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*Hamlet, Macbeth, Anantanarayanan's The Silver Pilgrimage and A Touch of Occidentalism*¹

Abstract: The article focuses on an encounter with Shakespeare in an unusual place, a novel set in medieval India, where Shakespeare is viewed and assessed by an Indian audience, by Indian listeners, through principles of classical Indian art and thought. Such an encounter creates a sense of incongruity, an incongruity that is cultural, philosophical and aesthetic, but at the same time leads to startling perspectives and new and fresh insights. The novel does not privilege one culture over another but the listeners do and we have a brilliant piece of comic writing where the humour derives from the one-sidedness of their perceptions, their “occidentalism”, their easy assumption of the superiority of their belief system over the “other”. *The Silver Pilgrimage* thus provides not only a stimulating perspective on two Shakespearean tragedies from the point of view of Sanskrit poetics and Indian thought, but also a gentle expose of the limitations of this point of view, and the cultural chauvinism that lies behind it.

Keywords: occidentalism, incongruity—cultural, philosophical, aesthetic stimulating perspective, cultural chauvinism.

To start with a cliché, Shakespeare has transcended so many, if not all, geographical, social, political, cultural and linguistic barriers that it is no longer surprising to encounter him in what would at one time have seemed to be strange and unusual places, places like India, Nigeria, Iran, Iraq, Morocco, Egypt, China, Japan, to name just a few. Several of these are in the form of translations, several are reinventions which make the plays more contemporary or are clothed in the traditions and customs of the country or place where they are staged. But

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¹ A shorter, much less detailed version of this article, concentrating on *Hamlet* and without a discussion of Occidentalism or the “play-within-the-play”, was published in the “Notes” section of *Hamlet Studies*, vol. 24 (2002), under the title “*Hamlet* in Strange Places”, 123-31.

while it is no longer strange to meet Shakespeare in strange places there are, nevertheless, two kinds of Shakespearean encounters, one that create a sense of incongruity and seem parodistic and a second that lead through this very incongruity to startling perspectives and provocative thought.

It is on the second kind that I am focussing in this article, an incongruity that occurs in a novel and is cultural, mainly philosophical and aesthetic, as Shakespeare is received and assessed through principles of classical Indian art and thought. The novel is M. Anantanarayanan's *The Silver Pilgrimage*, a wise, richly evocative and sensitively written work, which is remarkable for much more than the segment on Shakespeare and deserves to be better known.

Published in 1961, Harvey Breit in the Preface describes it as possessing "its own luminosity; it is magic" (7). It is the first novel, indeed the only novel, by M. Anantanarayanan (1907-1981), educated at Madras (as it was called then) and Cambridge, an Indian lawyer and civil servant who served as Chief Justice of Madras State from 1966-1969. The product of a lifetime of reading, reflection and experience, it can be called, to quote Harvey Breit again, "a novel, a tapestry, a pageant, a tour de force" (5). A unique blend of fable and fantasy (Paranjpe 51), Thomas Palakeel aptly describes it as a "modern picaresque tale", an "Indian Canterbury Tales" (883), which displays the same robust humour, tolerance and humanity that Chaucer does. It is replete with folklore and folktales, conversations and discussions, and like Chaucer, Anantanarayanan uses the pilgrimage motif and the picaresque to introduce a wide variety of characters and situations.

The book, in Breit's words, is "shamelessly Indian", and gives expression to all facets of Indian life—music, painting, sculpture, cooking, mythology, philosophy—and to a culture in which "religion" pervades "every activity of life" and tinges "every experience" (Breit 6). The narrative voice, however, is "thoroughly modern" (Paranjpe 51). There is a Prolegomena, a series of twenty epigrams, quotations from ancient Tamil and Greek writers, Shakespeare, Donne, Rilke, Rumi, Eliot and Tagore, for which "device of garnishing a plain tale with prefatory excerpts" whose "relevance" becomes clear after reading the story, the author expresses his indebtedness to Herman Melville (8).² The epigrams, Palakeel states, "complicate the interaction of history, plot, style, theme, and accept the conceit that narrator and reader are embarking upon a pilgrimage as observers of a seamless, postmodern present" (883).

The story takes place in "the old days, before this part of the world [India, Sri Lanka] was tainted with pale faces, motor cars and smoke-belching

² All references to *The Silver Pilgrimage* are to the novel (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann 1975). Preface by Harvey Breit. Page numbers follow the quoted passage in the text.

factories, before damp newsprint had corrupted the minds of men” (15). It is set in pre-modern, pre-colonial, medieval India and revolves around a Lankan prince, Jayasurya, handsome and skilled in every way—like Hamlet “The glass of fashion and the mould of form” (3.1.155)³—but singularly lacking in feeling and loving no one but himself. In desperation the King decides to consult the sage Agastya who diagnoses the prince’s mental condition as “the dread infection that tyrants suffer from” (38), and prescribes that with his close friend Tilaka as his sole companion he be exposed to “perils and fatigues” (34), inclement weather, sickness, hunger, deprivation, and undertake the “Silver Pilgrimage” to Kashi (another name for Varanasi, a name that has been restored and is its present name).⁴

The Prince and the Horatio-like Tilaka set off, sail to India, and make their way by foot across Kerala and the Pandian territories facing snakes and insects and hostile natives. Early in the journey they are attacked and robbed by a brigand tribe, carried to their chief and incarcerated. The chieftain’s daughter, Valli, falls in love with the prince, insists on marrying him, devises a plan of escape with the help of a Falstaff-like purohit (priest), and the travellers, accompanied by Valli and the priest, continue towards Kashi. Many adventures befall them, they come across all sorts and conditions of men and, in the most brilliant, comical and memorable encounter in the entire novel, meet “the strangest man of their experience” (86), a merchant, whose lust for adventure led him to remote and unknown lands.

In his most bizarre and fearful journey he was shipwrecked on a rocky, bleak, cold shore, which is obviously England. He lived in this land for three years and learned about “the people, their customs, language, religion and institutions” (87). And what follows is what can best be described as a kind of “Occidentalism”, the “Other”, in this case the West, seen from the perspective of an Orient or East that considers itself superior in every respect—in the physical appearance of its inhabitants, climatically, geographically, intellectually, historically, culturally and aesthetically.

The sun in “this terrible and marvelous country”, he declares, is not “the glorious and compelling [...] lord of light of our Bharat Kanda” but “debilitated, weak and watery”, and “shows his face only for some months in the year” (87-88); autumn and winter are long and chill, and, as an “Easterner”, he suffered a great deal (88). Their “principal food” is meat of various kinds, “good, clean nourishment, but crude, insipid to an Eastern palate” (88). The

³ All references to *Hamlet* are to the Arden Shakespeare, ed. Harold Jenkins (London and New York: Methuen, 1982). Act, scene and line numbers follow the quoted passage in the text.

⁴ There are three sorts of pilgrimages, an old Tamil treatise tells us, Gold, Silver and Lead. “The Silver Pilgrimage is to Kashi, on foot” (Prolegomena 8).

physical appearance of the people is such as to cause “amazement, irrepressible laughter and admiration, all at once” (88). Both men and women are tall and strong but abnormal, “of a deathly whiteness” with “crimson patches on cheeks” which are “greatly prized in women, as well as pale blue eyes [. . .] and fine hair, the color of honeycomb”, “abnormalities”, however, that are much esteemed and celebrated by their poets. His audience reacts as he had predicted with disgust and incredulity: “I cannot credit blue eyes and yellow hair,” said Tilaka. “Nature, even in her crudest mood of jest, would not perpetrate such outrages upon women, the embodiments of divine shakti” (88-89).

While being physically overdeveloped, however, the people of this nation are intellectually underdeveloped—“Their thought is dwarfed like the rocks which they call hills”—an underdevelopment that is geographically determined: “thought does not flourish in that thick, cold air” (90). Hence “their science of medicine is a puling infant beside the giant stature of our Ayurveda”, consisting “largely of sweating in hot tubs, and having blood let out by not overclean barbers”, “harmless” but “ineffective” herbals and tinctures, and no knowledge of “the science of pulse” and very little of “the theory of humors and their minglings” (89).

The language of these “strange, incomprehensible people” has “an imperfect alphabet and a misshapen grammar” but the merchant studied and became proficient in it and was able “to make a close study of their literature and politics” (89). A “recent king” whom they praised as “heartly and masterful”, “twisted their religion out of shape in order to marry a woman” whom he beheaded later, (the merchant spices up history and increases the number of beheaded wives to six), and “robbed the matams [religious houses, monasteries] of their endowments”, which evokes the comment that “dharma” [righteousness] cannot rule in such a country (90).

Since the merchant considers the people immature, incapable of contemplation or deep thought, it is not surprising that he finds their literature “childlike beside the glories of Sanskrit. They have no epics, no *Ramayana* to con with loving reference. Nothing but stories in rhyme about a plowman or an old king, or [. . .] stories recounted by pilgrims to one of their shrines” (91-92). He focuses his attention on their dramatic literature which was “reputed vigorous”, visited their theaters, and centres his discourse on one of their “popular dramatists”, “also a good poet”, who was “so fond of the *rasas* (essence of emotion), of *karuna* (sorrow) and *bhayankara* (horror) that he wrote several plays in which all the characters were finally carried away as corpses, or left on the stage as such”. The unnamed dramatist is obviously Shakespeare. He saw two of these plays “and studied them with circumspection” (92). The two plays, easy to identify from the plot summaries, are *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.

The first “concerns a prince whose uncle murders his father, usurps the throne, and seduces his mother to an incestuous marriage. The prince hates

the uncle and the unholy wedlock, but is ignorant of the murder till his father's spirit enlightens him and exhorts him solemnly to revenge. He takes a vow to do so" (92). The merchant's summary elicits questions and comments, and a lively exchange follows, an exchange in which the issues that have vexed scholars throughout the ages are debated vigorously beginning with the central issue of delay or Hamlet's procrastination:

"He kills the uncle at once, I suppose?" said the prince. "And the theme of the tragic drama is the conflict between him and the widowed queen?"

"Not so", said the merchant. "That would not accord with the peculiar sportiveness and the infant thought of these people. Once he draws his sword to kill, but the king, his uncle, is at prayer, and he does not want to slay the murderer in a moment which might cloak sins and earn grace for him in the judgment hall of Yama (Lord of Death)".

"What a poor reason!" cried Tilaka.

"And what belittlement of Yama's intelligence!" said the purohit.

"I thought so too," said the merchant. "But it seems that this was not the reason, as the prince inwardly realized".

(92)

Obviously, what we have here is the critique of one belief system by another. But what is equally obvious is the expose of the flimsiness of Hamlet's justification for the delay, flimsy no matter what the belief system of the audience. And it remains a dilemma because, as the merchant points out, Hamlet "inwardly realizes" the reasons he gives are not the real reasons, they are feeble and weak, and he is deceiving himself. And just as others have sought to offer credible explanations for Hamlet's procrastination, the merchant, too, puts forward an explanation: "The only reason I could detect was that he desired to make a number of speeches, some earnest, some sportive, while the tragic drama crawled like an ant on a wall" (93). Seemingly flippant and stressing the fact that the play did not hold his interest and was too long, the comment pinpoints Hamlet's main activity throughout the play, his expending energy on words rather than deeds, on *saying*, as he reveals inadvertently in the Hecuba speech, rather than doing.

Some of the speeches are too brief to convey any meaning, according to the merchant, others of medium length, but in all of them the "reflections are disordered" (96), and by way of illustration he gives a literal paraphrase of Hamlet's famous soliloquy. "Shall I kill myself, or shall I not? That is the question perplexing me. Is it a mark of nobility to suffer what fate decrees, or to oppose these miserable events by stabbing myself to death?" The speech, "treasured [. . .] as pregnant with force and wisdom" in the country of its origin, does not impress the prince and his companions. Nor are they sympathetic to the

dilemma Hamlet confronts. They see nothing “noble” in the contemplation of suicide which, to them as to a Christian audience, is a “grievous sin”. They can make no sense of Hamlet’s “philosophical discourse”: “To die is a kind of sleep. But we may dream in that sleep. And the dreams may be highly unpleasant. It is this contingency which makes men afraid to end themselves”. They ridicule the argument that human beings “put up with grievous ills” and “tolerate the oppression of the world” for fear of facing “unknown evils” and reject Hamlet’s negative view of life:

“Man is daunted by present evil, not anticipated. [. . .] It is not the dread of possible greater evil that restrains men from pursuing their ends beyond the pulsation of life. It is the ananda (bliss) of life itself, omnipresent even amidst the ravages of toothache, or unachieved passion”.

(97-98)

The statement is of a piece with what the sage Agastya had said earlier and reinforces the point he was making: “life is dear and supportable at all points, for wherever it is manifest, it is in tension” (36). And the upshot is that the speech is dismissed as “bad logic” and hence “bad poetry” (98).

As with the poetry and thought so also with the wit. The merchant finds Hamlet’s “greatly praised” wit (98) “strange beyond concept [. . .] neither subtle nor simple, often coarse, often meaningless”, and, to the merchant, it is acceptable only because “the playwright [has] as a sensible precaution, afflicted him with lunacy”. Lunacy alone can account for the “incomprehensible joy” which fills Hamlet when, having killed “the father of the girl he loves”, and being “taxed with the murder, [he] says that the nobleman is at supper, only that he does not sup, but worms have a feast of him [and] a beggar may eat of a fish that has fed on a king’s maggots” (99).

From the problem of delay the merchant thus turns to the other critical problem in the play, viz., Hamlet’s madness. Unlike the majority of commentators, the merchant has no difficulty in deciding whether the madness is real or feigned. Hamlet behaves “as if he was afflicted with *unmatha* (lunacy)”, and since in the merchant’s opinion he gains no “visible advantage” by *pretending* madness he believes that it must be real, part of the prince’s natural constitution, “clearly an instance of a playful disposition” and not an aberration. It can be seen in the number of “sportive” speeches he makes and in his treatment of Ophelia in the “nunnery” scene, where, despite his love for her, his “humor” triumphs “over his passion” and he drives her “with tears from the stage laughing to himself like a madman” (93).

And then he comes to the ending of *Hamlet* which results, he observes, not from tragic inevitability, but a series of “accidents”:

“His mistress drowns herself, and the brother of the lady is killed by the prince in swordplay, and who in turn kills the prince. The prince, before he dies, at last stabs his uncle to death. The queen dies, drinking wine from a poisoned goblet. An enemy prince arrives in triumph and takes possession of the kingdom”.

(93)

And, as with so much else in *Hamlet*, the merchant is left with a feeling of dissatisfaction, a dissatisfaction with the excessive number of deaths, a point he makes through the sarcastic remark that the play has been “mutilated” and is “imperfect in construction” and could be improved by having the prince’s friend (Horatio) kill himself “after killing the courtier [Osric] who invited the prince to the sword display, and as many attendants as convenient”, and finally having the “enemy prince” [Fortinbras] drink “the dregs of the poisoned goblet” and drop “on the encumbered stage” (93).

From Shakespeare’s longest play the merchant turns to his shortest play, *Macbeth*, which he saw twice and which “concerns an ambitious chief, welcoming his king to his castle, after a battle in which this chief has greatly distinguished himself”. On his way home he encounters “three ragged female astrologers”, at which point he is interrupted by an outburst from the horrified purohit who finds it difficult to accept women as astrologers, a “new concept in the mind of man” (94). They predict that the chief would receive honours and would become king although his children would not rule after him. On his return, when he finds that the first part of the prophecy has come true, he decides to kill the king, “aided by his wife, a woman of far greater energy than common sense”. Prince Jayasurya asks, “How can the shedder of royal blood escape the workings of Karma?”, and the merchant replies that this did not occur to either him or his wife, nor “that the murder would cry out from floor and well, that avoidance of suspicion would be impossible” since “the preparations” were such as “would have shamed a kitchen drudge”. The sons of the murdered ruler flee and the new king proceeds to other murders to secure his throne and “loses sleep”; Tilaka is astounded to learn that that is his “major punishment and he complains with peevish frequency about this insomnia”. His wife, on the other hand sleeps “to an unwholesome excess” which “causes her to perambulate in a stupor, suffering from reminiscences of the murder” (95). Commenting again on the underdeveloped state of medicine in the country he states that physicians are unable to cure her and she dies. So does the king, but he dies on the battlefield and is given a “glorious death, not the death of a regicide” (96).

Macbeth, thus, fares no better with the merchant than *Hamlet* and having dismissed the plot as faulty he turns to the style and finds nothing admirable in it either. Although, unlike the prince in the previous play, the chief-become-king is not mad “at any time” but only “ambitious and cruel”, “the imbecility of

intellect” seen in *Hamlet* is evident here, too, and, by way of demonstration, he paraphrases one of the murderer-monarch’s “notable” speeches as he had done Hamlet’s:

“Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow—So the days succeed in a most gradual procession—The past days have been like torches, lighting the unintelligent to their day of death. [. . .] Let us extinguish the truth. [. . .] Life is a *nata* (a player) who plays a strictly minor part, and disappears behind the curtains. [. . .] Alternatively, life is a story recounted by an imbecile or attempted to be so recounted. Sounds proceed from his mouth, but they are devoid of meaning”.

(96-97)

Shakespeare’s tragedies, in short, do not find approval or approbation with either the merchant or his listeners. The disapproval, the criticism, arises not just from a different world view but from the radically different principles of Sanskrit poetics, a criticism which the listeners amplify and to which they contribute. “It strains credence that none has realized, neither playwright nor audience”, says Tilaka, “that cumulative death is farcical, and not tragic. Surely, death itself is irrelevant, and classic tragedy concludes with the aftermath of skies cleared, of storm” (94). As Tilaka’s comments spell out, the perspective of the merchant and his listeners in *The Silver Pilgrimage* is determined by the philosophical and aesthetic principles on which they have been nurtured, a drama in which there is no tragedy, often no conflict, or, in plays like Bhasa’s *Urubhanga* which comes close to the Western notion of tragedy, no death. To them, to repeat Tilaka’s observation, “death is irrelevant, and classic tragedy concludes with the aftermath of skies cleared, of storm”. And hence they regard with smug satisfaction the superiority of Kalidasa’s *Abhignana Sakuntalam* and Bhavabhuti’s *Uttaramacaritam* over these rudimentary dramatic productions of an inferior barbaric culture, plays where there is disruption and separation, sorrow and suffering, but where everything is resolved, there is reconciliation and a happy ending, harmony is established and a benign providence rules over all.

In fact, the Indian audience of Anantanarayanan’s novel would have been comfortable with and appreciated Shakespeare’s Romances which, like the Sanskrit plays mentioned, deal with the separation of families and their eventual reconciliation, where death, when it occurs, does not mar the happy ending, and which do, indeed, conclude with “the aftermath of skies cleared, of storm”,⁵ with good rewarded and evil punished and the restoration of justice and harmony.

⁵ See my article, “Bhavabhuti’s *Uttaramacaritam* and Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*: Two Versions of Romance”, *The Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature* 23 (1985): 40-48.

It must be pointed out that it is not just the literature to which the merchant responds negatively. He finds nothing in that culture worth admiring and disparages everything. He does not value or praise the discovery of printing which makes books “cheaply available” and available in large numbers, “multiplied by tens, even hundreds” and accessible to ordinary men and women. He can “discern no advantage therein”, “the method” being “monstrous and evil”, the “process [. . .] laborious, with far more disfiguring errors of text than in our palm-leaf books so daintily engraved with stylus”. What is worse is that an “unskilled sot” has merely “to take the seals in a wooden press”, “fools” are “initiated into reading, without the skill of digesting thought”, and Kalidasa’s *Meghadutam* (cloud messenger) can be bought for a trifle “and balladed by kitchen wenches” (98-99). Literature and literacy, he strongly believes, are not for the masses and should be provided, after they have laboured and toiled, only to the chosen few, the elite.

All this notwithstanding, it is necessary and important to dispel the impression that *The Silver Pilgrimage* seeks to privilege one culture over another or to subvert one culture by another. Not even incidentally. To that extent, it is not an example of Occidentalism. It is not an attempt, even comically, to counter the idea of “Orientalism”, a patronizing representation of the Orient as “the Other”, a “skewed colonial view” of the East (Jukka Jouhki and Henna-Riika Pennanen 2), positing that it was inferior in every way, geographically, socially, sociologically, culturally, to the West, and representing Orientals as irrational and at a lower level of progress and civilization compared to their Western counterparts. “Occidentalism” is the polar opposite and, as I mentioned before, sees the “Other”, the West, and its inhabitants as inferior in every way to the East and its glories, inferior in its intellectual, cultural and aesthetic achievements, and in academic texts often takes the form of anti-Westernism.

The Silver Pilgrimage is not anti-Western in any way or by any stretch of the imagination. To begin with, there is no blanket “West” in the novel. There is this one country, England, where the merchant lands and he distinguishes it from Hispania and the way in which the people worship here from the way of worship of the Hispanic people. There is thus no question of stereotyping, part of the reason for this being that the novel is set in a period when there was no concept in India or Lanka of the West, there was no prior knowledge of the West and there had been no exposure to the West. The encounter was to come later, colonialism was to come later. Therefore, the whole exchange that takes place in *The Silver Pilgrimage* is not “a strategy devised by subordinate people for surviving in a hegemonic world” (Takeuchi, 26-27) but reactions to an extraordinary and unusual experience presented in a brilliant piece of comic writing, a wonderful take-off, which lays bare the limitations of the Indian listeners and their preconceptions. If the West is undercut it must be noted that the humour derives in no small measure from the one-sidedness of the

merchant's views, *his* "Occidentalism", *his* privileging of his and his listeners's culture over that of the "Other". That is *his* position, not the position of the novel and the narrator, and it is a position that is questioned and critiqued.

The merchant himself qualifies some of the statements he makes. For instance, when he says that the people of this unknown country are "strange" and "incomprehensible", he adds "to us"; that is, they are not strange and incomprehensible in any absolute terms, only to him and his fellows. He states that they are not "overclean" but observes at the same time that their health is excellent, their "spirits are nimble and light", and concedes that one reason why their science of medicine is not as well developed as Ayurveda is that it is not needed as it is in India where sickness is rife (89). The people may be "essentially immature" and incapable of "grave contemplation", but they are "lovable" and possessed of "a homely wisdom", they have no caste system as in India, and they do not tolerate injustice (90). As to the women, he admits that the "incessant adoration" accorded to them in the works of the poets and writers of the land "convinced" him, "as no philosopher could have done, of the relativity of the beautiful" (89).⁶

As I mentioned, the merchant's extreme opinions provoke rejoinders from the listeners and Tilaka questions the truth of his declarations: "I do not think that you are doing justice to these strange folk. Providence is subtle, and gifts and afflictions are cunningly mingled as the dowries of nations". He draws attention to the fact that in "our glorious *Bharat Kanda*, incomparable in its philosophy, literature, sculpture, and architecture [. . .] we are burned and baked by an all-potent sun to our debilitation", the same sun the merchant had described as the "glorious and compelling [. . .] lord of light"; "the soil is cruel flint except in the valleys of the great rivers, the Asiatic cholera is an unmitigated curse,⁷ and so are our warring kings, tax-gatherers, and black crows" (93). Agastya's discourse at the beginning of the novel provides a detailed list of the terrible conditions in India—the bad roads, the dirty, exorbitant inns, "the danger of being stripped by official and unofficial robbers [. . .] the continuous danger of epidemics, the potent cholera of Asia, disfiguring smallpox, fevers of the jungle" (34)—which Tilaka briefly mentions here. And he insists that this alien land, disadvantaged in so many ways, "robbed" of beautiful women, must have some positive features by way of compensation: "It cannot be that brains were also stolen by goblins from the skullcaps of dramatists, and powdered clod substituted" (94).

⁶ The "relativity" of beauty is emphasized in the exchange between Tilaka and the Prince about Valli. The latter observes that Valli's "complexion ought to be fairer" and Tilaka turns on him with "You are a fool. Her beauty is like the night, dark, reserved and deep" (50).

⁷ Valli dies of cholera on the return journey.

The Silver Pilgrimage, in other words, is not just a critique of another culture, it holds the mirror up to and is a critique of Indian culture as well. Consequently, it provides not only a fresh and stimulating perspective on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* from the point of view of Sanskrit poetics and Indian thought but, through the intensity and insistence of the merchant's assertions, a gentle and humorous expose of those very assumptions, of the limitations of that point of view, of the inability to see and comprehend any body of opinion except one's own, and of the cultural chauvinism which determines responses and is used to confute Western cultural hegemony.

Apart from the foregoing discussion, the whole Shakespearean interlude performs an interesting and important function. It serves as a play-within-the-play which comments not only on the issue of Western and Sanskrit poetics but, like all such, on the happenings and issues raised in the novel and promotes a kind of dialogue. In both the plays and the novel, the confrontation with death effects momentous changes in the protagonists. In *Hamlet*, Hamlet Senior's murder and his "commandment" to revenge it lives in Hamlet's brain to the exclusion of everything else (1.5.102) and transforms him. He is overwhelmed by the task which dominates his every thought and which he would seek to escape by suicide were it not for the "dread" (3.1.78) of what lies beyond. It is curious that Hamlet's lines on the "undiscover'd country, from whose bourn/No traveller returns" (3.1.79-80) and the "dreams" that may come in "the sleep of death" (3.5.66) occur *after* his meeting with his father's Ghost; for a "traveller", Hamlet Senior, has returned in the spirit and told him of the purgatorial fires to which he is confined. It is therefore somewhat surprising in the light of his own remarks that what the Ghost says does not impact Hamlet except when he uses his father's dying unsanctified as an excuse to spare Claudius which I have already discussed and which the listeners in *The Silver Pilgrimage* see as just that, an excuse. Hamlet is crushed and tormented by the burden laid on him in *this* life and achieves some sort of equilibrium only after his own brush with death and the generality of death in the graveyard scene, his realization that everything is not under his control and "readiness is all" (5.2.218). While the "Let be" following these words (5.2.220) probably indicates the interruption of his conversation with Horatio by the arrival of the courtiers it also suggests that Hamlet is prepared to let things take their course.

In *The Silver Pilgrimage* Valli's death precipitates an "internal crisis" in the unfeeling prince of the opening chapters. He is shaken by cataclysmic violence, becomes disordered and is "tortured" by the desire to "know". Hamlet is troubled by the "dread of something after death" (3.1.78), Prince Jayasurya about "the future of the personality after bodily dissolution" (151-152). Valli's spirit is summoned through the offices of a necromancer and speaks to the prince and his companions in a séance. Unlike Hamlet Senior, Valli paints a positive picture and waits to "drift" from the "shadow world" which she does not like to

heaven which is where everyone seemingly goes, “always to heaven, for we create by ourselves, and by the dreams of ages”, a “shifting luminosity, indescribably beautiful” (154-155). Jayasurya, however, does not say he is reassured, he simply states he is “totally cured” by the séance and has “lost all interest in the afterlife, which, however gilded”, has “ineradicable snags” (157). In both works, thus, though the belief systems are different, the protagonists put these supernatural encounters and the next world behind them and return to the here and now.

The saint of Kashi, in their meeting with him, asks the prince a question one might ask Hamlet, why he lives “in the past and future” and torments himself “with hopes, with fears”, why he does not live “in that which is real, the present” (131). For “When the mind is intensely focused in the present, when it is not separate from event but is event itself, there is [. . .] both peace and happiness” (132). Macbeth in his lines in Act 5, scene 5, which the merchant paraphrases, speaks of “yesterdays” and “tomorrows” (5.5.19-23)⁸ but not of todays, and his problems arise from his ambition to be king, an event that lies in the future, and his inability to rest content in his present successes in battle and the honours conferred on him. Hamlet, as we have seen, torments himself speculating on whether he should or should not act and what the consequences of his actions will be. The sage’s answer is that the future is not important since “it does not exist apart from the present, which alone exists” (133).

Jayasurya grows and learns through his experiences of which his and his companions’s exposure to Shakespeare’s plays are a crucial part for, as I have pointed out, the questions raised by Hamlet and Macbeth are questions in *The Silver Pilgrimage* as well. It is significant that Anantanarayanan’s novel should conclude with a repetition of the sage of Kashi’s “There is no future” and Agastya’s, “Life is dear and supportable at all points, however great the anguish or mean the situation, for everywhere it is in tension” (159). For these are the answers to Macbeth, Hamlet, as well as Jayasurya and Tilaka.

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⁸ *Macbeth*, the Arden Shakespeare, ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Methuen, 1962). Act, scene and line numbers follow the quoted passage in the text.

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