Notes on *Tillaikkalampakam*

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1.

How mixed is a "mixed bag?" In particular, one assembled, if we are to trust the tradition, by the strangely familiar though unlikely couple of a blind man and a cripple, both inspired poets? Why are we told this story of double authorship? Does it illuminate, or frame, the text in question in a meaningful way? Is there a logic or organizing principle underlying the assemblage of discrete parts, topics, themes in such a work?

Kalampakam, the "mixed bag,"[1] is a well-known, extremely popular medieval genre in Tamil, diffuse in structure but frequently replete with exquisite individual stanzas (*taṉippāṭal* or *muktaka*); the standard number of verses is 100, linked by *antāti* anaphora. Perhaps the earliest extant example is the *Nantikkalampakam*, of anonymous authorship, with Nandivarman III (846-869) as its hero. The genre flourished in later centuries, right up to the nineteenth, when the great Tiricirapuram Mīṉāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai composed several such collections. In the eyes of the tradition, however, truly exemplary *kalampakams* were the work of the so-called Twin Poets, Iraṭṭaiyar (*kalampakattiṟk' iraṭṭaiyarkaḷ*), whom we date, on somewhat precarious grounds, in the mid-fourteenth century.[2] Two surviving *kalampakams* are ascribed to these poets: *Tillaikkalampakam*, on Cidambaram and its deity, and *Tiruvāmāttūrkkalampakam*, on Tiruvāmāttūr in the Toṇṭai region. Both works conform to the fixed features of the genre as stated in the somewhat later textbooks of poetics such as the *Paṉṉiru pāṭṭ'iyal*.[3] I return to these formal guidelines below.

From the *Tamiḻ nāvalar caritai* we have the story of the Twin Poets, Iḷañcūriyar and Mutucūriyar, one blind and the other lame; the blind man carried the lame one on his shoulders so that both could benefit from the latter's vision.[4] An ideal of extempore composition in this case required, as so often,[5] two complementary voices, the second finishing the verse begun by the first. A

[1]< *kala*, "to mix, unite, join; to commingle, combine" (*MTL*, s.v.); probably via *kalappu*, "mixture," "intimacy," "union" + *akam*. Note the proximity to the semantic range of Skt. *śleṣa*: see below.

[2]T. V. Catāciva Paṇṭārattar, *Tamiḻ ilakkiya varalāṟu (13, 14, 15-ām nūṟṟāṇṭukaḷ),* (Tiruvannamalai: Annamalai University, 1957), 62; Te. Po. Mīṉākṣicuntaraṉār, introduction to *Tillaikkalampakam*, edited with commentary by Ta. Ce. Umapati (Madras: Ruttira patippakam, 1958), viii.; K. Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (Leiden: Handbuch der Orientalistik, 1975), 216. The dating hinges on the line *vaṭitta cuṭar veṟ campaṉ vāḷ mallinātaṉ* in the Iraṭṭaiyar's *Ekamparanātar ulā* and the identification of the Campaṉ mentioned there. Later references to the Twin Poets in *Toṇṭaimaṇṭalaccatakam* and *Tamiḻ nāvalar caritai* are of marginal usefulness in dating.

[3]*Paṉṉiru pāṭṭ'iyal* 129-130. A third *kalampakam*, *Kaccikkalampakam*, has also been attributed to these poets: see Zvelebil, *op. cit.*

[4]*Tamiḻ nāvalar caritai* 98.

[5] See Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman, *A Poem at the Right Moment: Remembered Verses from Premodern South India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 159-68.

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considerable body of late narrative expands upon this concretization or personification of the Sāṅkhya parable, the *pangv-andha-nyāya*. For present purposes, however, we will set aside these powerful narrative materials and concentrate on the verses of the *Tillaikkalampakam*, to see if we can make some sense of this "rather untidy and bizarre genre."[6]

First, a brief word on context. There is perhaps no period in the history of Tamil literature so neglected as the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries—the period following the final collapse of the Cōḻa state. We are accustomed to stressing the truly revolutionary achievements of the Cōḻa-period poets such as Kampaṉ, Cēkkiḻār, Oṭṭakkūttar, and Cayaṅkoṇṭār (particularly the two former, with their monumental *mahākāvyas*). Yet the poets of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and early fifteenth centuries were, in their own way, no less revolutionary, as we can see from the immense impact their work had on the emerging medieval system of literary forms. In a sense, the ecology of genres that we recognize later—including the standardized list of 96 *ciṟṟ'ilakkiyam* or *prabandha* forms as well as those literary models that remain stubbornly outside it—was fashioned out of the innovative and systematizing impulses of the early post-Cōḻa centuries. Further critical advances, such as Ativīrarāmapāṇṭiyaṉ's *Naiṭatam* and Civappirakācar's *Pirapuliṅkalīlai*, emerge directly from the literary matrix of this previous period.

Who are these poets? Apart from the Twins, there is Pukaḻēntippulavar, the author of the great lyrical masterpiece, *Naḷaveṇpā*. There are the Śaiva Siddhānta poets who shaped the Tamil Śaiva canon, including Umāpati Civācāriyar; together with his predecessor, Perumpaṟṟappuliyūr Nampi, Umāpati invented the major narrative *mahākāvya* format of late-medieval Tamil, the *talapurāṇam*—sustained, highly integrated, and self-contained lyrical narratives, utterly different in character from the earlier *mahākāvya* models. We have the great commentators (Pērāciriyar, Parimēlaḻakar, Nacciṉārkk'iṉiyar, Cēṉāvaraiyar, Aṭiyārkkunallār) and the erudite Vaiṣṇava scholar-poets. Toward the end of this period, there is Villiputtūrār's *Bhārata*, Aruṇakirinātar's breakthrough in musical-metrical forms, and the many works of Kāḷamēkappulavar—arguably the most original, also one of the most prolific, of these poets. This list could easily be extended to include more minor figures. If we attempt an analytical characterization of the radical changes in the literary universe that emerged at this time, we might stress the following three features:

1) *The intra-linguistic turn*: Language turns back on itself, examines and toys with itself as a primary subject of the poet's attention. At the same time, by the same token, syntax, diction, and metre achieve a sophistication and complexity of an entirely new order when compared to the Cōḻa masterpieces. The creative, indeed magically potent energies active within poetic speech come often to dominate more discursive directions, and these powers are also studied, systematized and theorized by the poeticians. *Śleṣa/cilēṭai* paronomasia becomes central to poetic praxis, at once a sign and an instrument of the poet's transformative skill. *Śleṣa*-oriented poets such as the Iraṭṭaiyar or Kāḷamēkappulavar are assimilated to a model of peripatetic

[6] K. Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1974), 200.

magicians or sorcerers, far removed from the court-poet model of Cēkkiḻār or Kampaṉ. As such, they are also given to far-reaching linguistic experimentation, the driving force behind much poetic praxis. Thus Pukaḻēnti, for example, appears to create an effective isomorphism between the specific dynamics of his chosen metrical form (*veṇpā*) and the internal and external processes his heroes undergo.[7] Experimentation of this sort, while far from unprecedented in Tamil, becomes an autonomous, axiomatic goal as poets explore the natural iconicity of language and attempt to harness its potential. Playfulness, complexity, and a certain intra-linguistic objectivity—in its own way scientific and systematic—underlie new, subtle forms or modes of expressivity, heavily metaphysical in implication. Formally, we see the reemergence of the individual stanza as the natural unit of poetic speech.

2) Perhaps unexpectedly, given the above, highly individualized voices begin to make themselves heard. Once again, this is a new point of departure. Think, by way of contrast, of the three *Tēvāram* poets and of the relative uniformity of their style. This process is a long one, and it is easy to miss the distinctiveness of particular poets who assume the burden of genre-based conventions. Nonetheless, sensitivity to syntax alone can often show us the way, as it is here, and in the handling of metre, that individuality becomes most evident. It may seem strange to join this feature to the notion of introversive and magical tendencies, but the paradox is only apparent: it is precisely the manifestation of non-accidental intra-linguistic effects by a skilled poet that allows for the deepened expressivity of the *prabandha* genres.[8] Together with this enhanced personal tone we notice a drive toward integration, on various levels—above all, the attempt to produce fully integrated, poetically convincing *prabandha* texts; but also the attempt to rework and re-apply, as it were, the vast store of poetic convention inherited from earlier books with their associated grammars.

3) "Grammar," in the widest sense, remains critical. New poetic grammars are produced to map out standard features of the new genres, but this movement is but part of a much wider systemic effort. In effect, poetic grammar has to be reinvented, as we see clearly in works such as the Iraṭṭaiyar's *kalampakam*s. Here, as usual, the poets themselves are far more daring than the poetician-theorists who, seen from our perspective, appear reluctant to address the primary mechanisms now active in the poems (for example, the reworking of the old *akam* conventions; see below). Still, the sense of an emergent system is very strong in all of these texts and is also reflected in a dense intertextuality, which presumes a knowledge on the part of the poet of the erudite disciplines related to poetry. In short, the early post-Cōḻa centuries can be said to have reconceptualized the grammar of poetic speech. We are still very

[7] See my essay on "Nala Unhinged: Pukaḻēntippulavar's *Naḷavĕṇpā*," in a forthcoming volume on the Nala story edited by Susan Wadley.

[8] A very similar process comes to the fore in Telugu in the 16th century, when we can observe a split between those poets, such as Rāmarājabhūṣaṇa, who seek to explore the depths of language for its own sake and those, like Piṅgaḷi Sūranna, who move into novelistic, discursive modes. Velcheru Narayana Rao and I are preparing a monograph on this period.

far from understanding the true richness and subtlety of this process; all too often, we read the later medieval Tamil texts as if they were more or less mechanical extensions of what we think we know about first-millenium poetry. Most emphatically, however, they are not. The following remarks on *Tillaikkalampakam* are offered in the spirit of probing, empirically and comparatively, one remarkable, tantalizing text.

2.

Kalampakam is usually defined on the basis of a set of 14 to 18 set elements that are, we are told, de rigueur. They include:

puyam—on the hero's prowess (as evident in his arms)
ammāṉai—the well-known women's genre
ūcal—a swing song
yamakam—chiming/twinning
kaḷi—on drunkenness
maṟam—on Maravar heroics
cittu—on Siddha medicine or praxis
kālam—"time" as separating lovers
mataṅki (or *mataṅku)*—an acrobat/actress playing with two swords
vaṇṭu—a bee as messenger (*tūtu*)
mēkam—a cloud as messenger
maruḷ (= *kaikkiḷai*)-- one-sided love
campiratam [< Skt *sambhṛta*]—magic as creative illusion
tavam—"*tapas*," in this case an ambiguous and rather open-ended term[9]

Add to the above the following four items:

Pāṇ—the heroine's address to a bard as mediator in her love relationship
ūr—praise of the hero's village or town (but which hero? see below)
taḻai—the *talaivaṉ*'s gift of the leaf-dress to his beloved
iraṅkal—impatient waiting, as in the classical *neytal tiṇai*

The last item, cited in *Citamparappāṭṭ'iyal* as part of the complete sequence of 18,[10] is somewhat misleading: we find in *kalampakam* the whole range of the classical *uripporuḷ* categories, although, not surprisingly, states of agonized separation tend to predominate. There is a clear tendency for these defining elements to proliferate, especially in terms of the social types that infiltrate the genre: thus we find poems on *kuṟatti* fortune-tellers, cowherdesses (*iṭaicciyār*), female mendicants (*picciyār*),[11] and so on. Other types of messenger-verses are also well attested.

The earliest extant *kalampakam*s, such as *Nantikkalampakam* and Nampiyāṇṭar Nampi's *Āḷuṭaiyapiḷḷaiyār tirukalampakam*, include only a few items from what was to become the more or less standard list of defining features.[12] The *kalampakam* grew and expanded its repertoire of subjects over time. Even in this schematic description, however, one can see the serious attempt to

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[9] This list follows *Paṉṉiru pāṭṭ'iyal* 129; see comments by Zvelebil, *op. cit.*
[10] See T. P. Mīṉākṣicuntaraṉār, *op. cit*., v.
[11] See *Tillaikkalampalam* 72, 37, 87.
[12] See T. P. Mīṉākṣicuntaraṉār, *op. cit*., vi-vii.

encompass within the genre a social universe both diversified and, in a sense, complete—or, to state the matter differently, to create a relatively self-contained, autonomous universe of its own. Note, however, that there is no attempt to regulate the order in which the individual items are to appear, or even how many times such an item might recur. *Kalampakam* is always ordered—we need not shrink from the word—in non-linear sequence.

This manner of defining the boundaries of the genre, the preferred mode of the *pāṭṭ'iyal* grammars, has its uses; for one thing, it points to a genealogy, as many, indeed most, subjects are well known from the earlier tradition. In a way, this is the problem: lists like the above, apart from their episodic and disconnected character, effectively mask the transformations that have taken place in nearly all generic themes. It is fair to say that the supposedly familiar *akam* scenarios that turn up in *kalampakam* have all been very radically revised; we will see some examples below. In fact, there are much more powerful ways to classify the *kalampakam*'s range. Most obvious and accessible—also highlighted in the *pāṭṭ'iyal* works—is the organizing role of metre. The outstanding classical metres are all necessarily represented here: as the *Pan̲n̲iru pāṭṭ'iyal* says, "[in *kalampakam* the various] musical metres[13] appear, mixed together, in the *antāti* mode" (**en̲a varum ceyyuṭ kalant' uṭan̲ eytiya antam/ātiyāka varum en̲a moḻipa*, 129). "Mixing" is clearly a primary goal, as the very name of the genre indicates. The result, invariably, is a display of extremely sophisticated metrical technique, a musical and rhythmic *tour de force*. *Kalampakam* offers a taste of the Tamil metrical system at its most mature and complete. In all likelihood, this metrical extravagance is the major structural principle of the genre. Note, however, the *antāti* device, each stanza beginning with a syllable or syllables taken from the end of the preceding verse; this anaphoric technique, which also applies to the final verse of the *Tillaikkalampakam* in relation to the first, binds together the century of poems in a loose but significant integrative pattern, entirely rooted in sound rather than meaning. At the same time, *antāti* here produces a recursive structure, as if the text were circling around itself endlessly, the end feeding into the beginning so that there is, in effect, neither end nor beginning, only the continuous rhythmic movement from verse to verse, metre to metre.[14]

One could, however, suggest a rather different typological series, analytical, stylistic, and thematic, for the verses contained in these works. The exact combination and prevalence of generic types varies from one *kalampakam* to another, but if we take the *Tillaikkalampakam* as our sample, we can easily distinguish the following major categories:

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[13] *orupōku*, *veṇpā*, *kalitturai*, *vañcitturai*, *akaval*, *viruttam* are mentioned specifically; other texts expand this list considerably.

[14] See remarks by A. K. Ramanujan on *antāti*: *Hymns for the Drowning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 166-69.

***1.** Straightforward descriptive verses focused on the temple in its geographical setting, its ritual order, or its particular history.[15] For example (the *ammāṉai* exemplum):

teṉpuliyūr ampalavar tillaic citamparattē
vem puliy oṉṟ' ennāḷum mēvuṅ kāṇ ammāṉai/
vem puliy oṉṟ' ennāḷum mēvumēy ām ākil
ampalattai viṭṭē akalātō? ammāṉai/
āṭṭai viṭṭu vēṅkai akalumō ammāṉai//

"They say there's a tiger who always stays
in the Inner Space[16] of Tillai
in Southern Tiger Town—*ammāṉai*!"
"But wouldn't a tiger leave the open meadow?—*ammāṉai*!"
"What tiger would leave behind a goat/ the dance?—*ammāṉai*!" (60)

The *ammāṉai* is cast in this case as an exchange, ostensibly between women playing ball. An initial statement is put to the test, or recast as a riddle, which then inspires a solution.[17] But both the riddle and its solution depend here on *śleṣa* paronomasia. The "tiger" in Tiger Town, that is, Cidambaram, is Vyāghrapāda, the tiger-footed devotee of the dancing Śiva. This "tiger" is at home in the (*ciṟṟ'*) *ampalam*—also, an open space or meadow. One might expect a tiger to be restless enough to abandon the meadow from time to time—but not if there is a goat (*āṭṭai* < *āṭu*) waiting to be eaten, and not if the tiger is a devotee rapt in wonder at Śiva's dance (*āṭṭai*). So the riddle can be simply solved or, better, diverted into another domain; the real mystery, which resists solution, is the miraculous homophony of "goat" and "dance" when compounded with the near-identity of Tiger-Foot and a wilder tiger. As if to mark off this conflation, the final line opts for another synonym for tiger, *vēṅkai* (after we see only *puli* in lines 1 through 4). *Śleṣa*, as usual, extends beyond the technical chiming of syllables and establishes an otherwise invisible or obscure connection. The result, naturally untranslatable, is meant to charm but also to draw attention to this level of non-accidental homophony, which then becomes suggestive in its own right: is Tiger-Foot eternally hungry for this dance of the Cidambaram deity?

***2.** Iconic descriptions of Śiva himself, or of his attributes, his mythic history, his consort:

āṭiya veṇpiṟaiyōṭ' antarattiṉ mēṟ koḻuntāy
ōṭiya cekkar vāṉ okkumē—nīṭiya kō-
paṅ kakk' uḻaiyāṉ paṭai maḻuvāṉ teṉpuliyūr
caṅkakkuḻaiyāṉ caṭai//

Like the red sunset sky,
rising with the moon like a flame,
is the long matted hair of the god

[15] E.g. *Tillaikkalampakam* 1, 42, 69, 98, 99.

[16] *ciṟṟ'ampalam*. For this translation and its implications, see my essay, "Downstream into God," in D. Shulman and G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Self and Self-transformation in the History of Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[17] Note the similarity to the *tiruccāḻal* of *Tiruvācakam* 12; discussion of the latter in D. Handelman and D. Shulman, *Śiva in the Forest of Pines: An Essay on Sorcery and Self-knowledge*, in press.

in Tiger Town, an angry deer
in one hand, the axe
in another, conch dangling
from his ear. (71)

Such verses can be relatively transparent, their beauty mostly achieved through phono-aesthetic means like the *mōṉai* alliteration in this case, and by lucid figuration; note, however, the complex enjambment between lines 2 and 3, a typical indication of the syntactical developments mentioned earlier.[18] A sub-category includes verses rich in allusions to specifically Tamil Śaiva materials (the stories of Ciṟuttoṇṭar [73], Tiruñāṉacampantar [22], Cuntaramūrttināyaṉār [40], the Caṅkam poets' plank, *palakai* [61], etc.). Occasionally, we find *Tēvāram*-style statements, sounding slightly anachronistic amidst the *kalampakam*'s tendency to more condensed or compacted syntax:

puri nūl puṉaivār tirunīṟ' aṇivār puliyūrar
paripūraṇarāy maṭavār uyirē pali tērvār
eri nīṟ' iṭave nakuvār paku vāy erut' ēṟi
varu nūpura' māṉ nacaiyāl pala kāl varuvārē//

He bears the twisted thread, covers himself
with ash. He belongs to Puliyūr.
He fills all space. He begs
from women, takes
their very life as alms.
He laughs, and fire burns (the demons' cities)
to ash. He rides the bull. He comes
again and again out of love for the girl
with ringing anklets, gentle
as a doe.(79)

A routine set of iconic attributes, simply articulated (but with a mild paradox situating the god at once in Puliyūr and in "all space"), opens up in the final line to include an *akam*-type reconceptualization of this god as hero and lover.

***3.** Discursive, emotionally intense, mostly first-person *bhakti* verses in what could be called, emblematically, a *Tiruvācakam* style.[19] Such verses are often couched in *viruttam*, though we also find other cases, such as this lovely *veṇpā*:

puliyūr uṟaiyum puṉitā puku veṇ
paliy ūr toṟum irakkum paṇpā—poli kayilaik
kallil irukkak kaṭaṉ āṉāl enneñcak
kallil irukkak kaṭaṉ//

It is in your nature,
pure god living in Puliyūr,
to wander from village
to village begging alms, yet they say
you *have* to stay in some rocky place
like the tall mountain.[20] If this is true,
why not stay in the heavy rock
of my heart? (12)

[18] Further examples of this category in *Tillaikkalampakam*: 38, 64, 68, 70, 84.
[19] E.g. 59, 65, 66, 89, 91, 95.
[20] Kailāsa.

Why not indeed? The god is restless and, apparently, needy; at the same time, he remains fixed in place both in Cidambaram and in his mountain home in the Himālayas. Śiva is drawn, duty bound, to the form of existence we see in rocks. Such an affinity has its own logic and consequences. The singer, perhaps no less restless and needy, offers a resolution, or at least a restatement, of the paradox of simultaneous stasis and movement, deep feeling and numbness. Let this god come, not to rest but to hide and reside, in the singer's heavy heart, where both emotional options—dull opacity and clarity of sensation—are naturally at play.

A somewhat more elaborate, yet typical example is the following:

viti vaḻi tavaṟiya matiyilā eṉai
meyttavam puriyāp pittaṉ ivaṉ eṉṟu
maṉpatai ulakatt' aṉparkaḷ nakaittaṉar
āḻiy am puviyil aṉaivarum paḻitta
ēḻai eṉṟ' ikaḻāt' eṉṉaiyum tāṅkuṟum
cūtamum mullaiyum cōkamum kuvaḷaiyum
mīt' uyar kañcamum veḷippaṭa malara
ven tiṟal vāliyait tantai koṉṟatu pōl
oḷittu niṉṟ' eyta voṇ cilai māraṉai
muḻuttirai koḻikkum mutta veṇ nakaiyāl
maruṅku cūḻ kiṭanta karuṅ kaṭal nakaikkum
mallal am perum paṇai vayal cūḻ
tillaiyampalavar teṉpuliyūrē//

The whole world laughs at me,
lovers mock me. They say I'm crazy,
do nothing right. I agree. I'm fate's
true idiot.

Still, there's one place that wants me,
that doesn't scorn me
as everyone's fool. Tiger Town
in the South, where the god of Tillai lives
amidst mango, jasmine, nelumbo and the dense lotus,
reaches up to the black sea

that showers the paddy fields with pearls
as if showing its white teeth
to Māraṉ, God of Desire, whose father
slyly shot Vālin, the monkey king, as Desire
shoots his deadly flowers. (59)

This is *akaval*, an archaic survival, so to speak, in the medieval set of lyrical metres. The simplicity of the metre, however, masks a syntactical complexity well suited to the fourteenth-century poetic system. Following the opening three lines, a single sentence, we have a long, serially embedded sequence whose subject appears only at the very end of the verse; the finite verb *tāṅkuṟum* slips in, almost unnoticed, and potentially ambiguous in import, at the end of line 5. A long adjectival clause, modifies *māraṉai*—the god of desire—together with an embedded simile: Desire shoots his five arrows surreptitiously, unfairly, just as Viṣṇu—Desire's father—in the form of Rāma shot down Vālin from an ambush. Against this sly attack, articulated so as to hint at a father's violent activity, we have the ocean's pearly, somewhat supercilious smile; Tiger Town, that is, is proof against Desire. So much the better for the speaker, who

knows himself to be an idiot (*matiyilā eṉai*) and concurs with the world's assessment of him as mad, yet still happily finds solace in Cidambaram.

A syntax so convoluted presents the intriguing problem of attention. What is it that the listener is meant to hear, to focus on? The god, as often, is mentioned only obliquely, almost as an afterthought, although he is perhaps the real center of the verse. This poem is not, however, split into double registers (erotic and metaphysical), unlike those of our next category. The initial confessional tone slips into a description of the landscape that evokes a more generalized process of emergence from the depths; the water casts pearls into the fields, thereby deriding and defusing the powers of Māra/Manmatha, and the speaker, by implication, may himself be successfully emerging at Cidambaram, the one spot that naturally facilitates or enables this process. Why or how this should be the case is, one might say, the latent theme of the *kalampakam* as a whole.

***4.** Reworked *akam* scenarios, of various types, including an occasional *kōvai*-style verse (e.g. 93). We will examine this set more closely in the following section.

***5.** The set-piece compositions, mostly on figures drawn from the social universe, realistically observed but sometimes close to parody.[21] The *pāṭṭ'iyal* lists seek to formalize these topics, as discussed above. To take one example:

> *cirattilē karam kuvittu muppattu mukkōṭi tēvar ellām*
> *varattilē teṇṭaṉ iṭum ampalavar teṉpuliyūr mataṅkiyār tam*
> *urattilē kōṭ' iraṇṭu katuppilē kōt' iraṇṭ' eṉ uyirai vāṭṭum*
> *karattilē vāl iraṇṭu mukattilē ōr iraṇṭu kaṇaikaḷ tāṉē//*
>
> In Śiva's southern Puliyūr where 900 million gods
> fold their hands above their heads,
> this girl, too, comes to perform,
> two sharp points on her breasts, two others
> in her hair, two swords in her hand,
> two sharp arrows on her face
> to cut through my life. (23)

The subject is the *mataṅki* acrobat playing with swords in the street, a woman dangerously beautiful in the eyes of her admirer, who is reduced to counting her fine points in series of twos. This play with numbers, especially doubles, is significant, as we will see. Which is the greater threat—the flashing swords or flashing eyes? Both can serve as subjects for (*eṉ uyirai*) *vāṭṭum*, a two-pronged attack on the vulnerable lover.

***6.** Time-frame verses. The grammars refer to this mode as *kālam*—verses on separation as refracted through the experience of the seasons. They are prominent enough in *Tillaikkalampakam* (as in other *kalampakams*)[22] to warrant particular attention: following the sequence from rains (*kārkālam*, 39) to cool season (*kutirkkālam*, 41) to the two "frosts", *muṉpaṉi* (43) and *piṉpaṉi* (45), to

[21] For this combination, see V. Narayana Rao and D. Shulman, *A Lover's Guide to Warangal. The Krīḍâbhirāmamu of Vinukŏṇḍa Vallabharāya* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002), 1-32.

[22] See *Tiruvaruṇaikkalampakam* of Ellappa nāvalar (Madras: A. Iraṅkacāmi Mutaliyār and Sons, 1920), 21, 52.

early spring (*iḷavēṉil*, 48) and summer (*mutuvēṉil*, 50), these seasonal poems structure the middle segment of the collection. True to the overall sense of a non-linear pattern, however, they appear—in proper sequence relative to each other— not as a unit but separated from one another by verses from other categories, other realms of experience. Time is assimilated to the "mixed bag" not as an overarching principle of order, regular in application and sensation, but as yet another element in the rather dream-like, surreal landscape that this genre systematically, purposefully, creates.

Let us look at one example, which also offers a typical instance of a reworked *akam* scenario:

cēv aṇiyum maṇiyōcaikk' iṭaiya niṉṟu
viḻi tūṅkat tillai maṉṟil
kōv aṇiyum koṉṟaiy eṉap pacalaiy eḻa
aṉpar maṉam kuṟiyāk kālam
pū vaṇika vēḷāḷar puviy aracar
koṭuṅ kōṉmai poṟuttāṟ pōla
āvaṇiyum puraṭṭāciyum mātamum nāṉ
taṉiy irunt' iṅku āṟṟiṉēṉē

In the evenings, I listen to the bells
on the buffalos' necks, as they turn home.
It hurts. Tears hang heavy
in my eyes. My skin
turns sallow as the cassia flower
that the King from Tillai wears
in the Inner Space. Is this no sign
for a lover's heart? We all put up
with the cruelties of merchants, peasants,
kings. Like that, I pass the monsoon months
of *Āvaṇi* and *Puraṭṭāci*, I wait, I bear
my loneliness. (39)[23]

Each of the seasonal verses in this text lists the relevant two months; the annual cycle is complete, and heavily suffused with the experience of lonely separation (with the sole possible exception of the *piṉpaṉi* season, 46, where the heroine bravely boasts that she is immune to Kāma's torture). In the present instance, evening, resonant with the poignant sound of the bells on the cattle returning home—unlike the *talaivaṉ* hero, who remains distant—is a particularly painful moment for the heroine. Time hangs as heavy as the tears in her eyes, and this time of separation is a sign (*kuṟi*) of more to come.[24] An explicit simile makes the point about somehow or other putting up with such distress, as one survives the tyranny of merchants, farmers, kings. But here the simile actually resumes and intensifies an earlier element in the verse, for there is, after all, a king present in the girl's mind—Śiva, the king (*kō*) in Tillai, with his garland of *koṉṟai* flowers. Indeed, this king is, in a sense, the true subject of the poem, the object of the heroine's love; he is, however, as is standard in the medieval genres, mentioned obliquely, in an embedded phrase that appears at first glance to

[23] v.l,, *āṟṟilēṉē*, "I cannot bear...."

[24] Or, alternatively, it is a time "not signalled" by the absent lover, not marked as ripe for his return.

obscure his true role. Verses such as this, which we recognize at once from *kōvai* and other genres, distinguish the ostensible hero of the literary context (*kiḷavi talaivaṉ*) from the actual hero of the text (*pāṭṭuṭai talaivaṉ*), usually present only in various patterns of indirection.[25] A deep bifurcation or fracture sets in motion an unsettling back-and-forth movement in the mind of the listener, who struggles, in effect, to identify the hidden subject, re-composing or superimposing the distinct registers that the poem presents.[26] I will return to this process below.

A typological classification like that I have suggested does not seek to exhaust the variation present in this genre. It seeks rather to highlight the change in emphasis implicit in an innovative thematic selection. In particular, reworked *akam*-style poems inhabit a new space in the *kalampakam*, one in which there is also room for acute social observation, the building up of a local geographical and cultic setting—in effect, the elaboration of a self-contained cosmos-- highly personal, affect-laden lyricism, iconic description, mythic allusions, and a specific interest in temporal (seasonal) progression. All of this takes place within a metrical or rhythmical exuberance, and each element is linked anaphorically, musically, both backwards and forwards. Usually, *śleṣa* effects are also present and create another level or dimension of integration. We can now examine a little more carefully a few representative poems.

3.

There is reason to regard the reframed *akam* verses of *Tillaikkalampakam* as embodying the work's deepest expressivity. Each time we encounter such a verse, there is an appreciable rise in poetic intensity that reflects, I would argue, both the heightened complexity of these stanzas (when compared to the other types suggested above) and the peculiar cognitive process they generate. There are ways to define this effect analytically. Look, for example, at the following *kōvai*-style verse:

Kalluṅ kuḻaiyum paṭi niṉṟ' aṭarum karutāraip
pullum pura' muṉ poṭi kaṇṭavar teṉ puliyūril
villum kayalum puyalum koṭu veṉṟ' iḷaiñōraik
kollum paṭiy eṉ etir niṉṟatu miṉ koṭi mānē//

In southern Puliyūr, home to him
who turned the three cities of his raging enemies
to dust, melting down rocks,

there stands a girl lithe as lightning,
gentle as a deer. With her weapons—
a bow, a fish, a dark raincloud—

[25] See the discussion in Norman Cutler, *Songs of Experience: The Poetics of Tamil Devotion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 82-91.

[26] Thus Cutler, *ibid*., 86-87, using the language of the classical categories that are invariably joined in such poems, the *akam* love-sequence and the *puṟam* praise of an external hero: "The poetic center of a *kōvai* verse is the interface between its *akam* and its *puṟam* elements. This is the hinge that holds the two registers of this genre in balance."

> she kills young men, and she's looking
> straight at me. (93)

Again, the distinction between *pāṭṭuṭai talaivaṉ* and *kiḷavi talaivaṉ* obtains. Śiva, the "true" hero of the poem, is seemingly displaced; his presence defines the setting of Puliyūr, where the dangerously attractive *talaivi* is standing before the *talaivaṉ*-speaker. The verse is an exercise in oxymorons, brought to bear in each of the two registers: Śiva softens or melts harsh mountains—in battle; the gentle *talaivi* drives her potential lovers to death. Her weapons are the *rūpaka* metaphors that make up her beauty—her bow-like eyebrows, fish-shaped eyes, hair black as a monsoon cloud. The *etukai* head-rhyme, beginning with the harsh and stony mountain (*kallum*), marks a continuous escalation of the imagined violence, to the point where love or desire itself becomes explicitly lethal (*kollum paṭi*). All of this is skillful but hardly surprising.

What does set the mind in motion is the powerful parallelism in the two main images. Both Śiva and the heroine kill, ironically by their very softness or gentleness. Repetition deepens the oxymoronic contrast and provides the verse with its concluding, rather delightful "punch." If the initial, *puṟam*-oriented description of the *pāṭṭuṭai talaivaṉ* (Śiva at Tillai) is embedded as a clause in the main sentence depicting the girl's terrifying beauty, this embedded segment replicates perfectly the internal structure of its encompassing syntactic sequence. Elsewhere I have tried to describe such patterns in terms of "concentric embedding"[27] and to reveal something of the way they work on the listener (or, for that matter, on the deity they seek to capture). We could also think in terms of duplication or replication that is primarily recursive—as if the verse begins with a curving line (the embedded clause) that is exactly repeated in a continuous, wider curve or loop, an expanding helix. Topological metaphors like this, however exotic, have the merit of clarifying the direction the poem takes; and here another surprise awaits us; for the inner, concentric curve turns out to be taken up entirely with the supposedly *puṟam*-oriented segment about the god, while the outer spiral is focused on the *akam* segment about the girl. Already in Cankam poems, the terms *puṟam* and *akam* seem to signal more a direction of movement than a static, defined space.[28] Yet here, the directions are seemingly reversed when compared with the norm: the *puṟam* element appears as an outward-directed force moving inwards, *akam* as an inner, emotional state expanding outwards. Together with the general "hinge-effect" built into this *kōvai*-like verse, which makes the two registers at once resonant and restless and moves eventually toward their conflation, recursive replication intensifies the cognitive effect sparked by the poem. To make matters yet more complex, we have the *rūpakas* of the main clause stripped bare of their *upameya* referents, so that within the somewhat volatile spiral the poet

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[27] See "Downstream into God," acknowledging the impact of Margaret Trawick's discussions of *Tirukkōvaiyār*.

[28] See Ramanujan, *op. cit.*, 262-66. I have argued elsewhere that the deep embedding of *akam* or *puṟam* sequences, with their implied directionality, in each other (as, *e.g.*, in *kōvai*) is the major sign that the medieval Tamil system of genres achieves maturity. "Suga besuga asuya," in N. Wasserman, *Hutim nitvim* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2002), 111-124.

has created we get an ironic, stark, and ultimately surreal effect—as if bow, fish, and rain-cloud, devoid of any natural connectedness to one another or to the woman who uses them as weapons, were scattered at random in the poetic landscape, rather like the seemingly diffuse appearance of such *akam*-verses in the surreal, seemingly disorganized *kalampakam* cosmos.[29]

At times, these *akam* segments appear much simpler than in this last example. Here is the hero urging on his beloved after their hasty elopement (*uṭaṉ pōkku*):[30]

> *nitampa taṭa mayilē koḷḷiṭaṅ kaṭantōm iṉic caṟṟu nēram ceṉṟāl*
> *patam paravum āyirakkāl maṇṭapamum tirumatilum pacumpon tērum*
> *catam peṟu kāl maṇṭapamum civakaṅkaiyuṭaṉ kanaka capaiyum tillaic*
> *citamparamum kōpuramum tillai mūvāyiravar teruvun tānē//*
>
> Come, my peacock.
> We've crossed the Koḷḷiṭam River.
> If we go just a little farther,
> we'll see it—the Thousand-Pillared Hall,
> the great wall, the golden chariot,
> the Hundred Pillared portico, Śivagaṅgā,
> the Golden Space of Tillaiccitamparam,
> its *gopuram*, and the street where the Three Thousand
> Brahmins live. (52)

Not much is left of the Cankam *akapporuḷ* motif (the delicate *talaivi* needs to be encouraged as the lovers cross the forbidding *pālai* wilderness). In effect, this theme simply frames a list of features proper to Cidambaram and its temple, the name of the site serving as the crescendo built by *etukai* into the final line. *Pālai* poems from the classical corpus also frequently concentrate on vivid landscapes—although we might also recall the somewhat ironic and tragic use of the motif in *Puṟanāṉūṟu* 255, a close parallel to our verse:

> I cannot cry out,
> I'm afraid of tigers.
> I cannot hold you,
> your chest is too wide
> for my lifting.
>
> Death
> has no codes
> and has dealt you wrong,
> may he shiver
> as I do!
>
> Hold my wrist
> of bangles,
> let's get to the shade
> of that hill,
> Just try and walk a little.[31]

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[29] For similar effects of detached *rūpaka* metaphors, see, *e.g.*, the verse attributed to Kampaṉ in *A Poem at the Right Moment*, p. 101.
[30] *Tol. Poruḷ.* 39.
[31] Translated by A. K. Ramanujan, *op. cit.*, 176.

The devastating, almost colloquial final line, *varai niḻaṟ cērka naṭatti ciṟciṟitē*, echoes in the *kalampakam*'s initial statement: *iṉiccaṟṟu nēram ceṉṟāl*....And the *kalampakam* verse is also, of course, barring its frame, more in the *puṟam* than the *akam* mode. The goal, so near yet not yet reached, is in this case the *puṟam* hero's home; but the indirection or displacement so dominant in the *kōvai*-style verses, like our previous example, has here been muted or masked, to the point that the two heroes, *pāṭṭuṭai talaivaṉ* and *kiḷavi talaivaṉ*, have almost merged.

This movement is important: the verse is not quite as innocent as it looks at first glance. Indeed, the *kalampakam*'s *akam*-style stanzas seem often to point to precisely this conflation of the two heroes, superimposing what the classical *kōvai* seeks, on principle, to keep separate. Here is one more example, which will have to suffice:

> *arumai ākiya pacupati ampalatt' āṭi teṉpuliyūriṉ*
> *urimaiy ākiya kāḷaiyai kaṇṭa piṉ uyir varum allāmal*
> *karumaiy ākiya kaṉṟ' iḻant' iruppavaḷ kālaṉār pakaṭṭiṉ piṉ*
> *erumai pōṉa piṉ ivaḷ uyir mīḷumō ēḻaimai maṭavīrē//*
>
> When she sees
> the man who belongs in southern Puliyūr,
> who dances in the Inner Space of Paśupati's rare temple,
> life may return. Otherwise
> there's no hope. Her bangles
> have slipped from her lean arms.
> Simple women that you are, why believe
> that the breath of life rushing after
> this buffalo that has gone the way of
> Death's own buffalo will ever
> breathe again! (6)

The situation is *veṟi vilakkal*, familiar from Caṅkam precedents:[32] the love-sick heroine is subjected to various ritual exorcisms aimed at driving out the illness or demon that has, in the view of the girl's mother and foster-mother, possessed her. Only the girl's friend, *tōḻi*, knows the true cause of her illness, and it is she who now reveals this secret, at the same time casting scorn on the pointless rituals (in this case, as in *Kuṟuntokai* 362, a buffalo sacrifice). If the heroine is to recover, she must see her lover soon. But just who is this lover? Technically, we could, I suppose, insist that the *kāḷai* of line 2 is other than the Dancer (*āṭi*) in line 1, thereby preserving the distinction in the two modes that we saw in our earlier example. However, such a reading forces the syntax into a somewhat awkward strait. It is far more natural to read the entire first clause, with Ta. Cē. Umāpati, as describing a single individual (thus *āṭi* will be either a non-finite subordinate to *ākiya* or a noun in apposition to *kāḷai*). There are occasional, rare examples of this kind of merging in *Tirukkōvaiyār* and Nammāḻvār's *Tiruviruttam*,[33] but they usually lack the forceful clarity of the *kalampakam* verse. There seems to be no question that the girl is in love with the god, and only the god, who, incidentally, turns up in yet a third superimposed title, the Paśupati who owns or belongs in the (*ciṟṟ'*)*ampalam*. It is as if the conventions of the *kōvai*-

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[32] E.g. *Kuṟuntokai* 362.

[33] E.g. *Tiruviruttam* 12.

like poetic prism were collapsing inward and taking with them the formal inheritance of a Caṅkam theme.

Not that this movement simplifies the verse. Quite the contrary: collapsing the distinction between registers intensifies and enhances the somewhat enigmatic, affective drive that is so evident in these poems. What, after all, does it all mean, this constant splitting, doubling and replication that issue so quickly into moments of fusion, conflation, or resonant parallelism? *Akam* resumes *puṟam*, the god slips into the poetic persona of the lover—a doubled, superimposed or recomposed lover, never the simple hero of the old *akam* poems-- and the listener or reader probably (so it seems to me) identifies all too directly with the languishing heroine, almost as dead, with longing, as the uselessly slaughtered buffalo. Even this buffalo is doubled and transposed, as if by dying it had merged into Yama's buffalo mount. In verses like this one, we can see, or experience, something of the secret of the *kalampakam*'s subtle technique.

4.

Clearly, this secret has something to do with *śleṣa*—"the pressure of semantic bonds on acoustic form"[34]-- which is everywhere in our text, in various complementary patterns. We have seen a few suggestive examples. Along with the juxtaposition of homonyms (as in verse 60, see above, section 2), we also find, as in all *śleṣa* works of any magnitude, the *śabda-śleṣa* technique of paronomastic resegmentation (thus *am pala vāṇaṉai*, "powerful Bāṇa," is juxtaposed with **am pala vāḷ naṉai = vāṇaṉai [yār]*, "women with bud-like teeth" and *ampalavāṇaṉai*, "the Dancer in the *ciṟṟ'ampalam* [acc.]—verse 19). The authors of the *Tillaikkalampakam* were clearly fascinated with these intralinguistic potentialities and set themselves the task of exploring and unfolding them in poem after poem. They also thematized them explicitly and repeatedly in several remarkable verses:

miṉ oṉṟu vāṉa mati oṉṟu vēṇi viṭai oṉṟ' irunta koṭiyār
maṉ oṉṟu cōti naṭam oṉṟu tillai maṇi maṉṟiṉ muṉṟil iṭaiyē
poṉ eṉṟu mēṉi arav' oṉṟu nīṭu puli oṉṟu niṉṟa ataṉāl
eṉ oṉṟu pētai toḻuvāṉ tuṇintum eḻuvāḷ maṭantai ivaḷē//

One crescent moon from the sky
flashing with lightning
in his hair.
One bull on his banner.
One dance full of light that is one
with the world
in the open space within Tillai.
One golden body, one serpent,
one big tiger.
What else but one
young girl who dares to go to worship
what is one? (4)

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[34] Andras Hamori, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 131.

Again an untranslatable effect: o<u>ṉṟ</u>u, "one," oscillates between the cardinal number and the verbal adjective meaning "to be one, one with, to be suited to, united with," and so on. The sky is filled with (*oṉṟu*) lightning, but there is only one (*oṉṟu*) dance, which takes place in an open, though internal, space, "one" by definition. One tiger nicely balances one snake, so there is no reason to be afraid of approaching the god (*eṉ oṉṟu*)[35]—although this culminating cry is also almost an apotheosis, a rhetorical question that makes sense of the entire paronomastic series. "What is one(ness)?" What indeed? Apparently, "it" is something more than one, though perhaps moving through potential oppositions—snakes and tigers, inner space and outer enclosure—toward being or becoming one.[36]

There is a similar verse on the number "two"—the god's two earrings, two great devotees in Cidambaram (Vyāghrapāda and Patañjali), his two sons who were nursed at Pārvatī's breast, his two wives (Pārvatī and Gaṅgā, 8). Yet these two women, for example, are really "one woman" (*peṇṇ āṉa per iraṇṭu pēr*). What is two is apparently much more than two, *i.e.*, one, or, once again, something moving toward one. We could follow this theme right through the *kalampakam* in all its *yamaka*- and *śleṣa*-based doublings and syzygies. The god himself, as we know, is such a pair, half green, half white, half female, half male, the two halves merging into a unity but also conflating and confusing themselves, simultaneously contrasting and flowing into or through one another, as Śiva's golden hair flows into the dark-blue sapphire of his throat (38). Similarly, the *akam*-based hero or heroine now regularly collapses into the *puṟam*-based subject, thereby constituting a double (sometimes triple) unity, compressed, compacted, and powerfully enhanced. Such a unity retains the original fault lines that mark the critical distinction between levels or parts.

Not surprisingly, this highly energized, intensifying movement within a poem, or from one poem to the next, sometimes translates discursively as apparent paradox:

āṟṟil iṭum poruḷ kuḷattil aḻaippitta tirukkataiyum ārūrarkkuc
cēṟṟu vayaṟ pukalūril ceṅkalaippoṉ ākkiyatum tiruntac coṉṉār
nēṟṟ'iravil eṉaip pukaḻntār iṉṟ' aṟintēṉ poruḷ tēṭa niṉaintat' ellām
pōṟṟu tiru ampalavar poruppar eṉaip pukaḻntat' ellām poy mey tāṉē//

He told me the famous story
about the gold thrown in the river
and summoned up later, in a temple tank.
He told me about the bricks turned to gold
for Ārūraṉ in fertile Pukalūr.[37]
He told me straight.
Last night he praised me. Today
I thought it through—all this searching
for wealth, and what it means-- and

[35] Thus Ta. Cē. Umāpati on this verse.

[36] See also verse 10, close in tone to this one.

[37] These two stories are taken from Cuntaramūrttināyaṉār's *vita*. Śiva gave Cuntaramūrtti gold in Mutukuṉṟam; he put it in the river there and recovered it far to the south in Tiruvārūr. Placing bricks under his head as a pillow in Pukalūr, he asked Śiva for gold and woke to find the bricks transmuted accordingly.

now I understand. All the praises
the Lord of the Inner Space
who lives on the mountain
heaped on me
are lies
come true. (40)

Much hangs on the ambiguity of *poruḷ*—"wealth" as well as "substance" or "meaning." The heroine, apparently languishing by day, alone, wants to know what it all means, this uneven, asymmetrical, rather frustrating business of loving this particular *talaivaṉ*. There is a certain, well grounded skepticism and distrust. It seems the hero has hopes of repeating Ārūrar's successful acts of manipulation. But then this hero is "really" the god himself: once again, we could, theoretically, distinguish a human lover, *poruppar*, from the god of Tillai, *ampalavar*, thus preserving intact the integrity of the old *akam* universe and maintaining the distinction in mode or domain; but everything points rather to the identification, through apposition, of these two nouns, hence to the conflation of the two domains. What is striking is the oxymoronic pseudo-paradox of the conclusion: the speaker sees her experience as "false truth" or "true lies" (*poy mey*), as if the conflation that the poem strives for retains a profound tension, a split waiting to break open.

One can see in this poem the entire process of *śleṣa* recombination, broadly understood. The double meaning of *poruḷ* is no more than a trigger for this wider process. We can actually watch the distinct planes or registers shifting in the direction of fusion, fixing the god in place directly over the contours of the lover and realigning a whole body of narrative about this deity and his devotee accordingly. This movement toward coincidence or coalescence is not, however, complete; something of the affective power of the older *akam* sequence survives, so that a verse like this always successfully resists allegorization.[38] Yet the overall cognitive effect of the verse leaves us, like the heroine, pondering the meaning of the move toward congruence and oneness; the merging of planes is somehow both true and false, an "as if" fusion, not wholly real, or both real and unreal, and latent with future fission. Indeed, *śleṣa*, as the Sanskrit *ālaṅkārikas'* discussions show, is usually pregnant with this "as-if-ness,"[39] so that the similarity or identity established by implicit, intra-linguistic comparison is not merely fictive, invented or projected—like any standard simile or *rūpaka*-metaphor—but actually more like the semblance of a fiction, an "as-if" fiction both false and true. At this point, in verses like this one, language cuts loose from reference, and figuration loses any residual denotative power (as in verse 93, discussed earlier). Hence the surreal sensation that becomes ever stronger as one reads and re-reads the text. Still, it is good to bear in mind that an "as-if" fiction is

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[38] As Friedhelm Hardy showed clearly for *kōvai* and other transformed *akapporuḷ* materials: *Viraha-bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion in South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 323-25.

[39] See Yigal Bronner, "Poetry at its Extreme: The Theory and Practice of Bitextual Poetry (*śleṣa*) in South Asia," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1999, 266-72 (on Bhāmaha), 290 (Udbhaṭa). I am deeply indebted to this seminal study.

logically—though it is by no means only a matter of logic—endowed with a status that must finally be positive and "real," or possibly "more than real."

Śleṣa, as we have seen, binds the *kalampakam* together, no less than the somewhat technical *antāti* device. It is for all intents and purposes the master trope in this text and rightly "embraces" all the types of stanzas, in one form or another. What happens in the refashioned *akam*-type verses is also a kind of *śleṣa*, motivated by the same metaphysical impulse that we see, in smaller doses, in verses based on homophonic resegmentation or in strung-out *yamaka* rhymes. In fact, a far-reaching isomorphism integrates all the levels operative here—from the individual, isolated pun to the highly dynamic *akam* stanzas, to the *kalampakam* taken as a whole, and—perhaps most powerfully-- to the ritual world of the temple and its deity that this text seeks to describe or, better, to create or re-create. On all these levels, we see a powerful recursive movement that superimposes, integrates, and conflates but that also leaves room for what has been unified to fall apart.

Sometimes this fissiparous vector is made entirely explicit, in the form of a *śleṣa*-based opposition:

vamp' ulāvum itaḻiyai vēṭṭavar
vantu ceyya itaḻiyai vēṭṭilar/
māṉaiyum kaip piṭittē naṭattiṉār
māṉaiyum kaip piṭittē naṭattilar/

He (Naṭarāja in Cidambaram) likes wearing fragrant cassia, but he doesn't like (to marry) the woman garlanded in bright flowers.
He dances while holding a deer in his hand, but he won't hold the "deer"(-like woman) by the hand (in marriage).

And so on for the whole of this verse (30). What looks identical phonetically, also figuratively, is radically polarized into positive and negative—and, remarkably, here the figurative identification consistently receives the negative charge. Even more striking is the split into "mythic/iconic" and "erotic" registers, the latter being systematically negated. It is as if the frustrated heroine and lover were complaining that what works on the level of the god's mythic role and attributes—and should work in relation to her as well, because of the non-accidental homophonies she brings to bear—unfortunately fails in this latter domain, leaving her deflated, lonely, and rather helpless, now that even language has let her down.[40]

There are, then, limits to the effectual capacity of an "as-if" poetic projection of unity. On the other hand, this very metaphysic of "as-if-ness" probably drives the continuous attempts at recursive recomposition—the attempt to put back together the world that keeps falling out of focus or that keeps opening disjunctive spaces and empty gaps. We might do well to think of *śleṣa* in this medieval Tamil poetic universe as being just this process of repeated or recursive touching, as if "embracing," under conditions of perceived disjunction. The congruent "embrace" of *śleṣa* is not a state, certainly nothing stable, but more of a movement within language and the mind or,

[40] Compare the similar verse 66.

better still, a direction implicit in such movement. It produces a unitary intensity of perception and experience by densely compacting or combining two or more disparate but mutually dependent entities, linguistically alike yet each somehow incomplete in itself—like the visionary cripple riding on the shoulders of the blind man. Together they are one or, rather, more than one, a highly intensified form of oneness generated out of the complementary impairment that situates one on top of the other and thus allows, or requires, a complete set of poems to emerge.[41]

The *kalampakam* takes us through this process again and again, unifying and intensifying perception in moments of far-reaching congruence and conflation, only to lapse back thereafter into a seemingly disconnected, somewhat dream-like space, filled with scattered, haphazard objects, very much as in our everyday, ordinary experience of the world. Somewhere within this poetic cosmos, taken as a whole, is the Inner Space of the *ciṟṟ'ampalam*, the final locus and subject of the poem that, itself empty of solid objects, marked only by the *liṅga* of open space (*ākāśa*), seems to generate all the elements and perceptions the poets describe. Nowhere is the as-if movement of recombination more at home. The *ciṟṟ'ampalam* is the domain of *śleṣa*—the direction and movement inherent in *śleṣa*—in the sense just described. Given this highly structured field of action and interaction, so rich in implication and so true to experience, so consistent in its rhythms, we might be tempted to conclude that the *kalampakam* is actually one of the most lucidly integrated genres in the medieval Tamil ecology of literary forms.

We have been speaking of *śleṣa* in a sense close to its literal Sanskrit meaning, on the one hand—conflation, congruent superimposition—and in a somewhat less literal, indeed metaphysical sense, on the other (*śleṣa* as this process of generating a partial or total overlap in meaning, identity, or cognitive/poetic domains). Yet *kalampakam* is, literally, about "mixing" (it is, we might say, the inner aspect, *akam*, of mixing, *kalappu*). Mixing is not quite the same thing as conflation or coincidence of contours. Mixing is a far more radical and, ultimately, creative act. It mingles two or more initially separate entities in such a way that their original integrity is blurred and lost and something new is formed. The very notion of contours and distinctions becomes largely irrelevant. The two parties involved are not simply superimposed but rather go through one another, combining and recombining, flexing and folding into one another in a profusion of mathematical permutations.[42] This process requires more energy than in the case of conflation, and it depends on the opening up of a kind of middle space, in which movement becomes possible.[43] Moreover, mixing, unlike the strict *śleṣa* "embrace," always tends to leave over undefined areas of excess, resistant to simple classification and ordering. This

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[41] Many stories of the Iraṭṭaiyar reveal the complementarity they enact both in seeing through the veil of reality and in jointly completing a verse that expresses this vision. See, for example, Ec. Vaittiyanātaṉ, *Piṟkālap pulavarkaḷ* (Madras: Dr. U. Vē. Cāminātaiyar nūlnilaiyam, 1986), 46-47.

[42] It is thus not by chance that the Tamil term for *yamaka* chiming is *maṭakku*, "bending" or "folding."

[43] See Handelman and Shulman, *op. cit.*

"exuberance"[44] is what we see in the *kalampakam*'s expansive and inclusive range.

Perhaps, then, the deeper problem related to this productive genre is not one of apparent randomness or disorder but one of inclusion and integration per se. That is: what does it mean to create, through and within language, through mixing, an autonomous poetic cosmos like this, recursively unifying and combining parts of itself only to take them apart again? Does such a cosmos have an outer limit? Can the unsettling effects of *śleṣa*—the fundamental law governing such a universe—really be contained? The Iraṭṭaiyar themselves give voice to such issues in a haunting, long *kalittāḻicai* verse, couched in elusive and ambiguous syntax, that marks one of the high points of our text:

eṇṇiṉukkuḷ aṭaṅk'iṭātavar tillaiyampalavāṇaṉār
ivar aḻitt'iṭum mataṉamōkaṉam ivaḷ maṉattil aṭaṅkumō
viṇṇiṉukkuḷ aṭaṅk'iṭātu viritt' eḻunt'iṭu veṇṇilā
virakiṉukkuḷ aṭaṅk'iṭātu vicaitt' eḻunt' iṭu kāmanōy
maṇṇiṉukkuḷ aṭaṅk'iṭātu vacantakāla vacantaṉum
vācakattil aṭaṅk'iṭātu maṭantai paṭṭa varuttamum
kaṇṇiṉukkuḷ aṭaṅk'iṭāt' ivaḷ kaṇṇilē viḻu kaṇṇi'ṉīr
kāciṉikkuḷ aṭaṅk'iṭāt' ivaḷ kātal koṇṭa vilācamē//

Thought cannot hold him
who lives in Tillai's Inner Space.
How can *she* hold the passion he inspires
in her mind?

It spills out as moonlight, unenclosed
by sky, bursts out as love's sickness
no cunning can confine,

as the south wind in spring
that the earth can't enfold,
an agony, fully hers,
that no words can define,

as tears, that her eyes no longer restrain,
as love, as play, that no cosmos
can contain. (74)

Each uncontainable object or emotion exists in its own right, yet each seems to be at once embedded in or produced out of the previous one, forming a dense concentric series, and yet also identified with the original, singular, overriding impulse. Oneness enhanced to this degree can surely not be thought, which is not to say that it cannot be made manifest in language and thereby known.

I offer these tentative remarks in deep reverence for the insight and wisdom of François Gros, a master of Tamil in all its long history and intricate forms.

[44] To borrow a term from Ortega y Gasset: see A. L. Becker, *Beyond Translation: Essays toward a Modern Philology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 5, 163.