Revenge, Hatred, Love, and Regret: The Use of Narrative Empathy in a Regional Purāṇa

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ABSTRACT: This article analyses the character of the demon found in the Sanskrit Bhadrakāḷimāhātmya. This regional Purāṇic text, pertaining to the narrative tradition of the Dārikavadham from Kerala, adopts a specific stance with regard to its main antagonist, the asura king Dārika. While the Bhadrakāḷimāhātmya eagerly engages with various Mahāpurāṇas such as the Liṅga and the Mārkaṇḍeya, the demon that it depicts contrasts with the rather rigid image set out by his counterparts in those texts. Instead, the demon’s character is carefully drawn and led through an array of emotional states in a way that tempts the audience to empathize. In this article, I explore this strategic empathy. Perusing the narratives of the Bhadrakāḷimāhātmya, I identify passages that are activated by strategies of affect and show how they construct the character of the demon. In the second part of the article, I attempt to unravel the motives for this alternative view of the demon, relying on frameworks stemming from contemporary studies of narrative empathy and classical Indian theories of aesthetics.

KEYWORDS: demon; Hinduism; Kerala; narrative empathy; rasa; regional Purāṇa.

1. After concluding her MA in Indian Languages and Cultures at Ghent University, Noor van Brussel has been employed as a PhD candidate in that same department. She is currently writing a doctoral dissertation entitled ‘Bhadraķāḷi and the Bhadretpatty: A Comparative Study of a Regional Goddess and her Narrative Tradition’, which focuses on the Bhadrakāḷimāhātmya, a regional Purāṇa from Kerala, and on the goddess it celebrates, Bhadrakāḷi. At the end of 2016, Noor was appointed as a teaching assistant for the Languages and Cultures department at Ghent University, complementing her research activities. She teaches and supports several courses on Sanskrit, Indian religions, and gender.

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INTRODUCTION

Demons allure. They challenge and charm the gods; they intrigue and enrap- ture the audience. They are conspicuous and multifaceted characters, yet in many cases they do not move beyond their role as the embodiment of evil. Throughout Hindu imagery, we are confronted with demons destined to die at the hands of merciless goddesses. Names, places, and circumstances may alter, but it is an enduring battle between eternal adversaries. This article explores the case of a demon who challenges the limitations of the demon character-type set out in pan-Indian Purāṇas such as the Liṅga and the Mārkaṇḍeya. In the second part of the article, I will show where this alternative interpretation might stem from and how this specific type of demon might benefit from an analysis based on findings in the field of narrative empathy studies.

This survey will focus upon the state of Kerala, where a regional tradition has developed centred on the goddess Bhadrakāḷi (Skt Bhadrakālī) and her eternal adversary, Dārika. The ferocious goddess and the condemned demon have thus taken up their roles once more, and are pursuing their ceaseless battle in the myth of the Dārikavadham. Over time, this narrative developed, blossomed, withered, and revived, leaving us not only with a myth but with a multifaceted narrative tradition that defines the worship of Bhadrakāḷi in Kerala. It is the overarching tradition into which many local stories are woven, and the fertile ground out of which many rituals, texts, and performances arose. It is told within families, recited in temples, and sung as pāṭṭῠ.

2. In this article, I opt for the term ‘demon’ in the full understanding of the many implications that this term bears in Western and Christian thinking. The cult of Bhadrakāḷi in Kerala comprises many kinds of so-called demon characters, such as asuras, vetālas, yakṣīs, and so forth. I believe the trends described in this article are reflected not only in the asuras, but also in those other kinds of characters. I therefore opt for this flawed but overarching term in describing these characters as a group.

3. The singular term ‘audience’ will be used in this article to represent a diverse body of readers/listeners who are situated in both individual and collective contexts activated by innumerable dynamics (political, historical, religious, and many more).

4. See the work of Caldwell (1999a), Tarabout (1986), and Aubert (2004) for anthropological descriptions of the ritual and performative side of the tradition.

5. The Malayalam word pāṭṭῠ literally designates ‘song’. It has a long history in Malayalam literature and is especially known from its occurrence in the theoretical treatise of the Līlātilakam. This classical treatise on grammar and poetics tries to establish Manipravalam as a language reflecting the proper union of Sanskrit and ‘Kēraḷabhāṣā’ (local forms of language, probably classical forms of Malayalam). Pāṭṭῠ in this case is mostly used as a (negative and contrasting) example of a similar confluence of Sanskrit and Kēraḷabhāṣā, but with a greater Tamil influence. The dichotomy between the two is, however, looked upon as rather artificial by contemporary scholarship, mostly due to the fact that texts defining themselves as pāṭṭῠ do not live up to the standards mentioned in the Līlātilakam. Instead, they tend to engage more with local views on and kinds of literature. Nowadays, most oral or written texts that are defined as pāṭṭῠ tend to go back to the literal meaning of the word: song. Many kinds of these songs are to be found, in this case in the religious life of the devo-
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at festivals and on many other occasions, including female Brāhmanical rituals (Caldwell 2001: 107). Apart from that, it has also been committed to writing in the form of Nāṭakas, Tantras, Purāṇic poetry, and many other genres. It is a tradition with numerous faces that reaches far beyond the regional toward the transregional and pan-Indian borderlands (Rohlman 2011: 140), while still carefully preserving its local distinctiveness.

THE BHADROTPATTI OR BHADRAKĀLĪMĀHĀTMYA

One of the products of the travels and developments of this narrative tradition is a group of regional Purāṇic texts called Bhadrotpatti or Bhadrakālīmāhātmya. These texts are widespread, and palm-leaf manuscripts of them in Malayalam and Sanskrit can be found throughout Kerala in various public and private collections. Despite this wide prevalence and its scholarly notice, including mentions of the texts in the work of Sarah Caldwell (2001: 100–101) and Mari-anne Pasty (2010: 133), these manuscripts have not thus far been translated or subjected to in-depth study of their contents. Consequently, many questions remain unanswered; for example, the texts have yet to be accurately dated. Drawing on my own experience with a few manuscripts, I estimate them to originate somewhere between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. Four specific factors support this hypothesis.

Firstly, I have considered the invaluable work of David Shulman (1979, 1980), which offers significant insights into the development of South Indian Purāṇic traditions and, more specifically, into the rich collection of regional Tamil Sthalapurāṇas. According to Shulman (1980: 29), the broader Purāṇic tradition pervaded the South as early as the fifth to sixth centuries in the form of Mahāpurāṇas such as the Brahmāṇḍa, Mārkaṇḍeya, Vāyu, and Viṣṇu. The composition of South Indian—Tamil—Purāṇic material reached its golden age much later, in the sixteenth century, though much of the Sanskrit Māhātmya material is estimated by Shulman to be somewhat older (p. 32). The parallel case of the Tamil Sthalapurāṇas is thus the first factor pointing to a possible dating between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Secondly, the fact that the Malayali Bhadrakālīmāhātmyas were composed in the famous kilippattō style (Parameswara Aiyar 1924), which was popularized in the sixteenth century by Tuñchattō Eluttacchan, also supports this hypothesis.

6. This term will be used to denote those texts belonging to the Purāṇic genre that are considered to have more of a pan-Indian appeal, as opposed to the regional Purāṇa under discussion in this article. I fully recognize the problematic nature of this distinction. As the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya itself recognizes the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa as a text of reference, the breakdown used here follows from the primary source.

Thirdly, the proposed period coincides with an epoch in Keralan history during which local kingdoms and their war patronesses were both popular and powerful (Caldwell 1999b: 86). This heightened attention for local violent goddesses, combined with an increasing appreciation of the Puranic genre in the region between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, certainly facilitated the composition of texts such as the Bhadrakālīmāhātmyas. Additionally, the immediately preceding period was one of relative political stability which contributed substantially to the creation of regional traditions and identities such as the Dārikavadham:

Interregional warfare was mostly aimed at the control of intermediate regions or simply at the acquisition of goods. There was a balance of power which was determined both by the internal strength of the respective regions and the inability of rulers to extend their control beyond their respective regions ... Due to this balance of power there was a great deal of political stability within the regions which fostered the evolution of distinct regional cultures.

(Kulke and Rothermund 2004: 114)

Lastly, this evolution is attested by the array of references to the Dārikavadham tradition in various texts. As early as the fourth to sixth centuries, the famous Tamil epic Cilappatikāram mentions the goddess slaying a demon called Dārika. Later references continue to occur, especially around the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, when additional mentions appear in certain texts, including the Vyāghrapuramāhātmya and the Kokilasaṃdeśa. This seems to indicate that the regional goddess and her narrative received heightened attention in this period, thus supporting my proposed dating for the Bhadrakālīmāhātmyas.

With regard to content, all of the manuscripts I have been able to study adhere strongly to the core story of the Dārikavadham. Despite being written in two different languages—Sanskrit and Malayalam—and in accordance with different metrical systems, their narrative uniformity is striking. Scenic descriptions of settings and actions are held in common, similes are shared, and storylines are closely preserved. This strong adherence to the Dārikavadham narrative tradition did not, however, preclude the development of a distinct literary identity, characterized primarily by its explicit multivocality. In what follows, I base my findings primarily on Sanskrit versions—manuscript T697, and the edition by Visalakshy and Girija—which I bring together under the singular title Bhadrakālīmāhātmya due to their great uniformity.

8. Vyāghrapuramāhātmya 192; for translation, see Smith (2003: 145–46). The text is estimated to originate between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries.
9. Kokilasaṃdeśa 1.42; for translation, see Rajaraman and Kotamraju (2012). The text is estimated to date from the fifteenth century.
10. Other factors that support my hypothesis concerning the date of the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya will not be discussed here due to spatial constraints. They will be discussed at length in my forthcoming PhD thesis.
MULTIVOCALITY AND INTERTEXTUALITY

As a rather late Purānic text, the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya was prone to influences from different strands of traditions that had found recognition in local society by that time. Traces of Tamil literature, epic narratives, and Mahāpurāṇas are all quite clearly discernible within the text. Some of those intertextual connections are made consciously, and should probably be considered as strategies of authorization. For example, the bonds that are forged with the larger Purānic tradition by employing Mārkaṇḍeya as a primary narrator are ambitious and assertive. Furthermore, by defining itself as a chapter (Skt prakaraṇa) of the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, the regional Māhātmya implicitly positions itself on the same level as the most famous part of that Purāṇa: the Devīmāhātmya. This presumed affiliation thus endorses a clear intention to be part of one of the biggest literary traditions on goddess worship in India, and to assert a place in the larger Sanskrit world. It is a kind of engagement that clearly aims at creating a Foucauldian ‘regime of truth’, a process that is common within the Purānic genre, as argued by McComas Taylor (2012: 99–154), and especially within the subgenre of regional Purāṇas. In her work on the Sarasvatī Purāṇa from Gujarat, Elizabeth Rohlman has written extensively on this regional Purāṇa’s active engagement with diverse texts belonging to the pan-Indic Sanskrit tradition, arguing that this intertextuality forms a crucial part of the text’s character (2011). She meticulously describes how the Sarasvatī Purāṇa’s inventive and fluid engagement with the Daśakumāracarita helps to establish an authoritative connection. The text’s treatment of these well-known stories also demonstrates a high degree of self-awareness and regional identity. These connections should therefore not be viewed as plagiarism or fraudulent claims for authority, but rather as integral aspects of the identity of regional Purānic texts.

Other connections are made in less obvious—and perhaps also less deliberate—ways, such as verses reminding us of caṅkam poetry in their use of certain metaphors and imagery. These discursive connections activate the text, making it into a ‘reading formation’ (Bennett 1983: 5) and contributing to its general appreciation without overtly dominating the tone. One could say, in the words of A. K. Ramanujan (1989: 197), that these connections are ‘sounding in their absent presence’, causing the text to resonate with literary worlds beyond its own. This kind of implicit and explicit engagement with textual discourses is thus one of the defining features of the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya. It urges us to place this literary work within the web of surrounding texts: to consider it, as Roland Barthes (1977: 146) once put it, in its role as ‘a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture’. Thus, we advance toward an understanding of the Bakhtinian

11. With many thanks to Elizabeth Rohlman and her inspiring paper at the 2016 Spalding Symposium for this thought.
heteroglossia at play in this text (Bakhtin 1981). The many voices that whisper, wail, and speak throughout the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya require us to ask where they come from and why they are there.

THE PURĀNIC OUTLINE

One of those voices, and perhaps the loudest, is the Purānic. As previously mentioned, the ties to the Purānic tradition are clear from the very first folio. Mārkaṇḍeya is called upon to tell the story, and the Purāṇa that bears his name is presented as the source of the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya at the end of every chapter (Skt adhyāya). Intertextual engagement is thus one of the most pronounced strategies of the text and is embedded not only in its choice of narrative techniques, but also, more particularly, in the literary characters and their narrative trajectory.

An important factor in this case is the demon. While the character of the goddess herself inevitably places the text within the greater discursive field of demon-killing goddesses, it is the demon that specifically connects the regional narrative to the pan-Indian Purāṇas. One example of this intertextual engagement can be found in the Liṅga Purāṇa (1.106.1–29), which features a demon with exactly the same name as the Malayali one. This is rather uncommon, since the only other usage of the name Dārika, to my knowledge, occurs in the Mahābhārata. Apart from the name, the Liṅga Purāṇa also shares the rough outline of its narrative with the Dārikavadham: a demon rises and acquires a boon that makes him invincible to any god, sage, or man, yet he haughtily dismisses the threat posed by women. The demon then terrorizes the world, until the gods realize they can no longer bear it and ask Śiva for a solution. Remembering the demon’s vulnerability to women, Śiva creates a goddess who proceeds to behead the demon. However, after killing that demon, the goddess becomes so violent and uncontrollable that Śiva, needing to find yet another solution, decides to create a child and place it in her path. When she picks it up and the child starts suckling at her breast, the goddess calms down and so the universe is saved.

Since the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya consists of nine chapters (Skt adhyāya) and over 600 verses, it inevitably adds many more details and specific plot twists. The basic outline of the narrative is, however, shared by both texts. What they do not share is their understanding of the demon character. The allegiance of the short narrative in the Liṅga Purāṇa unmistakably lies with the goddess. Half of the verses deal with her creation and describe how her māyā is so powerful that she deceives not only demons but also gods and sages. The

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12. In the latter case, Dāruka is the charioteer of Kṛṣṇa. In the Keralan context, ‘Dārika’ and ‘Dāruka’ are completely interchangeable. Both variants are commonly used.
narrative is an ode to Śakti, with the demon once again cast solely as the eternal enemy. This attitude is illustrated in verses 2 and 3:

The bard spoke—

Dāruka, born as an asura, attained heroism through tapas and destroyed gods and brahmins like the fire at the end of time. After approaching Brahma, Śiva, Skanda, Viṣṇu, Yama, and Indra, they said, ‘The asura is to be slain by a woman’.  

(Liṅga Purāṇa 1.106.2–3)13

The demon is introduced without preamble and is characterized primarily by the term strīvadhya: he must be killed by a woman. The narrative, however, does not elucidate this specific plot twist. Instead, it swiftly proceeds into a lyrical description of the creation of the goddess, elaborating no further on the subject of her adversary. In the end, the death of the demon is dealt with in a single verse, while the battle between goddess and demon is not even described: ‘With the permission of Pārvatī, the sublime goddess destroyed Dāruka the Dānava who slew the rulers of gods’ (Liṅga Purāṇa 1.106.19). Quite literally, the demon does not have a voice in this story and only serves the purpose of being the goddess’s eternal adversary.

The Bhadrakālīmāhātmya, in contrast, consistently devotes a rather large share of its verses to the demon, from the very beginning of the text. The audience moves into the central narrative even before the demon’s birth, and is thus allowed to gain considerable insight into the demon’s roots and motives. The text especially underscores the brutal annihilation of his family and clan by the gods. In verses 1.25–30, for example, we are given a description of the ruthlessness of Viṣṇu as he smashes the skulls of entire demon families, leaving alive only four girls who tremble in hiding: ‘With his discus, Hari smashed the skulls of all the Dānava demons, until their lineage was completely eradicated, except for four demon girls who were hiding in the underworld, suffering from sorrow, worrying, but with strong convictions’ (Bhadrakālīmāhātmya 1.25–26).

Thanks to a boon later on in the narrative, two of these girls acquire sons, namely the protagonist Dārika and his kinsman Dānavaṃendra. The two are described as excellent youths, and invoke the audience’s sympathy as they grow up fatherless and marked by their family’s history: ‘The princes, named Dārika and Dānava [sic], grew up as exemplary youths and gradually learned from their mothers about the gods and the annihilation of their lineage’ (Bhadrakālīmāhātmya 1.42). When Dārika then tries to avenge his family, the audience understands his motives, thus allowing the demon to rise beyond being the one-dimensional epitome of malice. The text shows how alluring the pitfalls of power can be and describes how an arrogant Dārika dismisses the threat posed by women when he asks for the boon of invincibility:

13. All translations are my own, unless indicated otherwise.

Brahmā—
O hero, be it so! Because of your terrible tapas, I will gladly present you with whatever you desire. You asked for a boon which will prevent you from being slain in battle. But, I ask you, O lord of the Daityas, why do you make no stipulation about women when you ask for this boon? Have you forgotten them?

Dārika—
That is preposterous, Brahmā! Will women slay me? As soon as they lay eyes upon me they run away, shaking like reeds.

(Bhadракālimāhātmya 1.54–56)

Thus the Bhadrakālimāhātmya not only explains the motives that drive the demon, but also elucidates his Achilles heel: he is predestined to die at the hands of a woman. Where the Liṅga Purāṇa mentions only that the demon must be killed by a woman, the Bhadrakālimāhātmya makes this vulnerability into an integral part of the character’s development, following from his rather rough start in life. His foolhardiness with regard to his plans of revenge and his arrogance, anger, and hatred are thus represented as being quite understandable. Throughout the narrative the demon continues to be a multifaceted character, defined by more than just outrageous malice. The narrative also shows, for example, his loving attitude toward his wife Manodarī when he says, ‘Manodarī, when you reach the house of your father Maya, expelled and frightened, lead the rest of your life in peace, my love! Do not wrongly follow me in death for the sake of my affection!’ (Bhad rakālimāhātmya 7.58). Along the same lines, toward the end of the narrative Dārika is depicted as a pitiful creature deserving of compassion, begging for his life at the feet of the goddess.

These descriptions of actions, motives, and character traits lend depth to the character of the demon and allow the audience to recognize him as a ‘subjective mind’—a fluid functioning of sometimes contradictory traits that are defined by the ever-changing circumstances within which they operate (Hogan 2001: 138). In his definition of the term, Patrick Colm Hogan describes this ‘subjective mind’ in opposition to an ‘objective’ one: a mechanical functioning of certain accredited and fixed traits. In their depiction of characters, most texts move along this continuum, as extreme characters are often hard to maintain:

A pure villain—or, for that matter, a pure hero—is almost necessarily a simple list of objective traits. Familiarity pushes toward the middle, setting limits on both idealization and vilification ... [W]hen an author elaborates on the action or condition of an antagonist, he/she almost necessarily begins to develop a subjectivity for that antagonist, thus dulling the contrast with the hero. In this way, the sorts of opposition that would ordinarily block empathy tend to be undermined through ordinary literary exposition. Villainy in particular is difficult to sustain. (Hogan 1996: 138–39)

One could even argue that the two opposites described by Hogan can be put on a par with the dichotomy between flat and round characters proposed by E. M. Forster (1927). Interpreting Forster’s dichotomy as a continuum instead
allows it to illuminate a tension between reified and phenomenological understandings of characters.

Keeping these theories in mind, it seems likely that the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya has developed some kind of subjectivity for the character of the demon in its narration of the Dārikavādham. After all, putting the aforementioned passages next to one another reveals some striking differences concerning the treatment of the demon character between the regional Māhātmya and the ‘core’ Purāṇic texts with which it connects. The classic Purāṇic demon provides an outline of the character, but the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya subsequently elaborates upon it so dramatically that the shape is redefined far beyond its usual envisioning. Eventually, the demon in the regional Purāṇa seems to appeal to the audience in ways the classic one does not, primarily by employing narrative strategies that can be considered as empathetic.

NARRATIVE EMPATHY

The study of narrative empathy in the West officially began with the coinage of the term Einfühlung in nineteenth-century German aesthetics. Robert Vischer fully introduced the term in his PhD thesis ‘Über das optische Formgefühl—ein Beitrag zur Ästhetik’ (1872), after which the term evolved and matured in the works and minds of philosophers and art historians, such as Theodor Lipps. The latter eventually developed a full-fledged Einfühlungstheorie which forms the basis of our current understanding of the term (Wispé 1990: 22).

In the English-speaking world, both the term and the theory became more celebrated once E. B. Titchener (1915) translated Einfühlung into the word ‘empathy’, based on the Greek ἐν- (in) and πάθος (feeling), to convey the mental image of ‘feeling into someone else’s situation’ or—as it is now most commonly described—‘feeling with someone’. This is contrasted with the concept of ‘sympathy’, which is supposed to address ‘feeling for someone’ (Keen 2006: 209). Rather well known in this context is Titchener’s quote linking empathy to the experience of reading:

> We have a natural tendency to feel ourselves into what we perceive or imagine. As we read about the forest, we may, as it were, become the explorer; we feel for ourselves the gloom, the silence, the humidity, the oppression, the sense of lurking danger; everything is strange, but it is to us that strange experience has come. We are told of a shocking accident, and we gasp and shrink and feel nauseated as we imagine it; we are told of some new delightful fruit, and our mouth waters as if we were about to taste it. This tendency to feel ourselves into a situation is called empathy.
> (Titchener 1915: 198)

14. Studies of similar processes had been occurring for some time under the denominator of ‘sympathy’.
Thus empathy is constructed at the beginning of the twentieth century and continues to inspire authors, psychologists, art historians, and aesthetes. Soon, however, this newly defined theory found opposition, principally in the form of Brecht’s theory of alienation (Verfremdungseffekt) and—toward the second half of the twentieth century—with the identification of the ‘affective fallacy’ by writers associated with the New Criticism (Keen 2006: 210). These developments constituted powerful critiques of narrative empathy theory and, as Keen argues, they caused the term ‘empathy’ itself to be regarded with caution and suspicion for the next few decades.

Only at the beginning of the twenty-first century did this change with the so-called ‘affective turn’, which brought renewed attention to affect in various fields of research (Clough and Halley 2007). Interestingly, in the field of narrative studies this regenerated fascination with affect coincided with a modest interest in non-Western theories of aesthetics and emotion. Among those who widened the scope is Hogan, who turned to the rich tradition of Indian aesthetics and tried to recast the insights of ancient rasa theory within the contemporary framework of cognitive science. In his paper ‘Toward a Cognitive Science of Poetics’ (1996), Hogan attempts to align Abhinavagupta’s notion of memory traces (Skt saṃskāra) and their role in the evocation of rasa with cognitive insights on priming and the working of long- and short-term memory. This laudable work opened up the Western tradition of affective theory in ways that can significantly enrich it, and has been expanded upon by various scholars, most notably with regard to intersectionality. Suzanne Keen, one of the leading scholars of narrative empathy, convincingly argues for an intersectional narratology in her article ‘Intersectional Narratology in the Study of Narrative Empathy’ (2015). As various fields—including psychology, literary studies, and neurology—come together in the study of narrative empathy, there is a clear need for further development, clarification, and elaboration of term, theory, and method.

NARRATIVE EMPATHY—THE TECHNIQUES

An important part of the study of narrative empathy is devoted to the identification of those literary devices and strategies that invite affective response. This remains, however, a rather contested part of the field. Over the course of the past two centuries, Western scholars have identified certain devices as ‘inviting empathetic response’; a famous example is first-person narration (Keen 2006: 215). However, this view of literary studies has been criticized by many, including Keen. She argues that psychological and neurological tests have not thus far been able to pinpoint even one technique that consistently evokes empathy (Keen 2011a: 37). Instead, she points to individual empathetic dispositions along with innumerable circumstances and contexts that define the way a reader approaches a text, and she refers to Sternberg’s...
‘Proteus principle’ (Sternberg 1982) which cautions against ascribing fixed uses and effects to particular narrative techniques (Keen 2011b: 367). Consequently, she dismisses the idea that we could develop a detailed taxonomy of reliable empathetic narrative devices.

Indian theories of aesthetics and emotion share Keen’s caution where ideal audiences and assessments of their responsiveness are concerned. The Nāṭyaśāstra, for example, distinguishes only a very specific set of people who are fully able to engage with a text or performance:

ideal spectators are: possessed of (good) character, high birth, quiet behaviour and learning, are desirous of fame, virtue, are impartial, advanced in age, proficient in drama in all its six limbs, alert, honest, unaffected by passion, expert in playing the four kinds of musical instrument, very virtuous, acquainted with the Costumes and Make-up, the rules of dialects, the four kinds of Histrionic Representation, grammar, prosody, and various (other) Śastras, are experts in different arts and crafts, and have fine sense of the Sentiments and the Psychological States. (Nāṭyaśāstra 27.49–52; as cited by Higgins 2007: 46)

Despite this reservation with regard to the ‘ideal spectator’ and the awareness of individual limitations, many Indian texts dealing with alaṃkāraśāstra (poetic theory) freely enlist a host of literary techniques aimed at evoking affective response. Well aware of the problematic inconsistency with regard to the outcome of such techniques, these texts still consider certain literary devices as better suited than others to evoke affective response—or, in their specific case, rasa. However, differences between the Indian and Western stances with regard to empathy must be considered.

As the above quotation reveals, an ideal spectator should, according to the Nāṭyaśāstra, possess a ‘fine sense of the Sentiments and the Psychological States’ (Skt rasabhāvavikalpakāḥ). Higgins also states that ‘later interpreters emphasize the requirement of being capable of empathetic response’ when discussing the ability to experience rasa (Higgins 2007: 47). This indispensability of empathy is supported by Anne Monius, who paraphrases the same verses from the Nāṭyaśāstra as follows:

The qualifications of the ideal spectator (prekṣaka) are many for Bharata, including: good character, high birth, virtue, impartiality, artistic proficiency, general learning in grammar and poetics, honesty, sound judgment, and, perhaps most importantly, empathy.

(Monius 2014: 155; emphasis added)

In Indian theories of aesthetics, empathy is thus considered to be a crucial disposition, a prerequisite even, for the experience of rasa when approaching a work of art, be it a performance or a text. In contrast, Western scholars do not regard empathy as a prerequisite for aesthetic experience. Rather, they study empathy in its own right, as something evoked or invoked by the text by means of certain techniques and within certain circumstances. Only later do these scholars look at what aims this empathy may serve, for example the
incitement of altruistic actions. As this article studies the ways in which the characterization of the demon invites the reader to empathize, rather than assuming that the text is approached with empathy at the ready, I thus rely more on Western theories in my analysis of the empathetic techniques that I identify in the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya’s representation of its demon antagonist.

NARRATIVE EMPATHY TECHNIQUES IN THE BHADRĀKĀLĪMĀHĀTMYA

One of the techniques described in Western rhetorical narratology that allows the audience to feel with an unusual subject is termed ‘defamiliarization’ (Keen 2011a: 19), and is the opposite of habitualization. The latter is described rather dramatically by Shklovsky as follows: ‘And so life is reckoned as nothing. Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war ... And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony’ (Shklovsky 1965: 12).

Defamiliarization is thus aimed at deconstructing these habits of perception and renewing one’s view of the (literary) world. In the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya this technique is used primarily by unsettling genre expectations. In its frame story, the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya attempts to follow its Mahāpurāṇic examples to the letter, and consequently constructs a highly standardized story about an unprincipled king hunting in the forest and a sage who comes across his path to enlighten him. Readers advance through that frame story and subsequently expect a genre-consistent continuation of the narrative: a classic goddess versus demon battle where the gods are supreme and the unscrupulous demons are—and should be—slain. By showing the demon’s humane side instead, the text unsettles the stereotype and forces the audience to re-evaluate its views. This re-evaluation can in turn cause an empathetic response. As David Miall states: ‘It is where schemata are inadequate or in conflict, therefore, that affect enters as a guiding force’ (1988: 261).

The strategy of defamiliarization is further strengthened by the explicit foregrounding (Hakemulder 2004) of the demon’s perspective from the very first verses of the central narrative. Even before the story unfolds, the audience is presented with a character who is made ‘Other’ by category but is familiar to the ‘Self’ in behaviour, motive, and situation. Representing the demon in this way indicates that the text is drawing on situational empathy rather than categorical empathy. In Hogan’s terms, this fusion of horizons is thus drawing on the individual archive of acquired experiences and related emotions, rather than on a collective self-definition (2001: 134–35). When viewed from the perspective of the authorial community, this same phenomenon has been described by Keen as ‘broadcast strategic empathizing’. The author ‘calls upon all readers to experience emotional fusion through empathetic representations of universal human experiences and generalizable responses to particular situations’ (2014: 526).
Other devices that add to the empathetic potential of the text are related to the narrative situation (Keen 2006: 219). For example, the use of direct dialogue—the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya reads almost as a film script—enhances the feeling of immediacy, and such immersion could strengthen the empathetic appeal. All of these techniques—defamiliarization, foregrounding, direct dialogue—serve as a supportive base onto which the reinterpreted, humane demon, or the ‘subjective mind’ (Hogan 2001), is placed. He is presented to the audience in a way that makes him identifiable and familiar: less Other than expected, and less single-mindedly evil than anticipated. The question, then, remains: why is the demon constructed along this empathetic trajectory?

THE EMPATHETIC DEMON: WHY IS IT THERE?

Why do we encounter such a sensitive and humane demon in the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya? Why are we confronted with a demon who, within the framework of current narrative studies, can be identified as the subject of empathetic strategies? Since there are never simple or definitive answers to such questions, I will use this final section of the article to formulate some thoughts and possible explanations.

First, there is the great intertextual sensitivity of the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya to consider. As mentioned above, Rohlman (2011) identified intertextuality as a defining feature of the regional Purāṇic text. I demonstrated earlier in this article how important these discursive connections are for the formation of the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya’s identity when I discussed the text’s alliance to the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa. By positioning itself within the discursive field of Purāṇic texts and by entering into conversation with the Devīmāhātmya, the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya adorns itself with the radiance of the Mahāpurāṇic tradition. However, narrative worlds beyond the Purāṇic contribute to the general flavour of the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya. One of them is the regional tradition of the Dārikavadham.

The forms and manifestations of the Dārikavadham tradition are many, as indicated in the opening lines of this article. Oral and written narratives, ritual texts and literature, poetry and prose: these are but a few of the countless shapes that the Dārikavadham has taken. Within this elaborate tradition exists a group of oral ritual texts called Bhadrakāḷi kālam pāṭṭῠ, which belong to the more general Malayali kālam pāṭṭῠ genre.15 In the case of the goddess Bhadrakāḷi, this panegyric ritual text not only praises the goddess’s physical form but also includes an exhaustive rendering of the Dārikavadham legend within the kālam pāṭṭῠ format.

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15. These are literally songs (Malayalam pāṭṭῠ) that describe the features and life story of a god after a ritual drawing (Malayalam kālam) has been made using coloured powders.

In comparison to its counterpart in the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya, the Bhadrakāḷīkaḷam pāṭṭῠ not only proves to share an affective understanding of the demon with the regional Purāṇa, but extends it still further and depicts a demon who is more approachable, more familiar, and more humane. One fragment supporting this perspective describes King Dārika taking leave of his wife to depart to the battlefield, knowing that this time he will not be able to escape the deadly wrath of Bhadrakāḷi. His queen, Manōdari (Skt Manodari), is inconsolable:

She started to grieve, saying: ‘I came to be a queen at the age of seven! I don’t know the way to go back! Having gone, I don’t know the place of separation! …’ Asura King Dārika could not bear the sorrow of Queen Manōdari, he hugged her against his chest, combed and opened her mass of hair and made her sleep happily.

(Nyblom n.d.: 36)

In a similarly humane way, the text devotes several lines to the mother of Dārika while she gives birth:

The head is smarting, oh blessed Dāmōdara! Give me your hand.
The neck is smarting, oh blessed god Kāmal! Give me your hand.
The chest is smarting, oh blessed Mādhava! Give me your hand.
The breast is smarting, oh blessed Mukunda! Give me your hand.
The belly is smarting, oh blessed Vāsudēva! Give me your hand.
The region of waist is smarting, oh blessed Ānanda! Give me your hand.
The belly button is smarting, oh blessed Nārāyaṇa! Give me your hand.
The thigh is smarting, oh blessed Subrahmanya! Give me your hand.
The knee is smarting, oh leaders of the three worlds! Give me your hand.
The ankle is smarting, oh blessed merciful! Give me your hand.
The heel is smarting, oh blessed Earth Goddess! Give me your hand.
The pearls of the nails are smarting, oh Nakṣatras and other deities! Give me your hand.
Everywhere is smarting again and again, oh Indra and other Ṛṣis! Give me your hand.
All the limbs are smarting, oh owners of all the troops! Give me your hand.

(Nyblom n.d.: 8)

As in the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya, the narrative of the kaḷam pāṭṭῠ takes the audience back to the period before Dārika’s birth. Cleverly chosen words depict a scene of labour and the entrancing rhythm of the poem is reminiscent of the pain that retreats and charges. By means of this lively description, the text succeeds in placing quite a lot of attention on the female demon’s perspective. The demon characters are thus portrayed in recognizable situations and contexts, and respond to them in ways to which the audience can relate.

Similarly relatable descriptions of demon characters are to be found throughout the Bhadrakāḷi kaḷam pāṭṭῠ, as well as in other oral renditions of

16. Here I use, as exemplar, a Bhadrakāḷi kaḷam pāṭṭῠ that was recorded by Achyuta Menon (1943: 74–121) and translated by Jussi Nyblom (n.d.). The translations used here were obtained by means of personal communication and are used with the permission of their author.
the Dārikavadham.\textsuperscript{17} This has led me to believe that the affective demon we encounter in the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya is voicing the strong regional performative tradition that developed alongside—and most probably in conversation with—the regional Purāṇa. Both evolved from the same narrative tradition, and their paths must have crossed in one of the many temple courtyards.

What if, however, the demon is more than a simple product of intertextuality? What if he is consciously represented as an anti-hero to the faulty devotee, who seeks redemption in that same temple courtyard? What if this humane representation and these appeals for empathy, sympathy even, are providing the devotee with the knowledge that even the most fallible and blemished could still receive mercy at the goddess’s hands?

Humane understandings of evil characters are prevalent in the South Indian literary tradition, with many contemporary and classical reinterpretations of characters such as Rāvaṇa adding nuance to malice and iniquity.\textsuperscript{18} This enhances the above argument concerning intertextuality. What is quite interesting, however, is that such reinterpretations of evil often coincide with questions of morality and ethics. Kampan, for example, sympathetically recasts the classically bad-tempered monkey-king Vālin as a noble hero in his Ṣīrāmāvatāran (Shulman 1979: 662). In that role, Kampan makes Vālin pose questions of dharma to Rāma, who has mortally wounded the monkey-king in an ethically dubious fashion:

\begin{quote}
What you did was not heroism, 
nor right action, 
nor Truth.  
My body was no burden to this earth of yours.  
Why, then, did you act thus, 
without love, 
against your nature?
\end{quote}

(Ṣīrāmāvatāran 84; trans. Shulman 1979: 662)

In the same way, the universal appeal of Dārika’s trajectory induces considerations of righteousness in the audience. Through that appeal, the demon challenges concepts of pure evil. Furthermore, Vālin’s and Dārika’s identities as ardent bhaktas add to their humane charm. Vālin remains a devoted worshipper of Rāma in spite of the latter’s questionable attack, while Dārika can be viewed as a dveṣabhakta: a devotee who builds an intimate relationship with the god by means of intense and unending hatred (Doniger O’Flaherty 1980: 127–38). Both, however, also die at the hands of the objects of their devotion.

In Tamil Temple Myths (1980), David Shulman explores the underlying tension between the hard-earned devotion of demon characters and the fact that they are predestined to die. While he frames the phenomenon of the

\textsuperscript{17} For example, see the Brāhmaṇi pāṭṭō as described by Caldwell (2001).

\textsuperscript{18} See, for example, Seely (1991).
demon-devotees\textsuperscript{19} within the rise of the bhakti tradition, their inescapable demise was likely inherited from what he calls ‘classical Hindu mythology’ (p. 318). As Tamil sources tend to look quite favourably upon these demon-devotees, their inevitable deaths—derived from this classical heritage—posed a problem for both audience and authors. This was eventually solved by interpreting the devotion of demons as arising out of egoistic motives. In this role, the demon became the personification of egoism and materialism, and his inescapable death was turned into a symbol of liberation (pp. 318–21).

Ultimately, this rationalized interpretation of the demon-devotee and his demise makes the character very relatable for a human audience beset by those same vices. Narrative identification and empathy help the human devotee to recognize this misconduct, and eventually lead to an understanding that salvation lies with the god(dess). Since the texts explicitly state that ‘the enemy who sacrifices his narrow understanding of his “selfhood” by dying at the hands of the deity is purified and attains release’ (Shulman 1979: 668), it is not unthinkable that characters were depicted in a certain way in order to convey this message of bhakti. The role of narrative empathy—whether or not it is explicitly defined as such—as a conductor in that process is clear. While Wendy Doniger once stated that the demon’s only \textit{raison d’être} is to be the adversary of the gods (Doniger O’Flaherty 1980: 64), it becomes clear that the character can grow beyond that role of antagonist, possibly transforming into an anti-hero who inspires the flawed human devotee to relinquish selfish acts. If so, then these trends closely parallel the debate conducted in Victorian society on those acts of altruism that originated from empathetic reading of novels. Moral transformation, altruism, and compassion were highly debated goods in nineteenth-century Victorian literary society, especially in connection with theories of narrative empathy (Harrison 2008: 262). Even though it is extremely unlikely that these traditions interacted, it is interesting to consider that both might have entertained similar thoughts on literary characters, narrative engagement, and the creation of good world-citizens—which Martha Nussbaum (1998: 11) has argued is one of the effects of reading novels. This is in line with what Sheldon Pollock calls ‘the social aesthetic’ in Indian literature, namely that it ‘was conceived of not only as verbal icon or metaphysical experience, but also and eminently ... as social practice, indeed, equipment for living’ (2001: 223).

Affect, aesthetics, and moral transformation easily lead us to the last factor that I believe could have inspired the character of Dārika: \textit{rasa}. \textit{Rasa} has given rise to a tradition so multifaceted and rich that it is impossible to describe it adequately in only a few words, yet it has surfaced throughout this article since the term is unequivocally connected to the function of empathy and affect in Indian literature. In this context, Anne Monius’s analysis of Abhinavagupta’s comments on Ānandavardhana’s \textit{Dhvanyāloka} proves illuminating:

\textsuperscript{19} On this general category, see also Hiltebeitel (1989).
Rasa experience begins with a sympathetic understanding of the situation on the page or stage ... With his response rooted in his own experience of everyday life (remember that Daṇḍin had stipulated several centuries before that great poetic narrative or mahākāvya must be recognizably realistic), the connoisseur eventually experiences—as the cumulative result of various stimulants, responses, lasting moods, and the like—something that transcends the human particularity.

(Monius 2014: 157)

Even though it could be argued that Monius describes empathetic rather than sympathetic understanding, this description supports the previously argued point that empathy and narrative immersion are crucial to the ideal experience of a text. Empathy links the represented emotional state (Skt bhāva)²⁰ to personal experiences and thus at least partially enables an aesthetic transformation that raises rasa in the knowledgeable audience. For some texts the evocation of rasa might become a goal in itself, a benchmark of aesthetic quality, as Lawrence McCrea argues (2008: 441–42; cited by Monius 2014: 154): he notes that after Ānandavardhana, a literary work could no longer qualify as poetic art unless it evoked rasa in the audience of connoisseurs. For others, rasa was instead the stepping-stone to an even higher goal, namely genuine insight (Skt pratyabhijñā). According to Monius, such views of rasa as yielding ‘moral transformation in the connoisseur’ (p. 159) are prevalent in Sanskrit literary theories and remain consistent across the Sanskrit literary tradition through time. That a regional Purāṇa from Kerala should participate in the literary tradition of kāvya and rasa is furthermore not very surprising. As Rohlman has indicated, regional Purāṇas such as the Sarasvatī Purāṇa did not refrain from engaging with kāvya in their intertextual process (2011: 159–60), whilst the kāvya tradition and its authors—Daṇḍin, for example—were very active in the South (Bronner 2010: 99).

When we reflect this back onto the Bhadrakālimāhātmya and its demon character, we might argue that Dārika is represented according to realistic standards set not only by Daṇḍin, but also, more saliently, by the regional and transregional Tamil traditions. The realistic and humane representation of the asura could then invoke empathetic reactions, which in turn could facilitate the experience of rasa. It is the empathetic response to certain textual elements that forms the basis for the creation of rasa, whether or not this is elicited through the techniques described in the alaṃkāraśāstra tradition. The way the demon is represented in the Bhadrakālimāhātmya certainly invites an affective response.

²⁰ In the Nāṭyaśāstra, one of the founding works of classical rasa theory, Bharata distinguishes between eight different bhāvas or emotional states/moods that can be represented in art. Each one is connected to a corresponding type of rasa, or aesthetic experience. For example, a love scene (Skt rāti bhāva) is supposed to induce an ‘erotic flavour’ (Skt śṛṅgāra rasa) in the knowledgeable audience.
Taking this one step further, we can argue that it is specifically bhakti rasa that the authorial community seeks to achieve, adding to the grandeur of the goddess and her compassionate termination of the demon’s vices, and thereby encouraging a moral transformation in the audience that might lead to genuine insight into the human condition, as argued by Shulman (1979, 1980). Furthermore, as both the regional and the transregional traditions are populated with similarly nuanced and relatable demon characters, this must have added to Dārika’s credibility and his acceptance by the audience, thereby empowering the symbolic image of liberation represented by his inevitable death.

Eventually, the demon character becomes an exponent of the many regional, transregional, and pan-Indian currents that underlie the regional Purāṇa: an epitome of multivocality instead of malice. After all, whereas the goddess has to remain unflawed and superior, and thus quite static, the understanding of the nature of evil as circumstantial, malleable, and in perpetual motion permits the demon to be interpreted more flexibly. He thus grows beyond his role as mere adversary and is able to present a deviant perspective on the goddess that adds to her greatness. His view is that of the subaltern, so to speak: a position that allows him to be activated by discourses and strategies that add to the narrative without obscuring the radiance of the goddess.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have attempted to define the ways in which empathetic strategies activate the main antagonist of the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya. The multivocality that is so characteristic of regional Purāṇas is here expressed in its most refined form through the character of the demon, who is connected to and distinguished from his compatriots in literary worlds beyond the text. The relatable and humane way in which Dārika is delineated seems to appeal to the empathetic capacity of the audience and sets him apart from his namesakes and counterparts in the Mahāpurāṇī tradition. When analysed from the perspective of both contemporary rhetorical narratology and classical Indian aesthetic theory, the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya seems to opt for certain narrative devices, such as defamiliarization, foregrounding, and direct dialogue, that facilitate the remoulding of this affective demon.

Eventually, Dārika’s character resonates. It resonates with the sound of night-time performances in Malayali temple courtyards. It resonates with a regional and transregional understanding of a demon close to the human world, so close that he is slowly transformed into an exemplar for faulty devotees seeking liberation from their vices in these same temple courtyards. And so the demon invites those devotees to empathize with a literary character who covers a trajectory filled with strangely familiar vices. He asks questions of morality, justice, and redemption, as others have done before him, and thus the character resonates in a second way, with tales of demon-devotees obtaining
deliverance at the hands of the merciful and superior goddess. These are tales of insight and symbolism, elegant poetic renditions that appeal to their audiences with techniques that fully immerse them—techniques that make it possible for those audiences to experience bhakti rasa and feel still more awe for the supreme goddess. And so the character resonates in a third way: with the South Asian literary tradition of rasa. In the end, the demon resonates in many ways. Sotto voce, he resonates with the melodious song of the many voices in the narrative of the Bhadrakālīmāhātmya.

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