in the third person as he announces his identity at the *svayaṃvara*, doesn't this look like the standard protocol whereby when *kṣatriya* combat is initiated, the assailant has to announce his identity (as at, for example, 4.48.18)?

On pp. 203ff. when the word *amaṅgaladhvaja* is discussed, it might be worth wondering what the *dhvaja* on Śikhaṇḍin's battle-chariot depicts. Does the text ever make this explicit?

On p. 211 it is said that "His [Bhīṣma's] identity as one of the Vasus, namely Dyaus, is established in 1.91, and as an eighth portion of each of them in 1.92.48–93.42". It is actually the other way around, as mentioned immediately below, and so this should be corrected. It should probably also be mentioned that at Hv 43.48 Brahmā says that Bhīṣma is the eighth Vasu (*vasur aṣṭamaḥ*), and Vaiśampāyana repeats this at Hv 44.3 (*vasūnām aṣṭame*). In n. 165, where the *Mahābhārata*'s Vasu lists are mentioned, references should be given. In general it would be helpful to be given some more background information about the Vasus – how many there typically are, what kind of gods they are, etc.

*On pp. 213ff. (subchapters 4.3, 4.4, 4.5) where there is discussion of "former divine or demonic lives", I think some more discussion should be provided about how this works. As far as I understand it, these – or at least the divine ones, about which more information is given – are not really "former lives" in a sense that would be comparable to previous human lives. Human lives are connected by karma, or by some boon or curse that stands in for karma, and so by the time Śikhaṇḍinī is born, Ambā has died and ceased to be; but divine alter egos are different in that the god incarnating as the human being has not died and ceased to be, but runs alongside the human being as well as within it, and will continue to exist after that human being's death. The human represents a descent of a "part" (*aṃśa*) of the god, and the god can be within the human while also playing its usual role in heaven or elsewhere (Hv 43.9, "We can all be up in the sky at the same time as being kings on earth"). Some of the discussion in subchapters 4.3–4.5 seems to treat past human lives as if they are strictly comparable with hidden demonic identities, but if the latter are like hidden divine identities then they are something rather different from former human lives. Also, the *rākṣasa* identity is ascribed to Śikhaṇḍin but never to Śikhaṇḍinī, and so the *rākṣasa* influx does not necessarily occur at the junction between one life and another. Divine influx into e.g. Bhīṣma occurs at the start of his

life, but how do we know that *rākṣasa* influx would work in the same way? The possession of Karṇa by the demon Naraka and the possession of the Saṃśaptakas by *rākṣasa*s occurred only after the conversation between Duryodhana and the demons at 3.240.

On p. 213 where Vyāsa's narration of Draupadī's former life to Drupada is mentioned (1.189), mention should also be made of 1.157 where Vyāsa tells the same story to the Pāṇḍavas and Kuntī.

On p. 225 where a sentence begins with the words "Their former lives", it should be made explicit who exactly "they" are, as this is not entirely clear from the context. If one of "them" is intended to be Draupadī, then it is not true that "Their former lives are ... constructed ... not by ... the implied author", since Vyāsa tells the story of Draupadī's former life at 1.157 and at 1.189.41ff.

On p. 229 the reference to "Viṣṇu's first *avatāra*" is anachronistic, as in the *Mahābhārata* there is no fish *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, so it is not clear how the authorial audience could be "reminded" of it.

On the same p. 229, in the same paragraph, reference should be made to Brodbeck 2009: 163, where the same point is illustrated by a genealogical diagram.

On the same p. 229 I think the candidate probably overinterprets 4.10.11, where there is no mention of any physical examination of Arjuna/Bṛhannaḍā's genitalia.

On p. 238 we read that "Losing half of her body (and, presumably, essence) can be seen as effectively enabling another being – the *rākṣasa* – to join Ambā in the creation of Śikhaṇḍin". This seems excessively speculative, and it doesn't fit with what happens in the case of Draupadī, who is Śrī in human form at the same time as being a reincarnation of the overanxious maiden, without any curse diverting half of that overanxious maiden to play some other role elsewhere.

*On p. 241 we read that "The audiences from Janamejaya upwards, including Vyāsa and Vaiśaṃpāyana are led to see Śikhaṇḍin primarily as a *rākṣasa* incarnate ...". There may be a mistake here, as Vyāsa and Vaiśaṃpāyana are not audiences (Vyāsa is in the audience at the snake sacrifice, but the dissertation more usually presents him as the author of what Vaiśaṃpāyana tells there), and Vyāsa does the leading rather than being led. More importantly, I am not sure about the propriety of the word "primarily" here, or the word "secondarily" to describe the Ambā option in the following sentence. This ordering of what is primary and what is secondary is based on the relative levels within the narrative, but that is only one way of looking at it. If one were to look at it in terms of quantity, then the *rākṣasa* identity is mentioned just twice in the text, and both times quite briefly, without elaboration or particular emphasis, whereas the Ambā past-life is the subject of half an *upākhyāna* and casts a much longer shadow across the text. As far as the flesh-and-blood audience is concerned, can we really say that they would perceive the *rākṣasa* identity as primary and the Ambā former identity as secondary? Would they have performed the kind of narratological analysis that the candidate performs in this

dissertation? Here I think we must distinguish the various audiences within and anciently outside the text (the flesh-and-blood ancient listeners, plus Janamejaya, Śaunaka, and the ṛṣis) from researchers in the twenty-first century in the wake of the academic discipline of narratology. In other words, it is one thing to point out something that is structurally the case with the text, but it is quite another to suggest that this was something that ancient audiences used to notice habitually.

On p. 259 the mention of the sun's progress "south of the equator" is imprecise. As far as I understand the situation, the sun's progress north and south refers to the location of the sun's rising and setting, such that in the northern hemisphere (where the text was composed) the days get longer while the sun moves north, and shorter while the sun moves south. The movement is relative, so the equator doesn't need to come into it.

On p. 267, with regard to Bhīṣma's (third, i.e. actual) death, it would be relevant to refer to John Brockington's article "Exemplary Deaths in the Mahābhārata" (in Andreas Bigger, Rita Krajnc, Annemarie Mertens, Markus Schüpbach, and Heinz Werner Wessler, eds, *Release from Life – Release in Life: Indian Perspectives on Individual Liberation*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2010).

On p. 277, we read that "As curses and punishments in the narrative universe mostly follow the crime, it is fitting that Dyaus, having been born on earth, is deprived of what he attempted to get in his divine life: women (a queen) and the power over the earth". From one perspective, as argued, this is indeed fitting. But looked at from another angle, one could say that during his life on earth he succeeds in doing what in the Vasiṣṭha incident he tried to do but failed, i.e. getting the queen/cow/earth and then giving it to someone else.

On pp. 278–279 it is not quite true to say that "Bhīṣma (hero) abducted the women (objects) because Satyavatī (sender) wanted to get wives for her son Vicitravīrya". In both the *Ādiparvan* and the *Udyogaparvan* versions, the idea of getting wives for Vicitravīrya comes from Bhīṣma himself (1.96.2; 5.170.8). In these accounts Satyavatī's only involvement is that at 1.96.4 Bhīṣma goes to the *svayaṃvara* with her consent (*jagāmānumate mātuḥ*).

On p. 280 n. 230 "Kausalyā" is an error, as this means "woman from Kosala": it should be something like "Kāśeyī" instead.

On p. 293 it is not quite clear how the fact that "Bhīṣma was standing in the way of the power" would explain his being called "the border tree" (*sīmāvṛkṣa*); this needs to be set out more clearly.

On p. 310 we read that "(third sons customarily became the kings/progenitors of the next generation of kings)". This claim should be properly supported – which would require a lot of data collection – or omitted.

On p. 314 the dynamic between Bhīṣma and Draupadī in the *sabhā* at Hāstinapura during the game of dice is mentioned for the first time. I think the point made here is a good one, but it seems like it is being introduced as an afterthought.

16

In general it is disconcerting for readers to have a new consideration introduced for the first time as part of a conclusion, and so I would suggest that this point be introduced and integrated into the discussion earlier (or simply omitted).

4. *Personal contribution to the subject*
[Is the dissertation merely a compilation of information, or does the author employ the primary and secondary sources to propose an original, organically formulated contribution to the field?]

The application of narratological theory to the issue of Bhīṣma's death (and to the narratives that purport to explain it) is a new approach in the history of *Mahābhārata* scholarship, not just to this issue but to the *Mahābhārata* in general. Although there have been some previous intimations that such an approach might be possible or desirable (Brodbeck, Black, more recently Bagchee), no one before has set it on such a firm methodological foundation or carried it through in such detail, or with such aplomb. The dissertation thus makes an original interdisciplinary contribution in terms of methodology, which will no doubt bear fruit in future studies of different aspects of the *Mahābhārata*, and hopefully of other ancient texts too. More specifically, the methodology employed in this dissertation allows for an original analysis of the story of Ambā, Śikhaṇḍin, and Bhīṣma's death – an analysis that goes far beyond (though it also includes) compiling the results of previous studies. The dissertation's key insights that Bhīṣma is a potentially unreliable narrator, and that his account of Ambā plays intertextually with other well-known stories, are both important contributions to the field of *Mahābhārata* studies, and I hope that they will be published in some form in the coming years.

IV. Questions for the author
[You may wish to propose several questions for the doctoral candidate to address at the defence. It is possible to do so in the form of a more extensive critical analysis of the dissertation. However, if you do so, you are advised to arrange your main questions into separate points.]

Most of my questions have to do with the points made above and marked with asterisks.

What is the status of narratology in the dissertation? Is it employed as a reliable method in order to tell us something new about the *Mahābhārata*, or is it applied experimentally in order to tell us whether or not it works on this text? Hämeen-Anttila suggests that in light of non-Western and non-modern narratives, "The narratologists could update some of their views and even get new ideas". What narratological views could be updated on the basis of this dissertation?

Is it methodologically appropriate to apply the narratological approach to

Bhīṣma's speeches before applying it to Ugraśravas's? Is it possible that if the content of Ugraśravas's speeches were deconstructed on the basis of his narrative situation, the results of this dissertation would be invalidated?

How can Vyāsa be the implied author of the parts of the *Mahābhārata* that are spoken neither by Vaiśaṃpāyana nor by himself?

Does the story of Sāvitrī really match the structure of the other *pativratā* stories discussed? In terms of the analysis performed in the dissertation, does this matter?

Was there a *gāndharva* marriage between Ambā and Śālva?

When Bhīṣma decided to let Ambā go, did he do so for her benefit, or for the benefit of his family?

What difference would it have made if a heavenly voice had spoken and convinced Śālva of Ambā's purity?

Was Bhīṣma's vow never to fight against a woman or former woman (etc.) one of the vows taken to enable his father's marriage?

What is the difference between being constrained by actions in a former life and being constrained by being an *avatāra* of a god, demon, or *rākṣasa*?

Was Śikhaṇḍinī a former *rākṣasa*?

Do you think that ancient audiences of the *Mahābhārata* understood Bhīṣma to be an unreliable narrator?

V.   Conclusion

[Please conclude your report with the following standardised formulation (which can be elaborated upon as needed, clarified, or prefaced with a more extensive summative evaluation):]

Thank you for inviting me to examine this dissertation; it was a pleasure and privilege to do so. I provisionally classify the submitted dissertation as **passed**, but I think the candidate should be given the opportunity to revise it as she desires before it is put into the library for others to use.

Simon Brodbeck.
27 December 2021