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An Incredible Story on the Credibility of Stories: Coherence, Real-Life Experience, and Making Sense of Texts in a Jaina Narrative

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Abstract: Throughout the centuries, Jaina authors actively engaged in producing their own versions of stories that were told in sources such as the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, and the *purāṇas*. These authors self-consciously present themselves as correcting preceding narratives that they do not accept as credible. However, the question arises: what criteria determine the credibility of one version over another? This paper offers one possible answer as it appears in the *Investigation of Dharma* (*Dharmaparīkṣā*), a Jaina narrative that has been retold repeatedly in different languages throughout the second millennium. By examining its earliest available retellings—in Apabhramsha (988 CE) and Sanskrit (1014 CE)—I argue that this narrative traces the credibility of stories to the ideas of (1) coherence across textual boundaries and (2) correspondence with real-life experience. In this paper, I trace how these notions manifest in the *Investigation* and analyze the narrative's mechanism for training its audience to evaluate for themselves the credibility of stories. Through this analysis, the paper offers a fresh perspective on the motivations of premodern South Asian authors to retell existing narratives and sheds light on the reading practices they expect from their audience.

Keywords: credibility; narrative paradigm; world philology; literary coherence; realism; Jainism; *Dharmaparīkṣā*; Sanskrit; Apabhramsha

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1. Introduction

> Based on truth.. lies..
> And what actually happened
>
> -*Lords of Chaos* (2018 film)

> It's a book of our true stories
> True stories that can't be denied
> It's more than true, it actually happened
>
> -Gogol Bordello, *Immigraniada*

> Tigers exist, lifeboats exist, oceans exist. Because the three have never come together in your narrow, limited experience, you refuse to believe that they might.
>
> -Yann Martel, *Life of Pi*

Two strangers enter a city. Its residents, curious, inquire about their home and identity. The strangers, afraid of the reaction of the locals, share their concerns at length. After the residents reassure them, the strangers narrate the bizarre series of events that led them to the city. Their account is like nothing that their audience has experienced before, so the locals do not believe them and accuse them of speaking nonsense. How are we to interpret this scenario?

To start, its context is significant. This scenario is embedded in the larger narrative frame of the *Investigation of Dharma* (Apbh. *Dhammaparikkhā*; Skt. *Dharmaparīkṣā*), where it occurs several times. The *Investigation* is a Jaina narrative that has been retold repeatedly in different South Asian languages throughout the second millennium. It tells the story of Manovega, a Jaina Vidyādhara (a human being with certain magic powers) who carries his friend Pavanavega to Pāṭaliputra to confront the city's Brahmins. The plot goes as follows: The Vidyādharas repeatedly take strange disguises and enter Pāṭaliputra's Brahminical college (*brahmaśālā*). The Brahmins ask what brings them to the city and inquire about their identity. First, Manovega pretends that he is afraid to answer, explaining that if the Brahmins do not believe their story, they will harm them. The Brahmins reassure him that, as long as his words are true, no harm will come to them and encourage him again to reveal their identity. Each time, Manovega justifies his reluctance to answer by telling a story that illustrates his concerns about the Brahmins reactions. When he finally succumbs to their pledges, the protagonist comes up with fictitious stories about their identity and peculiar appearance and about what led them to the city. But each of his stories is full of unbelievable elements that make no sense to the Brahmins, and they repeatedly accuse him of telling lies. In response, Manovega repeatedly challenges them with Brahminical purāṇic stories that they accept as true, even though they are just as unbelievable as his fictitious life stories.

The repetitive structure of this narrative provides one clue as to its interpretation. In the context of the *Investigation*, the reader knows that the strangers' stories are fictitious. The repetition of this scenario reminds the reader that people make things up, and listeners need to be vigilant in assessing the truth of stories. What is specifically called for in such cases, I argue, is that people should assess whether or not a story contains contradictions (Apbh. *puvvāvara-viroha, aṇṇoṇṇa-viroha*; Skt. *pūrvāpara-virodha, anyonya-virodha*) and so whether it may be considered credible and true.

The *Investigation of Dharma*, I maintain, is not simply a narrative, but a narrative *about* narratives. Specifically, it continually raises the question of what constitutes a credible story, one that may be considered as true and as a warranted authority in instructing one how to appropriately act in the world. This paper discusses what I suggest are the *Investigation*'s criteria for making a story credible: credible stories must be both coherent and correspond to what people accept as true based on their own experience of the world around them. In order to examine these criteria, I analyze the two earliest *Investigation* tellings that are available to us, written by Hariṣeṇa (*HaDhP*) in Apabhramsha (988) and by Amitagati (*AmDhP*) in Sanskrit (1014).[1] I argue that these literary works serve to establish the parameters for stories' credibility and to instruct their audience about how to properly evaluate the stories they will encounter. My analysis shows that the *Investigation*'s standard of credibility involves both an intra- and an inter-textual coherence that exceeds the boundaries of any single text. The *Investigation* treats texts and the ideas they promote as partaking in a shared cultural world, one that requires harmony across its different components. In other words, ideas promoted in one text should be compatible with the ideas of other texts, as well as with what people accept as true in their own life. If such ideas contradict each other or do not comply with one's real-life experience, there must be something wrong with them and we cannot accept them as credible.

In the following section, I propose the two parameters for the credibility of a story: its coherence and its correspondence with real-life experience. I clarify that this coherence is not limited to the boundaries of the single story but should be maintained throughout a broader body of texts. I also exemplify how the question of coherence, which vividly manifests in the *Investigation*, is just as significant for other Jaina thinkers as it is for Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati, the authors of its earliest surviving versions. In the subsequent section, I explore the implications of the *Investigation* advancing its arguments through narrative rather than through more argumentative forms of writing by introducing my theoretical framework for discussing the *Investigation* as a story that focuses on other stories. I suggest viewing this narrative, along with Jaina retellings of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, as

participating in a shared philological endeavor of "making sense of texts" through non-commentarial methods. Then, in the three remaining sections, I analyze a variety of episodes from the *Investigation* as told by Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati to demonstrate how this work introduces and promotes the parameters for the credibility of stories. Through its narrative, I suggest, the *Investigation* explicates the mechanism for evaluating and making sense of stories. The reading I promote provides a fresh perspective not only on the *Investigation* but also on the practices of other Jaina authors retelling their versions of Brahminical purāṇic stories.

2. Degrees of Coherence across Texts

The *Investigation* sets the scene in the form of a narrative by staging an inter-religious encounter between two sides in a debate—on the one side, a Jaina layman and his friend in the form of Vidyādharas, and on the other, a group of Brahmins. This article analyzes two of its earliest versions to demonstrate how their authors employ this framework to build a theory of the credibility and truth of stories based on the parameters of stories' coherence and their correspondence with the real world. But coherence or incoherence relative to what? What is the corpus with reference to which we can sensibly make such judgments about credibility?

Phyllis Granoff has recently brought up the idea of coherence across literary corpora. She argues that the requirement of inter-textual coherence is a distinctive feature of some Jaina philosophers who "regarded the entire corpus of orthodox literature as a single entity that needed to exhibit consistency" (Granoff 2020, p. 173). These philosophers required that a range of ideas presented in different texts—regardless of their genre, the authors' identity, or the time and place of their production—be in harmony with each other and form a coherent whole. This hypothesis provides a framework for exploring the *Investigation*, since this narrative demonstrates many parallels for such a requirement. But the *Investigation* does not only speak about coherence across narratives. Rather, and unlike the philosophical texts that Granoff has discussed, they are themselves narrative in form.

Let us look into Granoff's hypothesis to understand its advantages in terms of discussing the *Investigation*. The philosophers she discusses "viewed the entire corpus of Jain writings across genre boundaries and across time as a whole" and required this corpus to be harmonious within itself (Granoff 2020, p. 169). Committed to their own standards, they also assessed the texts of others in a similar way. Granoff shows that, in contrast to the mainstream Brahminical and Buddhist scholars who exclude non-philosophical texts from their arguments, Jaina thinkers who engage with non-Jaina traditions include in their discussion a much wider variety of texts. For instance, such Jaina scholars assert that if one accepts the authority of purāṇic stories, then one's philosophical position must stand in line with such stories. This is the case with Vidyānandi, a Digāmbara Jaina philosopher who alludes precisely to the purāṇic idea of the *avatāras*, the earthly embodiment of a god, as part of his refutation of Nyāya's inference about the existence of a creator God. Similarly, the Śvetāmbara scholar Hemacandra employs philosophical arguments about causality to refute a purāṇic verse that argues that Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva are merely parts of a single God. Amṛtacandra goes even further as he employs practical ideas of tantric rituals and meditation in order to make a philosophical claim about the nature of the soul, that it is non-material and thus can never be the agent of any modification in the physical world.[2] These examples indicate a tendency of Jaina scholars "to see the various branches of Indian culture more holistically" (Granoff 2020, p. 168). This holistic Jaina tendency opened up for these thinkers a path to a more inclusive discourse in which non-philosophical genres (*purāṇas*, *tantras*, *dharmaśāstras*, etc.) could be a part of, serve as evidence for, and be assessed side by side with philosophical texts. Within this larger discursive field, narrative literature plays an important role.[3] But for that very reason, it demands criteria of evaluation that had previously not been articulated.

Granoff's argument focuses on Jaina philosophers who were distinctive insofar as they required their opponents' philosophical statements to be compatible with their statements

in other genres. My analysis of the *Investigation* corroborates and expands this argument. It demonstrates that the *Investigation* operates on a set of preconceptions regarding harmony and coherence similar to those hypothesized by Granoff, with one major difference: the importance of this harmony is emphasized in a narrative way, rather than in systematic argumentation. It is about showing, rather than telling. My reading, thus, exemplifies how such coherence was also pursued within texts that are not primarily philosophical in nature. Granoff's discussion already contains a germ of the possibility that this holistic tendency allowed Jaina thinkers to discuss different types of knowledge in ways that go beyond the medium of philosophical writing. Such a possibility comes to mind in her discussion of Hemacandra's *Mahādevastotra*, a work she refers to as a "philosophical hymn" (p. 172), as well as of Amṛtacandra's commentary on Kundakunda's *Samayasāra*, which the commentator stages and refers to as a drama (*nāṭaka*) (p. 177). However, both works are still very philosophical in their form and content. If one takes seriously the idea that these Jaina thinkers maintained an intellectual understanding that rejects "disciplinary boundaries and the compartmentalization of learning" (p. 184) in favor of a holistic unity of knowledge—one that expects coherence across poetry, philosophy, practice, and doctrine—then there is no reason to limit our examination of these cross-genre and cross-text discussions only to works that were composed in a philosophical style.

Once narrative genres enter the realm of rational inquiry, a major question is to what degree and across what texts should coherence be expected? When hearing a story, spectators have certain expectations. One expectation is for the story to be coherent within itself. If a character has died, we expect not to encounter them again. Surely enough, this is an expectation that has certain limitations. In case the story does not follow a standard linear chronology, or should a zombie apocalypse occur, a dead character might reappear. But under regular circumstances, such a reappearance would make little sense. Nevertheless, when we speak about distinct texts, things may be more flexible. Think about the Joker in Tim Burton's 1989 *Batman* movie. Although this brilliantly portrayed character did not survive, it suddenly reemerged on the screen, alive and well, two decades later in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight*. The justification was not only the fact that this is a separate film, but also that Nolan's trilogy is a reboot that takes place in a coherent world of its own, independent of any of the previous Batman films. That is to say, different textual corpora may pose different degrees of coherence—ranging from a single text to an inter-textual coherence across a vast body of separate texts—and spectators' expectations may be manipulated accordingly.[4]

But what happens when the degree of coherence posed by a certain body of texts does not satisfy the expectations of a group of spectators? The "Investigators," Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati, who expect coherence both within and between stories in a given tradition, took as their project the identification of those texts that do not satisfy their expectations. A pair of stanzas from Hariṣeṇa's Apabhramsha *Investigation* is instructive here:

> Some say: "After taking ten births, he rejoices."
>
> Some say: "He is free of things such as birth."
>
> Even after understanding this mutual contradiction, they do not take it seriously. Those injudicious people believe that Viṣṇu has both characteristics, although he is only one.[5]

Hariṣeṇa identifies a fallacy of mutual contradiction (*aṇṇoṇṇa-viroha*): on the one hand, some of Viṣṇu's followers claim that he had ten different births, but on the other, some of his followers say that he is free from birth. The author gestures here towards Viṣṇu's epithet as one who is "free from birth and death." As evidence, he even quotes a Sanskrit verse that uses this epithet, preceded by a verse that enumerates Viṣṇu's ten *avatāras*, both of which are taken from earlier Brahminical sources:

> His ten [*avatāras*] are the fish, tortoise, boar, lion-man, dwarf, Rāma, [Paraśu]rāma, Kṛṣna, Buddha, and Kalkī.

> While reflecting on Viṣṇu—who is beyond the perishable and imperishable, who had abandoned birth and death, free of fear, whose purposes have been fulfilled—one does not perish.[6]

Given that the quoted statements refer to a single object, that is Viṣṇu, in order for both to be valid, they must be compatible with each other. Since a single individual cannot both be born ten times *and* be free from birth, these statements and the stories that convey them are contradictory. As Hariṣeṇa frames things, the literary world that Viṣṇu inhabits must be coherent across textual boundaries. And, if one text makes a certain claim about Viṣṇu, then a second text should not offer a contradictory claim.

There is, therefore, the first question about narrative coherence across texts: the same story, with the same characters, should not suffer from internal contradiction, unless there is some compelling reason given for the discontinuity. The point about such contradiction is that both claims cannot simultaneously be true, even if one of them is. But for a story to be considered credible, there is also a second question, concerning the "fit" between a narrative and the real world. These two questions about stories' credibility reflect what the communication studies scholar Walter R. Fisher calls the "narrative paradigm," which explains how people reason and shape their worldviews by adjudicating between competing sets of stories. It is distinct from the "rational world paradigm," which recognizes reason exclusively as part of "discourse that features clear-cut inferential or implicative structures" (Fisher 1987, pp. 59–62). What Fisher argues is that reason and rationality are not limited to argumentative forms of communication of the sort that the "rational world paradigm" highlights. His "narrative paradigm" provides an alternative explanation of how people adjudicate between competing sets of non-argumentative claims based on their coherence and their correspondence with what people accept as true from their own lives. Rationality, Fisher explains—

> is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings—their inherent awareness of *narrative probability*, what constitutes a coherent story, and their constant habit of testing *narrative fidelity*, whether or not the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives (Fisher 1987, p. 64; emphasis in original).

That is, we may just as well consider the persuasive qualities of stories in terms of reason.[7] To determine whether a story is compelling, Fisher identifies two parameters: (1) its coherence ("narrative probability") and (2) its correspondence with real-life experience ("narrative fidelity").[8] Similarly, the narrative style of the *Investigation* repeatedly confronts the reader with characters who struggle to examine and evaluate stories according to these parameters.

Although the *Investigation* explores the credibility of stories, literary worlds are not its final object of inquiry. Its authors are not really interested in a certain diegetic world, but in the world of our intersubjective experience. It is about understanding the world and the normative ways of acting in it. Evaluating stories is both an epistemic and ethical problem: it is epistemological in nature, while also being founded on ethical characteristics. It is defined by an openness to hearing the truth and to giving up any behavior based on false premises. The project of the *Investigation* is, thus, an ethical one, with *dharma* being its goal. But its trajectory is an epistemological one, with an investigation serving as its means. It weaves in ethical and epistemic questions to induce in its reader such an ethical experience. As such, while the *Investigation* identifies incoherencies in stories, the objectives of its authors are not much different from those of Jaina scholars such as Haribhadra who, when introducing the Jaina doctrine in his doxographic work *Compendium of the Six Doctrines* (*Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya*), asserts: "Thus the summary of the Jaina doctrine—free of faults and in which there is nowhere an internal incoherence (*pūrvāpara-vighāta*)—has been explained."[9] Whether it is Haribhadra, the Investigators, or the philosophers that Granoff discusses, for all of these Jaina scholars coherence is a significant issue. For them, only a coherent account can even be considered as potentially true and worthy of patterning one's life on. This is why the stakes are so high for these Investigators.

The *Investigation* guides its readers on two levels. First, it asks them to evaluate the coherence of stories within their diegetic world, the world in which these stories take place. Then, it asks them to assess the correspondence between these stories and their real-life experiences. But what advantage do its authors gain by engaging with this problem using literary tools rather than systematic argumentation?

3. Narratives About Narratives: How Stories Teach?

The exploration of criteria for evaluating narrative literature did not appear out of nowhere with the *Investigation*. We trace earlier instances of contemplating these issues in Jaina retellings of Brahminical stories. Some Jaina literary works even refer explicitly to the Brahminical *Rāmāyaṇa* or *Mahābhārata* in order to point out the faults of these texts. The background story of such Jaina *purāṇas* serves as the basis for discussing these Brahminical works. It depicts King Śreṇika as he attends the assembly of Mahāvīra and voices his doubts about the Brahminical illustration of certain events in the life story of Rāma or that of the Pāṇḍavas. In return, Mahāvīra's pupil Indrabhūti Gautama narrates alternative versions of these stories, which claim to represent these events as they truly happened, in accordance with the teaching of the Jina. One instance that gained attention due to being alluded to in A. K. Ramanujan's *Three Hundred Rāmāyaṇas* is Vimalasūri's *Paümacariyam*, a Prakrit work that stands as the earliest available Jaina retelling of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (early centuries of the common era). Ramanujan reiterates King Śreṇika's doubts in this work as follows:

> How can monkeys vanquish the powerful *rākṣasa* warriors like Rāvaṇa? How can noble men and Jaina worthies like Rāvaṇa eat flesh and drink blood? How can Kumbhakarṇa sleep through six months of the year, and never wake up even though boiling oil was poured into his ear, elephants were made to trample over him, and war trumpets and conches blow around him? They also say that Rāvaṇa captured Indra and dragged him handcuffed into Lanka. Who can do that to Indra? (Ramanujan 1991, pp. 33–34)[10]

Śreṇika realizes that these things are contrary to reason (*uvavatti-viruddha*). A *Rāmāyaṇa* such as this must be false (*aliya*).[11] So he goes to Mahāvīra's assembly for clarification. There, Indrabhūti Gautama confirms that these instances were made up by bad poets (*kukaï*). They have no true basis (*pīḍha-bandha-rahiya*) and are utterly false.[12] Then, Indrabhūti narrates an alternative Jaina version of these events, the Jaina *Rāmāyaṇa*.

This framework was adopted by later authors who told the Jaina versions for the stories of Rāma (known by them as Padma) or of the Pāṇḍavas, such as Raviṣeṇa (*Padmapurāṇa*, 676 CE), Svayambhūdeva (*Paümacariu* and *Riṭṭhaṇemicariu*, 9th–10th cent. CE), Śubhacandra (Pāṇḍavapurāṇa, 1552 CE), and Vādicandra (Pāṇḍavapurāṇa, 1598 CE).[13] For these authors, stories of monkeys vanquishing *rākṣasas* or of pious men like Rāma committing violence could not be considered true. Their attempts to eliminate such instances, by revising or removing certain elements from the narrative through what some scholars perceive as a process of rationalization, mark these narratives as different from the Brahminical counterparts (Ramanujan 1991, pp. 34–35; Kulkarni 1990, pp. 223–24; Bhayani 1983, pp. 80–81). For example, in these Jaina versions, Rāvana is known as the Ten-Headed Demon not on account of having ten heads, a popular Brahminical depiction of him, but because, as a child, he wore a necklace in which his face was reflected on each of its nine rubies. Likewise, Indrabhūti explains that the monkeys and *rākṣasas* in the *Rāmāyaṇa* are actually human beings, referred to as such only because they used monkeys and demons as their symbols. With regard to Rāma's acts of violence, they are either eliminated or attributed to his brother Lakṣmaṇa, maintaining his pious characterization.[14] These authors employed Śreṇika's episode as an opportunity to raise doubts about the ways other people depicted these instances. It demonstrates these authors' motivation and justification for undertaking their project of narrating Jaina stories. They cast doubt on the credibility of such Brahminical stories and set the record straight by producing their new and revised versions. But none of them explained the criteria for evaluating stories and the mechanism

for making sense out of them. In this paper, I propose one potential answer to this problem, as it is promoted by the two earliest available versions of the *Investigation*.

Questions about practices for evaluating and expounding texts have recently gained interest due to renewed attention on the contemporary relevance of philology in academia (Pollock et al. 2015; Lönnroth 2017; Helle 2022). In a series of essays from recent years, Sheldon Pollock delineates a path for discussing philology as a global phenomenon and for understanding its place in precolonial and early modern India (e.g., Pollock 2009, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2024). He promotes philology as "the discipline of making sense of texts," which focuses on "the theory of textuality as well as the history of textualized meaning" (Pollock 2009, p. 934). Taking Pollock's definition as his starting point, Whitney Cox (2017) recognizes that a great deal of the modern scholarship that participates, sometimes more loosely than others, in exploring early instances of Indian philology, focuses its attention almost entirely on the genre of commentary. To broaden the scope of this conversation, he examines the sorts of non-commentarial methods of philology that were involved in the production of medieval South Indian works that fashioned themselves as *tantras* and *purāṇas*. To tackle the problem that "[a]ny literate is in some sense committed to the pragmatic project of 'making sense' of a given text," Cox sharpens Pollock's definition of philology to emphasize the philologists' concerns both in a delimited corpus of preexisting texts and in the public aspect of their own reading practices, which are methodical, self-aware, and self-reflexive (pp. 4–6).

By borrowing from Cox's expansion on the definition and the locus of philological practices, I propose that these Jaina authors—from Vimalasūri and his followers to the earliest authors of the *Investigation*, Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati—participated in a philological enterprise of making sense of texts. Their practices were not formally commentarial, and they did not encompass the entire scope of philological practices that we might expect to find in more scholastic contexts. They specifically focused on stories and were interested in such stories as a whole rather than in adjudicating variants or specific grammatical ambiguities. Furthermore, their methods were not as formalistic as those of most commentators. But they were self-aware and self-reflexive about their deep interest in examining a corpus of preexisting stories and in publicly making sense of them.

The public aspect of their reading practices is embedded in the framework of their works, staged to present their narrative as a public dialogue. Whether it is Śreṇika at Mahāvīra's assembly or the strangers that arrive to the Brahminical college in Pāṭaliputra and engage in a public debate with the local Brahmins, the public settings establish these characters' practices of reading stories and their attempt of making sense of them as occasions of public performance. Through its public teaching, the *Investigation* does not only read a set of preexisting purāṇic stories, but it further instructs its readers in making sense of such stories themselves. Unlike the authors of the Jaina *Rāmāyaṇa* or the Jaina *Mahābhārata*, these authors were not interested in producing new versions of existing stories. Rather, they exposed their readers to the parameters for evaluating and adjudicating a story as credible or as non-credible through their own acts of novel story making. In this essay, I advance a reading that unpacks the mechanism through which these authors undertook their project by exploring not only the purāṇic stories to which the *Investigation* alludes, but also the frame narrative that enables the public advancement of their arguments.

Because the *Investigation* is a narrative, it is difficult to extract from it a single comprehensive definition of the concepts they discuss, of the sort we expect to find in the more systematic genres of philosophical and scientific writing. Much of this essay's task is to articulate a consistent role for the various occurrences of these concepts by working across the arguments and stories that appear in these *Investigation*s. Moreover, reading each of the two versions on its own is insufficient for understanding the full scope of their argument. While they share the same plot and repeat similar sub-stories, the reading of one often sheds light and reinforces the reading of the other. Empirically speaking, we cannot tell whether the historical authors of these versions were aware of each other. Hariṣeṇa claims to have based his *Investigation* on a Prakrit work by a certain Jayarāma (now lost). Amitagati does

not mention any predecessor. Since we do not know whether Amitagati read the earlier work of Hariṣeṇa or whether both of them independently based their works on some earlier author, we cannot always know what details they took from their predecessors and what they interpolated themselves.[15] However, it is plausible that at least on some occasions both authors expanded the source they based themselves on with a certain “commentarial consciousness” that intended to clarify ambiguities in the original.[16] This being so, we can read their works side by side to expound ambiguities and to expose their shared sentiments and ideas.

These Investigators could have discussed the issue of stories’ credibility and coherence by using a more technical scientific style of inquiry. But they chose not to. What was their purpose in playing out this problem in literature rather than through a philosophical mode? Modern scholars have already argued that philosophical writing has certain inherent limitations for discussing complex subjects. Martha Nussbaum (1992) argues that the analytic language of philosophy is too “flat and lacking in wonder” to fully comprehend the complexity of many real-life dilemmas, and while some questions can be examined with such language, its characteristics render it futile for “certain truths about human life” (pp. 3–5). Some aspects of moral life, in particular, are just too complex to be addressed with principles of analytical philosophy. It is narrative language, and specifically the form of the novel, Nussbaum argues, that has sensitivity and attentiveness sufficient to inquire into the moral dilemmas that characters face as they confront particular situations. Such nuanced appreciation is necessary for a comprehensive discussion of these issues, hence an investigation of moral principles should take into account literary works alongside philosophical treatises (pp. 26–27).

Nussbaum focuses on the modern novel, a genre that is associated with the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere and early modern democracy, and is attuned to the conflicts and pressures of modern life, especially under capitalism.[17] But her claims are translatable to other literary genres and historical epochs. For instance, Hallisey and Hansen (1996) illustrate how Nussbaum’s position with regard to narratives’ impact on moral life is also applicable to the stories of the Buddha’s previous lives (*jātakas*), in the context of Southeast Asian Theravāda Buddhism. Mukund Lath (1990) also raises ideas that are very similar to Nussbaum’s in relation to the *Mahābhārata*. It is the enactment of moral concepts in the living story of this epic that provides the opportunity to unravel these concepts and make them come to life. Where Nussbaum speaks of the limited nature of philosophical writing, Lath raises the limitations of moral injunctions that were articulated in the compendiums of *dharma* (*dharma-saṃhitā*). The *Mahābhārata*, he argues, is where these general injunctions are examined and interpreted in relation to particular moral dilemmas that have relevance for the concrete lives of its readers. It is where general ideals are being negotiated with the constraints of human conditions that often prevent the fruitions of such ideals (See also Heim 2022, pp. 653–56).

Gregory M. Clines (2022) has recently bemoaned scholars’ reluctance to explore the ways Jaina literature functions along such lines, as an instrument for ethical edification. Rather than considering the operation mode of such literature in staging moral concepts in the living story and its examination of injunctions in light of specific scenarios, scholarship is persistent in characterizing Jaina narratives simplistically as didactic. This sentiment serves scholars to explain *what* such narratives do, namely, instruct their readers in the Jaina doctrine. However, “recourse to didacticism,” Clines stresses, “fails to consider [. . .] the varied methods of ethical instruction that narrative might employ,” leaving unanswered the important question of *how* narratives fulfill such instructive purposes (pp. 13ff). By considering the *Investigation*’s narrative frame along trajectories of the kind that Nussbaum, Hallisey and Hansen, and Lath chart, I focus on this latter question of how the narrative obtains its goals: what is the mechanism through which the *Investigation* instructs its audience? Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati cast their arguments in narrative form to construct a multidimensional ideal of truthfulness and credibility, and they do so by repeatedly thematizing the notion of stories’ coherence and their compliance with one’s day-to-day

experience. The narrative style allows the authors to unravel these normative ideals in the context of staged scenarios. While these scenarios are not necessarily as "realistic" as the texts that Nussbaum considers, they evoke in their reader a more proximate real-life experience of their content than what is evoked through the "mythic" Brahminical stories criticized by the Vidyādhara protagonist. These scenarios depict events that can potentially happen in real life to train the readers into recognizing themselves which scenarios are credible.

It is important to emphasize that the real-life experience of such scenarios should not be confused with "realism" as it is used in the modern sense. The protagonists' ability to fly and change their forms would obviously not be accepted as realistic in the same way that, e.g., the modern novel would. Their realistic nature is akin to certain features of the premodern South Asian genre of *kathā* literature, which Daud Ali identifies as establishing "a kind of 'realism'," one that—

> should be somewhat qualified, for supernatural beings, wondrous mechanical devices and magical transformations appear regularly in [. . .] the *kathā* texts. The term might not be entirely inaccurate, however, if we admit that the boundaries of the 'real' were different in early South Asia than we may be accustomed to assume now (Ali 2013, pp. 244–45).

The discussion in the *Investigation* focuses on questions of the truthfulness and credibility of stories. These questions entail an exploration into the relation of stories with the real world and into the potential of events in stories to happen in real life. In order to evaluate the parameters according to which a story is regarded true, I argue, the *Investigation* forms an internal distinction between its fictitious scenarios, which could happen only in stories, and between realistic scenarios that can potentially happen in the real world. This work establishes the "realism" of such scenarios through certain literary and narrative devices that bring the events that they depict closer to the world of the readers and to their real-life experience. The discussion of such devices and their role in evoking a real-life experience in the readers' minds, which I undertake later, is informed by Ali's observation about these context-sensitive boundaries of the real.[18] And the boundaries of the real is a significant question in the Investigators' conceptualization of the coherence and credibility of stories.

The *Investigation* therefore enacts, in narrative form, a kind of reasoning *about* as well as *through* narrative. In this context, we can apply the distinction that the philosophy of literature scholar Sarah E. Worth (2008) establishes between "narrative reasoning" and "discursive reasoning": while discursive reasoning happens by means of arguments that "convince one of their conclusions and possibly their truth," narrative reasoning uses a narrative to "convince one of its lifelikeness and believability" (p. 49).[19] As she puts it, narrative reasoning demonstrates that a matter could potentially be a certain way, but it does not prove it definitively. From that point on, individuals should make their own judgments about it. Worth expands on Nussbaum's work: where Nussbaum focuses on the novel's ability to develop its readers' moral judgments, Worth argues that narratives develop in their audiences (and their authors) the "ability to retrieve information readily and to find coherence where it does not obviously exist" since "[t]he inferencing mechanisms that are used to make sense of the everyday world are the same ones utilized during the comprehension of narratives" (pp. 54–55). To put it plainly, she suggests that narratives develop not only one's moral sensitivity, but one's ability to reason and adjudicate more generally.

In concurrence with Worth's observations, both coherence and correspondence with the real world entail that the underlying inferential mechanisms of the story world and the real world are largely the same. Following these observations, I propose that the narrative style that these *Investigation* authors employ develops the readers' ability to reason. It trains them to recognize the parameters of credibility and to make their own judgments about it. Amitagati clearly says so himself in the concluding verses of his work:

> Wake up, wise people, and grasp what I said! Now you will know by yourselves how to distinguish precisely between what is good and what is not. People can

> merely *know* a flavor when it is described, even hundreds of times. But they do not experience it.[20]

The image here expands on a metaphor from the preceding verse, where Amitagati compares his harsh words to a bitter medicine.[21] In order for the medicine to be effective, one cannot simply read about it. Rather, one must directly experience it through consumption. Likewise, the *Investigation* produces its desired results not through prescriptive lists of dos and don'ts, but by evoking in its readers the experience of different situations. And this verse contains a claim about the kind of knowledge that these experiences convey. It is the same kind of precise knowledge that we would expect to find in the more formal and explicit teaching of, for instance, a *śāstra*. The narrative form, with its repetitive structure, trains the audience in certain epistemological virtues by which truth and credibility are evaluated. But those cannot be truly tested until the reader is asked to exercise them in real life. The *Investigation* thus cultivates in its readers the ability to recognize for themselves the parameters of a story's credibility through a series of examples rather than a set of rules. Once the readers are trained, they are ready to adjudicate for themselves the coherence and credibility of the different stories that they will encounter throughout their lives. In the rest of this paper, I analyze how precisely the *Investigation* constructs its arguments by repeatedly confronting its audiences with situations that fail to meet these standards of coherence and correspondence with the real world.

4. Would a God Act like a Lecher?: The Coherence of Stories

How does the *Investigation* show that coherence across texts is a prerequisite for establishing the credibility of those texts? Let us unpack this issue with an episode in which the Jaina protagonist Manovega argues that Brahminical depictions of Viṣṇu are incoherent. It is the same episode from which Hariṣeṇa's aforementioned stanzas about Viṣṇu (introduced in Section 2) are taken. Here are the events that precede these stanzas: Before the two Vidyādharas first enter the city, they take the form of simple carriers of grass and wood, who are uncommonly adorned with valuable jewelry and fancy clothing. Their arrival causes somewhat of a fuss, as the local Brahmins cannot make sense of their peculiar appearance. The Vidyādharas look like rich men or even divine beings. But their avowed occupation does not match this appearance. The townsmen think that there must be something wrong with these two: why would they continue to work hard in a lowly occupation rather than simply selling their jewels and living off the profits?

In response, the Vidyādhara Manovega reprimands the townspeople: "*Purāṇas* like the *Mahābhārata* and others speak about such irregularities by the thousands. But you, sirs, do not recognize it."[22] In his view, the locals are blind to the fact that their own stories speak exactly about such things that they just claimed to have never encountered before.[23] By pointing out such instances, Manovega builds an argument against the coherence of Brahminical depictions of Viṣṇu. This is how Hariṣeṇa lays out this exchange between Manovega and the Brahmins:

> [Manovega said:] "Lakṣmī on his chest, a crown of jewels adorns his head, he subdues the poverty of the people, gods bow at his feet.—Is Viṣṇu, who is omniscient and suffused in everyone, seen in the *purāṇas*, or not?" Then a Brahmin, raising his hands above his head, said: "Yes, it is true!" Manovega heard and replied: "If Viṣṇu is described in such a way, then how could he have been a cowherd in Nanda's cowshed, with no marks of a lord? How could he have been a messenger, sent by Pāṇḍu's son when he conveyed his esteemed wish, and went to Duryodhana for the benefit of his own master? Why did he—lord of gods and enemy of demons, whose body is all-pervading—trick Bali into granting him the earth?"[24]

The arguments in this segment are based on conventional representations of Viṣṇu. Hariṣeṇa does not distort nor does he exaggerate them. The point is that the protagonist tells purāṇic stories in a way that would be accepted by the people who adhere to them. It is as if the authors of the *Investigation* believe that the faults of such *purāṇas* are almost self-explanatory,

and that once these depictions are presented side by side and looked into carefully, one cannot disregard their incoherence. But what exactly is incoherent here? How does mentioning Viṣṇu in relation to Lakṣmī and a jeweled crown, or in relation to Duryodhana or Bali, serve the author in establishing his argument?

Hariṣeṇa's argument here is established around two main parts. First, Manovega mentions one set of purāṇic depictions of Viṣṇu (carrying Lakṣmī, wearing a crown, etc.) and confirms with the Brahmins that such representations actually occur in their texts. Second, he questions the compatibility of this first set with another set of Viṣṇu's depictions (cowherd, messenger, etc.). Reading this passage along with Amitagati's narration of the same episode highlights what exactly Hariṣeṇa perceives as its incoherence. An analysis of the parallel Sanskrit retelling, which Amitagati produces in a slightly more systematic manner, clarifies the nature of this argument for both authors and assists in understanding the *Investigation*'s idea of stories' coherence.

Like the Apabhramsha version, the Sanskrit version also opens the illustration of Manovega's arguments by providing descriptions of Viṣṇu that are not considered controversial among the Brahmins. Initially, Manovega lists laudatory depictions that are compatible with each other. He then confirms with the Brahmins that these descriptions are indeed accepted by them:

> In this world, the Lotus-Eyed god Viṣṇu is renowned by men as the supreme cause of creation, persistence, and destruction of the world, from whose grace people obtain the eternal state. Like the sky, he is always all-pervading, everlasting, bright, and imperishable. His hands—pillars to support the abode of the triple-world, adorned with bow, conch-shell, mace, and discus—are a forest fire against enemies. By him the wicked demons who harm people are quickly conquered, like the mass of darkness is conquered by the sun. On his body the respectable Śrī, his beloved, who gives joy to the world and destroys suffering, is laid, as the moonlight lays in the moon. On his body the *kaustubha* jewel shines forth with pure radiance, as if a lamp that was placed by Lakṣmī in her beautiful home.—Brahmins! Is it, or is it not, the conception that you have of Viṣṇu, who is supreme among all gods, the god in Vaikuṇṭha, the highest soul?[25]

As in Hariṣeṇa's narration, these descriptions also correspond to widely accepted representations of Viṣṇu as they appear in a variety of purāṇic depictions. The Brahmins find nothing objectionable in them. Viṣṇu is associated with epithets such as the Lotus-Eyed and his iconography is linked with the various objects mentioned here. Indeed, the Brahmin interlocutors quickly validate Manovega's words, saying that no sensible person would deny that Viṣṇu exists as described.

Manovega then provides another series of illustrations. These illustrations too are not incompatible by themselves. Nevertheless, they are incompatible with the previous ones:

> Learned Brahmins! If Viṣṇu is endowed with such qualities, then is it the case that he stayed in Nanda's cow-house, in the form of a cowherd, protecting the cows and performing his playful dance everywhere together with the cowherds, carrying peacocks' feathers, his hair bound with a garland of *Kuṭaja* flowers? Did he quickly approach Duryodhana as a messenger, after Pāṇḍu's son Arjuna ordered him to do so as if he were a foot-soldier? Did he become Arjuna's charioteer and drive his chariot into the battlefield that was full of elephants, horses, carriages, and foot-soldiers? Did he take the form of a dwarf and request the earth from the evil-speaking Bali with piteous words, like a beggar? Did he—supporter of the entire world, omniscient, all-pervading, eternal—burn from all sides by the fire of separation from Sītā, like a lecher? Is it the case that such actions are appropriate for this Mahātmā, a venerable god whom only *yogis* can reach, the teacher of the worlds?[26]

As in the first series of descriptions, here too, the descriptions in themselves derive from familiar stories about Viṣṇu and his *avatāras*: his appearance as a cowherd in the house of

Nanda, his conduct as Arjuna's charioteer in the *Mahābhārata* during the battle of Kurukṣetra (both of which relate to his incarnation as Kṛṣṇa), the trick he played on Bali as a dwarf (as Vāmana), and the suffering that he had gone through at the time of Sītā's abduction (as Rāma). On the face of it, the Brahmins should not have much of a problem with such references either. After all, these characteristics are a part of the same repertoire of stories, and if the Brahmins accept the previous set of descriptions there should not be any reason for them to reject this one.

While Hariṣeṇa merely lays out these depictions side by side, Amitagati emphasizes the tension between these two sets even further. This tension derives from the fact that the actions described in the latter paragraph seem not to be suitable to the nature of Viṣṇu's character as it is constructed throughout the previous one. An all-pervading and eternal god who is the cause of creation, permanence, and destruction, whose graciousness grants refuge for the people, and who causes all the harmful demons to vanish, is expected to act differently from how these human *avatāras* act. In order to emphasize this tension, throughout the latter passage Amitagati employs a different rhetoric than he used in the previous one. To begin, the assertions about Viṣṇu in the first paragraph turn in the second paragraph into questions. Over a series of rhetorical questions, Amitagati emphasizes the speaker's doubts regarding the compatibility of the two sections and about this narrative's coherence. Namely, would a story where Viṣṇu—so described (*īdṛśa*) in the first set of depictions—acts in accordance with such descriptions as in the second set, be considered a coherent story? Second, Amitagati uses comparisons to add a negative valence to the behaviors ascribed to Viṣṇu's *avatāra*s and to emphasize what is problematic about them. In each of the two series of Viṣṇu's descriptions, Amitagati incorporates a set of four comparisons. But the first set of comparisons is very different in nature from the second one. The first set of comparisons is based on descriptions that are celestial in nature: Viṣṇu is all-pervading like the sky; he vanquishes demons like the sun vanquishes darkness; he provides a home for Lakṣmī like the moon for the moonlight; his body shines forth, like the beautiful house of the goddess. By contrast, the second set of comparisons is terrestrial, comparing this great god to common people. And this line of comparisons is gradually belittling him. It starts off by describing Viṣṇu at the house of Nanda. Here, Amitagati does not make an explicit comparison, but Viṣṇu's association with the cowherds serves a metonymic function similar to that of a comparison, by saying that his actions are like those of a cowherd. This, in itself, is not much of a problem. After all, in his *avatāra* as Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu was in fact a cowherd, and even the chief among them. The same happens again, when Amitagati refers to the Kurukṣetra episode. This time, he explicitly compares Viṣṇu to a foot-soldier. This reference is more charged, since the problem is not merely that Viṣṇu participates in the battle, but that he follows orders given by Arjuna, as if he is a simple foot-soldier and not the celebrated god that was described earlier. Then, the comparisons become even more problematic. Viṣṇu as a dwarf is compared to a piteous beggar, while in his form as Rāma he is compared to a lecher, on account of the pain of separation from Sīta that he underwent.

Such comparisons help us to understand Amitagati's argument better as they highlight the tension between the sets of depictions. And Amitagati's narration also helps us to understand Hariṣeṇa's argument better, since while the Apabhramsha author does not employ the same kind of explicit comparisons, the overarching idea is similar in both narrations: divine depictions of Viṣṇu do not stand in line with the depictions of his human forms. This exchange between Manovega and the Brahmins reveals what the authors perceive as internal incoherencies and contradictions (Apbh. *puvvāvara-viroha;* Skt. *pūrvāpara-virodha*) in the purāṇic stories of Viṣṇu. His actions make sense (*yujyante*) for a beggar or a lecher, but they do not make sense when they are ascribed to a divine god.

5. Can It Really Happen?: The Correspondence of Stories with Real-Life Experience

"All of your *purāṇas* are internally incoherent (*pūrvāpara-viruddha*). Brahmins, how can wise men who stand upon reasoning trust them?"[27]—Manovega, the Jaina Vidyādhara,

raises this allegation against his Brahmin interlocutors. Earlier we saw how Hariṣeṇa points out the mutual contradiction (*aṇṇoṇṇa-viroha*) between those who claim that Viṣṇu has ten different births and those who say that he is free from birth, followed by how Amitagati makes a similar claim against Brahminical *purāṇas*. But the internal incoherence within *purāṇas* is not the final goal of such arguments. The tension between the celestial and the terrestrial characteristics of Viṣṇu carries a further implication. In addition to exposing the incoherence of such claims across the world of their purāṇic stories, by referring to terrestrial images of Viṣṇu, the authors also draw the attention of their audience to the question of correspondence with the real world: do the stories about Viṣṇu conform to what the readers accept as true in their own lives?

Unlike his celestial appearances, Viṣṇu's terrestrial forms resonate with things that people experience directly and immediately in their real life. Throughout their lives, people come across individuals such as cowherds, soldiers, beggars, and lechers, and so they have a more tangible standard of comparison for such terrestrial forms. In other words, people can assess whether their own real-life experiences echo the terrestrial depictions of Viṣṇu. The reference to his terrestrial forms allows people to judge for themselves whether they ever encountered a cowherd who is omniscient, or a dwarf who is all-pervading. This is what the authors achieve through this line of argumentation: placing together all of Viṣṇu's forms side by side helps one realize that such an accumulation is not only incoherent, but it also has no correspondence in one's experiences of the world that is external to stories.

To further evoke in the readers' minds their own experience of the world, the authors take an additional step. They make a distinction between incredible and fictitious occurrences in the *Investigation*, ones that can take place only inside stories, and between realistic and truthful occurrences that might actually happen in the real world. Amitagati carries out such a distinction through Manovega's final sentences in the exchange, after he contrasts Viṣṇu's celestial appearances with his terrestrial forms:

> If Viṣṇu, who is free of passions, acts in such a way, then what is the problem if we—sons of a poor man—sell wood? If the Lord Viṣṇu is playing in such a manner, then what's to prevent us from doing the same thing according to our nature?[28]

With these words, the author draws an analogy between Viṣṇu's behavior and that of the protagonists. It demonstrates how the Vidyādharas' actions are no stranger than those of Viṣṇu, who is celebrated in the Brahmins' stories for acting in similar ways. But the analogy also establishes a level of distinction between Viṣṇu and the Vidyādharas. It is since, as far as the Brahmins of Pāṭaliputra experience it, the two friends are real people who show up in their city. The Brahmins experience the Vidyādharas directly through their senses and engage with them in an immediate way. By contrast, their experience of Viṣṇu is only an indirect one. The Brahmins' conception of Viṣṇu was established in a mediated way, through the testimonies of their purāṇic stories. While for certain thinkers such conceptions may potentially be warranted, it is difficult to overlook the irony in Manovega's words when, following his mentioning of Viṣṇu's celestial forms and before contrasting them with his terrestrial ones, he asks the Brahmins: "Is this, or is this not, the conception (*pratīti*) that you have of Viṣṇu?" (*AmDhP* 10.17).[29] The irony in his tone anticipates his own opinion about the unwarranted nature of their conception.

To further evoke in the reader a more realistic experience of the protagonists than that evoked by the purāṇic stories that Manovega mentions, the communication between the two groups in the narrative takes place in the form of dialogues that are full of first-person direct speech. This is a useful literary technique to establish a mimetic form of discourse and create in the reader a more vivid sense of the reported events.[30] The dialogical setting creates for the readers the "feeling of partaking in the conversation" and incorporates them not as mere observers, but as actual participants in the exchange (Esposito 2015, p. 82).[31] The form of a public dialogue brings the readers closer to the narrative setting, to experience a sort of overlapping between their own reality and the plot, intensified by a mimetic illustration of the events. This form of exchange evokes in the readers a more

realistic impression of the events of which they are informed and creates the experience of real occurrences that might truly happen not only in stories, but also in their everyday real world.

Unlike the readers' proximate and realistic experience of the Vidyādharas, the readers, just as the Brahmins in Pāṭaliputra, experience Viṣṇu only through others' third-person references to his stories. And the text asserts that this Viṣṇu is a character with mutually contradictory and incoherent features. On account of that, we are encouraged to doubt the reality of such character. By comparing Viṣṇu's actions with those of Manovega, the *Investigation* underscores the tension between the fantastic and fictitious nature of this god and between the terrestrial and realistic nature of its own protagonists.[32] In the story, these protagonists are real people whom the Brahmins encounter in an immediate way. It is only their peculiar appearances (here they are wood traders with a fancy wardrobe, in later episodes they take other strange disguises) that raise the Brahmins' curiosity and doubts. And, the explanations that Manovega gives for their appearance are always fictitious. In this episode, he lies by saying that their father is a poor vendor and that they simply came to the city to sell wood. In later episodes, he narrates other fictitious biographical stories. In all these cases, his lies are brought forth to justify the strangers' peculiar appearance. But these lies are aimed only at the Brahmins in the narrative. Outside of the story, the readers already know that their strange appearances and the stories that justify them are not real. The reader knows that these outfits are merely a disguise, and the biographical stories are actually made up.

In this way, the authors speak of the Vidyādharas in two distinct modes. In the first one, they are representations of real people who communicate with the Brahmins. In the second, they are fictive characters in Manovega's own fictitious life stories. The analogy between Viṣṇu and the Vidyādharas highlights the difference between these two modes of illustration. Since the stories of Viṣṇu are comparable only with the fictitious stories of these protagonists, both the Brahmins and the readers are led to recognize that Viṣṇu's stories are similarly fictitious. But when it comes to the protagonists as they truly are, as the interlocutors of Pāṭaliputra's Brahmins, the *Investigation* represents them as real people, who simply tell lies. Their illustration as real people stands in opposition to the fictitious nature of Viṣṇu as a character in the story and highlights the lack of correspondence between Viṣṇu's characteristics and what people experience as real-life phenomena.

This brings us to an important distinction that I should clarify with regard to what specifically is the Vidyādhara's object of critique here. The debate is not about the possible existence of *a* Viṣṇu, but it is about this particular Viṣṇu whom the Brahmins valorize. The *Investigation* makes it clear that the character of Viṣṇu to whom Manovega refers is the one outlined in the Brahmins' stories. This becomes more explicit after the Brahmins admit their defeat in this debate, when Manovega describes to his friend an alternative Viṣṇu: the real Viṣṇu is one of the sixty-three illustrious persons of the Jaina Universal History, the last among the nine *Vāsudevas* who were born during the fourth era of our current time cycle (*HaDhP* 4.1.3-9; *AmDhP* 10.53-7).[33] That is, according to the *Investigation*, Viṣṇu was a real person, just as the Vidyādharas and the Brahmins are.[34] What our authors do not accept is the stories that the Brahmins associate with him. Just as the Vidyādharas are representations of real people who associate themselves with fictitious stories, so might purāṇic characters like Viṣṇu be real people to whom the Brahmins link false stories. In this way, the analogy between the Vidyādharas and Viṣṇu exposes both the fictitious nature of his stories, as well as the tension between such stories and the potentially real people to whom these stories refer.

Manovega's words in Hariṣeṇa's narration similarly establish such an analogy between the two types of characters:

> Suppose that you say: "[Viṣṇu] causes life and prevents suffering, on account of his *karma*." [Then how is it that] you still doubt this wood of ours? And if you all say that this is just a shameless play, then you should similarly know that we

> carry this wood [as a play]. Or rather: *Karma* is powerful. And even Viṣṇu acts according to orders. So what would people like us, who are ruled by *karma*, do?[35]

Viṣṇu, like all non-liberated beings, is subject to the mechanism of *karma*. If the Brahmins justify the contradiction between his representations based on the karmic mechanism that causes him to be reborn in his inconsistent form, then the Brahmins cannot reject this very mechanism as an explanation for the contradiction between the Vidyādharas' characteristics. To put it differently, if the stories of Viṣṇu correspond with what the Brahmins experience in the mundane world, then the Vidyādharas' behavior should be justified on similar accounts to those that justify Viṣṇu's behavior. Another justification that should not be rejected on the same account is the following: if the Brahmins claim that the contradiction between Viṣṇu's representations is reconciled on account of his playful nature, then there is no reason for the Brahmins not to accept the same explanation as reconciling the tension between the Vidyādharas' seemingly contradictory features, too.[36] Ultimately, Manovega's argument is that if we want to accept certain occurrences as true and credible, then there should not be one standard to evaluate them in stories and a different standard to evaluate them in the experiential world. The same standards that apply to the stories of Viṣṇu should also apply to what the Brahmins encounter in their real (albeit textual) life. If the Brahmins maintain that these stories are true, then they should not blame these strangers who stand in front of them for doing anything unusual. The same logic also applies the other way around: since the reader knows that the Vidyādharas' appearance and biographical stories are entirely fictitious, the same reader should not be surprised when realizing that Viṣṇu's stories are just as fictitious.

The way in which the *Investigation* embeds the Vidyādharas' first-person narration of their fictitious biographies within the text's frame narrative further serves to establish the protagonists as representations of real people. In such episodes of a story within a story, the narrative shifts between several levels, wherein Manovega as a character at one narrative level becomes the narrator of another story, which is contained within the previous one and takes place at a higher narrative level. The shifts between the narrative levels take place through dialogues between the two friends and the Brahmins. Initially, the reader encounters the Vidyādharas as characters in the *Investigation* frame story, when the anonymous narrator opens the narrative by introducing the world where these characters live. The reader then follows the Vidyādharas to the city, where they encounter another set of characters, the Brahmins. But through the exchange between the two groups, the Vidyādharas gradually turn into narrators of their own story within a story, a story that is subordinate to the main frame narrative.[37]

The story within a story has causal functions in relation to the *Investigation*'s main narrative, as it introduces the events, albeit fictitious ones, which led the two into the city where they encounter the Brahmins[38]. Moreover, each of these instances of a biographic story within a story concludes with the plot's return to its narrative present, the time and place in which Manovega tells his story to the Brahmins. The overlap between his biography and the act of its narration in the narrative's present highlights the tension between these two narrative levels: one contains incredible stories of Manovega's fictitious biography, while the other illustrates a realistic exchange between characters who represent real people. For instance, in an episode where the Vidyādharas arrive in the city wearing the red garments of Buddhist monks, they claim to be the sons of lay adherents of the Buddha. Once, they say, while watching the monks' clothes drying in the sun, two scary jackals approached them. They tried to escape by climbing on top of a *stūpa*, but the jackals easily lifted it up and flew with them in the air. Eventually, the beasts dropped the two in a distant land. Lost and having nothing but the monks' red garments, the two decided to become monks themselves and to search for alms. Manovega then concludes by bringing this narration to his own here and now: "As we wandered across the land that is adorned with many cities, we reached this place of yours that is full of Brahmins."[39] With this conclusion, the story catches up with its own narration.[40] As the protagonist develops his story, the distance between his act of narration and the events he narrates gradually

diminishes. By concluding the story with his arrival to Pāṭaliputra, the *Investigation* ties Manovega's biography together with Manovega's recounting of this biography. As such, the characters whose fictitious story is narrated (lay adherents of the Buddha) turn out to be the same people who show up in the city and narrate these incredible stories to the Brahmins. The shift between narrative levels underscores the tension between incredible stories and the real world: the moment in which Manovega's biographical story and his act of its narration overlap at the narrative's present highlights the contrast between the fictitiousness of his story and the reality of his presence in the city as he stands in front of the Brahmins' eyes. The unification of the two levels emphasizes for both the Brahmins in the story and the external reader the distinction between what is credible and may be true in real life and what should be considered nothing but an incredible story.

6. The World and the *Purāṇas* Are Mutually Contradictory

Later in the plot (the seventh *sandhi* in Hariṣeṇa's work, the fourteenth *pariccheda* in Amitagati's), Manovega takes the form of an ascetic (Apbh. *tāvasa*; Skt. *tāpasa*) and again confronts the city's Brahmins. This time, he claims to be the son of a virgin woman, impregnated from the mere touch of a man. After presenting himself in this manner, which evokes the notion of "the son of a barren woman" (*vandhyā-putra*)—a common example in Indian thought referring to logical impossibility—he continues with incredible stories about how he stayed in his mother's womb for twelve years and how he joined a group of ascetics immediately upon his birth. As an ascetic, he concludes, wandering about on his pilgrimage, he eventually arrived to Pāṭaliputra, where he came across these Brahmins.

As expected, the Brahmins do not believe his story. They claim that it is so inconceivable (*asambhāvya*) that it cannot be true (*asatya*).[41] In return, he refers to parallel examples from Brahminical texts. For instance, since the Brahmins do not accept that a woman can become pregnant just by being touched and with no sexual intercourse, Manovega points out two purāṇic instances: First, the story of Bhagīrathi, whose mother became pregnant after sleeping next to another woman, and second, Dhṛtarāṣṭra's wife, Gāndhārī, was impregnated with the hundred Kauravas after embracing a jackfruit tree. The Brahmins accept this analogy, but they still do not believe other incredible elements of Manovega's fictitious biography, to which he responses with additional analogous stories from the Brahminical *purāṇas*: Abhimanyu in his mother's womb; a frog that became pregnant from drinking Maya Muni's semen and gave birth to Mandodarī, who later carried Indrajit in her womb for seven thousand years; Vyāsa's undertaking of penance as soon as he was born; and the pregnancy of Kuntī and Candramatī while both were still virgins.

Then, the two friends leave the city to the nearby park, where Manovega explains the source of the Brahmins' confusion: "The world and the *purāṇas* are mutually contradictory. Dear Friend! People who are bewildered by falsehood never critically examine them."[42] The protagonist explicitly states here the requirement of a story to correspond with the real world: even when stories are internally coherent, they might still be rendered untrue and unreliable in case they contradict what people accept as true from their own real-life experience. As long as the debate exclusively focuses on coherence within the world of stories, there are no contradictions between Manovega's fictitious biography and the purāṇic stories he ascribes to the Brahmins. To the contrary, the Brahminical stories are in fact analogous with Manovega's fabricated biographical narration. Manovega makes this argument explicit elsewhere in the *Investigation*: an impartial person cannot simultaneously claim that such Brahminical stories are true (*satya*) but the Vidyādhara's words are not.[43] If one accepts the validity of the Brahminical stories, then one has to similarly accept Manovega's stories as true. But the Brahmins do not accept the protagonist's stories. In their view, Manovega must be lying on account of the fact that his stories fail to comply with their own everyday experience. But since his stories are analogous with the Brahminical *purāṇas*, the latter must similarly be rejected on account of the fact that they are also contradictory to such an experience of the world. It is a *tu quoque* strategy, in which the authors employ one false story in order to expose the faults of another. But these faults are

based, first and foremost, on the fact that what the stories describe simply does not comply with what people experience as true.

Manovega provides specific examples of the contradiction between the world and the *purāṇas*:

> How can women give birth to a child upon embracing a jackfruit tree? Vines never bear fruits from the touch of a man. How can a woman become pregnant from the touch of another woman? I have never seen a cow that became pregnant from touching another cow. A frog giving birth to a human being—who can accept this? I haven't seen Kodo millet coming out of rice. If one can produce offspring merely by eating semen, why should a woman unite with a man in order to have a child?[44]

Manovega here revisits the purāṇic stories that he drew upon in his responses to the Brahmins. But this time, he contrasts the stories with real-life phenomena. This contradistinction highlights the tension between things that can be accepted only as part of an incredible and untruthful story and between what may actually happen in real life. By employing such strategy, the author puts forth his argument about the Brahmins' partiality and bias. It is, he shows, since these Brahmins accept *some* stories that depict incredible incidents. For instance, they accept that Gāndhārī was made pregnant by a jackfruit tree. But they are reluctant to accept other stories of similarly incredible incidents, as is evident from Manovega's account of how his mother became pregnant while still a virgin. Moreover, had impregnation by trees been possible, we would be compelled to accept the possibility that in the real world, just like in these stories, men would mate with vines. But the readers know that vines cannot produce fruits just from the touch of a human. Manovega's words, stating that he has "never seen" such things before, emphasize the fact that such claims are not simply hypothetical issues based on theoretical knowledge. Rather, they are directly related to one's immediate encounter with the world. If according to one's own experience these things cannot be accepted as true, there is no basis to accept as true such purāṇic stories, which are experienced only indirectly as verbal testimony. By restating what the readers already know from their own experience, Manovega emphasizes the faults in such purāṇic stories and exposes the Brahmins' bias in accepting them while rejecting Manovega's words.

These analyses reinforce my claim: For the authors of the *Investigation*, making arguments within the world of stories is not sufficient. The credibility of a story is determined in relation to both the diegetic world of stories (within the story, as well as with regard to other stories) and with the world of our real-life experience. So, in order for the Investigators to make their arguments compelling and reliable, they must take examples from both spheres. And, as these examples indicate, Manovega straddles the two spheres to establish his arguments, emphasizing that a story may be considered true only if it is both coherent and corresponding with one's experience of the world.

Manovega's examination of the Brahminical gods in another episode manifests the shift of his arguments between these two spheres. In a series of arguments, he challenges the coherence of Brahminical representations of these gods. He opens with a set of arguments that point out incoherencies within stories:

> If Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva constitute a single body, then how could they do things such as decapitating each other? Since this master can destroy the sins of all the gods, he should thus destroy his own faults, as the sun its mass of darkness.[45]

Manovega begins by criticizing a purāṇic theological notion that the various gods are in fact modifications of the single God. He challenges this notion by bringing to mind stories that describe such purāṇic gods who maltreat each other in different ways, as in the case of Śiva's decapitation of Brahmā.[46] Manovega further makes a claim that echoes the omnipotence paradox of the stone: could God be subject to a fault that even He could not overcome? Just like in the paradox of the stone (could God create a stone so heavy that even He could not lift it?), this argument points out a contradiction between the characteristics of

a single character. It resonates with the aforementioned argument about the contradiction between Viṣṇu's representation as having ten births and his epithet as "free from birth and death." This time, Manovega challenges the coherence of certain representations of the purāṇic God: if, as the *purāṇas* claim, the embodiments of this God destroy all sins, then purāṇic stories about the subjugation of his embodiments to the eighteen faults (*doṣa*), e.g., birth, death, and sexual pleasure, would simply contradict such claims.[47]

After carrying out these arguments, Manovega explores a specific Brahminical story about the creation of the world by Brahmā, which he challenges with a series of rhetorical questions:

> The cosmic egg was created from Brahmā's semen, after it dropped into the water and bubbled. When it split to two, the triple-world was created.—If this is what the scriptures claim, where was the water? If there are no causes in the ether, where would be found a cause for the creation of things such as rivers, mountains, earth, and trees? If the cause of even a single body is hardly found there, where would be the material substance that is the cause of the triple-world? How would the Creator, though he is bodiless, bring forth the creation? How would the effort of a bodiless produce a body?[48]

According to this Brahminical story, the world was created because Brahmā dropped his semen into water. Manovega first points out an obvious problem: if, as the story claims, the world did not exist, then where could there be water into which the semen fell? There is a contradiction between two claims *within* the narrative itself: On the one hand, the world did not exist. On the other hand, some body of water existed somewhere.[49] But the protagonist does not end with these arguments of incoherence within the story (intra-textually), as he moves further to discuss tensions between this story and other texts (inter-textually).

To establish her argument, Granoff shows how medieval Jaina scholars wrote with "a clear expectation that poetry and philosophy, practice and doctrine must form a coherent whole" (Granoff 2020, p. 184). And Manovega's following questions reveal his expectations of the creation story to align with philosophical ideas. For instance, he reminds us that if one takes the notion of causality seriously, then one's story must comply with such causality. But this creation story contradicts such philosophical ideas: If the world did not exist, then nothing—not even its cause—could have existed. And where the cause is missing, there could be no effect.[50] It is the problem of creation *ex nihilo* (Doniger 2007, p. 88): if the cause for the world is missing, how can the world be created? Manovega employs similar arguments about the nature of the creator himself: If Brahmā is embodied, how could his material body exist, when even the world does not exist? Alternatively, if Brahmā has no material body, how could he produce anything that is material? This line of questions brings to mind philosophical refutations of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika's notion of a creator God. But what the *Investigation* produces here is not an exhaustive philosophical refutation of the kind that thoroughly examines and counters all the possible responses of the philosophical rival.[51] The way Manovega lays out these philosophical positions suggests that such positions in themselves are not the target of the *Investigation*'s project. Amitagati employs these positions only to challenge the logic of this purāṇic story. He employs elements of philosophical discourse, but he does so predominantly to undermine the credibility of the story. These arguments clarify that the main target here is the stories, not the philosophical positions themselves. It is most vivid at Manovega's conclusion for these arguments, wherein he utters the allegation introduced earlier: "All of your *purāṇas* are internally incoherent!"[52] The *Investigation* selectively takes elements from a different textual world—the world of philosophical discourse—to point out their incompatibility with the purāṇic story of Brahmā. If, as these authors claim, stories and philosophical arguments reside in the same world, then they must be simultaneously compatible with each other. If they are not, then they cannot be accepted as true.

However, even if such compatibility within the textual world exists, Manovega reminds us that the question of compliance with the real world still stands. It is so that he brings his arguments into the world of our intersubjective experience:

> It is clear that for those who are judicious, a specific god or purāṇic story, well-known as it may be, might make no sense at all. "Viṣṇu has four arms. Brahmā has four faces. Śiva has three eyes."—How would anyone accept this? In the world, we see that everyone has one face, two hands, and two eyes. This was falsely set-up by people who are obscured by delusion.[53]

The protagonist expands his inquiry beyond the world of the narrative and into the experiential world of its audience, making the claim that coherence is not limited to stories. From our own experience of the world, we know that no one has such physical attributes as those that the Brahminical stories associate with the gods: Viṣṇu has four arms, Brahmā four faces, and Śiva three eyes. This fact does not depend on coherence within stories. An author can easily create an imaginary literary world, coherent within itself, in which people are born with unusual physical features.[54] But when compared with the life experience of the reader, such a story operates on presuppositions that the audience would not accept in their day-to-day existence. Again, Manovega restates here what the readers already know: stories of such gods do not correspond with what we accept as true in our everyday lives. And, just as Amṛtacandra requires metaphysical claims about the nature of the soul to be compatible with tantric practices, so does the *Investigation* require that purāṇic representations of these characters stand in line with everyday experiences. Otherwise, such accounts cannot be regarded as true.

7. Conclusions

Many literary traditions from South Asia offer instances where stories are repeatedly told in different versions. Some are very similar to each other, while others freely revise, expand, or omit details. However, occasions where stories explicitly mention and critique the predecessors that they substantially revise are less common. Some Jaina versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* exemplify this practice, where they employ the frame story of King Śreṇika to explicitly allude to earlier stories that they do not accept as true and credible. These Jaina versions meditate from their temporally subsequent position on a set of preexisting texts, which they self-consciously attempt to make sense of.

My basic assumption in this article is that there are specific parameters for evaluating the credibility of stories, which the Jaina authors of such versions—so upfront about their critique of their non-Jaina predecessors—follow. I introduced a potential explanation of what these parameters are by analyzing the arguments that the earliest versions of the *Investigation of Dharma* put forth: a credible story must be coherent (within itself as well as with other stories) and correspond with the real-life experience of its audience. To be sure, this is by no means the only explanation, and people may hold different views about what constitutes credibility. I also do not argue that all the Jaina versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* necessarily follow the same parameters that my analysis of the *Investigation* unfolds. On the contrary, I hope that my analysis will prompt others to further think about these questions in relation to other literary works. Nevertheless, what these Jaina *Rāmāyaṇa*s and *Mahābhārata*s share in common with the *Investigation* is their interest in examining a set of preexisting stories and making sense of them in non-commentarial means. Exploring further the methods by which authors treat received texts can open new directions of inquiry into their motivations for retelling existing stories, by way of unfolding their endeavors to make sense of stories and the knowledge they convey.

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Abbreviations

AmDhP	*Dharmaparīksā* of Amitagati
HaDhP	*Dharmaparīksā* of Hariṣeṇa

Notes

1. While both works were edited and published, I could not have conducted my research without consulting their manuscripts, especially for the Apabhramsha text, where the abundance of variants testifies to a decline in the copyists' familiarity with the language. In cases where I introduced emendations based on manuscript reading or conjunctions, my source is explicitly indicated in the footnote, along with the printed original. I am particularly indebted to Kamal Chand Sogani, who generously shared with me Hariṣeṇa's manuscripts housed in the Āmer Śāstra Bhaṇḍār in Jaipur and to Akshara Ravishankar who scanned for me a manuscript of Amitagati's work from the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute in Jodhpur.
2. For the specific arguments of Vidyānandi and Hemacandra (as well as the latter's commentator Malliṣeṇa), see Granoff (2020, pp. 170–73). For Amṛtacandra's, see pp. 180–83.
3. Seema K. Chauhan's work on Jaina *purāṇas* shows this very clearly (Chauhan 2021, 2023).
4. The fictional worlds of the Marvel Universe or DC Universe, where the different comics superheroes and villains coexist, are great examples for such coherent worlds that expand over multiple texts.
5. *ke vi bhaṇahiṃ ramaï daha-jamma levi* | *jammāi vivajjiu bhaṇahiṃ ke vi* | | *iha aṇṇoṇṇa-virohu jāṇanta vi avagaṇṇahiṃ* | *ekku vi uhaya-sarūu gaya-viveya hari maṇṇahiṃ* | | *HaDhP* 4.1.10-*ghattā* | | All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
6. *matsyaḥ kūrmo varāhaś ca nārasiṃho 'tha vāmanaḥ* | *rāmo rāmaś ca kṛṣṇaś ca budhaḥ kalkī ca te daśa* | | *kṣarākṣara-vinirmuktaṃ janma-mṛtyu-vivarjitaṃ* | *abhayaṃ satya-saṅkalpaṃ viṣṇuṃ dhyāyan na sīdati* | | *HaDhP* 4.2.1-2 | | buddaḥ conj.] budhāḥ; daśa conj.] daśāḥ; kṣarākṣara-vinirmuktaṃ conj.] akṣarākṣara-nirmuktaṃ; abhayaṃ MSS. 2, 3] avyayaṃ; viṣṇuṃ dhyāyan na conj.] viṣṇu-dhyāyān. Variations of these verses also appear in Amitagati's work (10.58-9). A verse almost identical to the first one, which enumerates Viṣṇu's *avatāras*, appears in a variety of Brahminical sources, e.g., the *Matsya-purāṇa* 285.6-7 and the *Varāha-purāṇa* 4.2 (Joshi 1967, pp. 400–1). With regard to the second verse, I have so far traced it only in the *Viṣṇudharma-purāṇa* 71.6. The *Investigation* itself does not indicate the sources of these verses.
7. "The narrative paradigm does not deny reason and rationality; it reconstitutes them, making them amenable to all forms of human communication" (Fisher 1984, p. 2).
8. We should not mistake Fisher's understanding of "story" with "fiction" or any specific category of literary genre. For him, a story applies to almost all human communication, whether written or oral, as he clarifies that his "narrative paradigm" is "an approach to interpretation and assessment of human communication—assuming that all forms of human communication can be seen fundamentally as stories" (Fisher 1989, p. 57).
9. *jaina-darśana-saṅkṣepa ity eṣa kathito 'naghaḥ* | *pūrvāpara-vighātas tu yatra kvāpi na vidyate* | | Haribhadra's *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya* 58 | | As it is brought in the 1986 edition of Haribhadra's *Compendium* edited by Satchidananda Murthy. In Mahendra Kumar Jain's edition with Guṇaratna's commentary (1997) the third *pada* reads *pūrvāpara-parāghāto*.
10. See also V. M. Kulkarni's introduction of this episode (Kulkarni 1990, p. 77).
11. *taha vivarīya-payatthaṃ kaīhi rāmāyaṇaṃ raïyaṃ* | | *aliyaṃ pi savvam eyaṃ uvavatti-viruddha-paccaya-guṇehiṃ* | | Vimalasūri's *Paümacariyam* 2.116cd-7ab | |.
12. *aliyaṃ ti savvam eyaṃ bhaṇanti jaṃ kukaïṇo mūḍhā* | | *na ya pīḍha-bandha-rahiyaṃ kahijjamāṇaṃ pi dei bhāvatthaṃ* | *patthiva hīṇaṃ ca puṇo vayaṇam iṇaṃ chinna-mūlaṃ ca* | | Vimalasūri's *Paümacariyam* 3.15cd-6 | |.
13. De Clercq and Vekemans (forthcoming) note that while the dialogical setting of King Śreṇika and Indrabhūti Gautama is commonly used as the framework for such narratives, in some Jaina *purāṇa*s Śreṇika merely wishes to hear these stories, without explicitly doubting them (p. 5).
14. There is not a single definitive Jaina version of these stories and the plots of some retellings written by Jaina authors are much closer to their Brahminical counterparts than to other Jaina retellings. On the Jaina Rāmāyaṇas, see Clines (2022); De Clercq (2005); Kulkarni (1990); Chandra (1970); Narasimhachar (1939). On the Jaina Mahābhāratas, see De Clercq (2008); De Clercq and Winant (2021) (for the Śreṇika episode, pp. 227–29); Sumitra Bai and Zydenbos (1991). For a typology of Jaina purāṇas, see Cort (1993).
15. On the question of Amitagati's familiarity with the two known preceding *Investigation*s (Hariṣeṇa's and Jayarāma's), see Upadhye (1942, pp. 600–3). For the broader context of the *Investigation* and its multiple iterations, see De Jonckheere (2019, 2020).
16. I borrow this concept from Deven Patel (2014) in his discussion about vernacular translations of the *Naiṣadhīya* (pp. 175–201).

[17] Ian Watt (1957) makes this argument in the context of the eighteenth-century English novel. Erich Auerbach (2003) traces the novel's association with the rise of the bourgeoisie, later, in what he sees as the emergence of modern realism in nineteenth century France, with Stendhal, Balzac, and Flaubert (pp. 454–92). For an excellent discussion on the democratic background of the novel, see Ruttenburg (2014).

[18] David Shulman (2012) provides an excellent example of the possibilities of such non-universalistic approach to what is real. Realism, the boundaries of the real, and its literary representation also serve a site in conversations of the premodern Indian "historical consciousness" and "traditional" forms of historical writing. The contestation of these issues by proponents from different sides is complicated on the account that "history employs the narrative techniques of literature, and [. . .] many forms of literature strive after realism and truthfulness" (O'Hanlon 2014, p. 108). E.g., see Cox (2013) or Narayana Rao et al.'s (2001) *Textures of Time* and their following exchange with Sheldon Pollock (Pollock 2007, pp. 373ff; Narayana Rao et al. 2007, pp. 417–18).

[19] Sarah E. Worth's "discursive reasoning" can be compared with the principles of Walter R. Fisher's "rational world paradigm," discussed earlier.

[20] *vibudhya gṛhṇītha budhā mamoditaṃ śubhāśubhaṃ jñāsyatha niścitaṃ svayam* | *nivedyamānaṃ śataśo 'pi jānate sphuṭaṃ rasaṃ nānubhavanti taṃ janāḥ* | | *AmDhP* 21.15 | |.

[21] *viniṣṭhuraṃ vākyam idaṃ mamoditaṃ sukhaṃ paraṃ dāsyati nūnam agrataḥ* | *niṣevyamānaṃ kaṭukaṃ kim auṣadhaṃ sukhaṃ vipāke na dadāti kāṅkṣitam* | | *AmDhP* 21.14 | |.

[22] *sa prāha bhāratādyeṣu purāṇeṣu sahasraśaḥ* | *śrūyante na prapadyante bhavanto 'vidhayaḥ param* | | *AmDhP* 4.3 | | 'vidhayaḥ conj.] vidhiyaḥ.

[23] One might debate whether any of these things are really strange and irregular. The contradictions pointed out here are based on social codes with certain presuppositions about labor, wealth, and appearance that the authors of the *Investigation* accept, but others might not. Amitagati briefly touches upon this point by referring to such contradictions as *avidhi*, suggesting that they negate certain codes or rules of behavior (*vidhi*).

[24] *lacchi-vacchu maṇi-mauḍaṅkiya-siru* | *jaṇa-dalidda-damaṇu paya-ṇaya-suru* | | *hari savvaṇhu savva-jaṇa-saṃṭhiu* | *atthi ahava ṇa purāṇahi diṭṭhaü* | | *tā sira-sihara-caḍāviya-hatthem̐* | *bhaṇiu dieṇa atthi paramatthem̐* | | *ṇisuṇeviṇu maṇaveem̐ bhaṇiu jaï erisu hari vuttaü* | *to ṇanda-goṭṭhi govālu huu kiṃ pahu-guṇahi viuttaü* | | *paṃḍu-suem̐ pahiu ṇiya-sāmi-hiu dūu hūu* | *dujjohaṇa-pāsem̐ kaya-mahiyāsem̐ kīsa gaü* | | *vāvaṇa-rūveṇaṃ kaya-kavaḍeṇaṃ vali vasuha* | *patthiu sura-pahuṇā kiṃ daṇu-riuṇā diṇṇa-suha* | | *HaDhP* 3.20.8-21.2 | | vacchu MSS. 2, 3] vatthu; jaṇa conj.] jaṇu; jaṇa MSS. 3, 4] juya; dūu MSS. 2, 3] ḍūu; pāsem̐ MSS. 3, 4] pāsaṃ; yāsem̐ MS. 4] pāsaṃ; vāvaṇarūveṇaṃ MS. 4] ṇaṃ vāmaṇarūveṇaṃ; vasuha conj.] vasu haṃ; sura MSS. 2, 3, 4] sara; diṇṇasuha MS. 2] diṇṇasuhaṃ.

[25] *ihāsti puṇḍarīkākṣo devo bhuvana-viśrutaḥ* | *sṛṣṭi-sthiti-vināśānāṃ jagataḥ kāraṇaṃ param* | | *yasya prasādato lokā labhante padam avyayam* | *vyomeva vyāpako nityo nirmalo yo 'kṣayaḥ sadā* | | *dhanuḥ-śaṅkha-gadā-cakra-bhūṣitā yasya pāṇayaḥ* | *triloka-sadanādhāra-stambhāḥ śatru-davānalāḥ* | | *dānavā yena hanyante lokopadrava-kāriṇaḥ* | *duṣṭā divā-kareṇeva tarasā timirotkarāḥ* | | *lokānanda-karī pūjyā śrīḥ sthitā yasya vigrahe* | *tāpa-vicchedikā hṛdyā jyotsneva hima-rociṣaḥ* | | *kaustubho bhāsate yasya śarīre viśada-prabhaḥ* | *lakṣmyeva sthāpito dīpo mandire sundare nije* | | *kiṃ dvijā bhavatāṃ tatra pratītir vidyate na vā* | *sarva-devādhike deve vaikuṇṭhe paramātmani* | | *AmDhP* 10.11-7 | |.

[26] *bhaṭṭā yadīdṛśo viṣṇus tadā kiṃ nanda-gokule* | *trāyamāṇaḥ sthito dhenūr gopālī-kṛta-vigrahaḥ* | | *śikhi-piccha-dharo baddha-jūṭaḥ kuṭaja-mālayā* | *gopālaiḥ saha kurvāṇo rāsa-krīḍāṃ pade pade* | | *duryodhanasya sāmīpyaṃ kiṃ gato dūta-karmaṇā* | *preṣitaḥ pāṇḍu-putreṇa padātir iva vegataḥ* | | *hasty-aśva-ratha-pādāti-saṃkule samarājire* | *kiṃ rathaṃ prerayāmāsa bhūtvā pārthasya sārathiḥ* | | *kiṃ balir yācitaḥ pṛthvīṃ kṛtvā vāmana-rūpatām* | *uccārya vacanaṃ dīnaṃ daridreṇeva durvacaḥ* | | *vahamāno 'khilaṃ lokaṃ kiṃ sītā-virahāgninā* | *kāmīva sarvatas taptaḥ sarvajño vyāpakaḥ sthiraḥ* | | *evamādīni karmāṇi kiṃ yujyante mahātmanaḥ* | *yogi-gamyasya devasya vandyasya jagatāṃ guroḥ* | | *AmDhP* 10.20-6 | |.

[27] *pūrvāpara-viruddhāni purāṇāny akhilāni vaḥ* | *śraddhīyante kathaṃ viprā nyāya-niṣṭhair manīṣibhiḥ* | | *AmDhP* 13.87 | |.

[28] *yadīdṛśāni kṛtyāni virāgaḥ kurute hariḥ* | *tadā nau niḥsva-sutayoḥ ko doṣo dāru-vikraye* | | *atha tasyedṛśī krīḍā murāreḥ parameṣṭhinaḥ* | *tadā sattvānurūpeṇa sāsmākaṃ kena vāryate* | | *AmDhP* 10.27-8 | |.

[29] Anil Mundra (2022) suggests that certain translations of *pratīti* into English (e.g., "faith" or "trust"), if incautiously used in modern scholarship, may reinforce the "racist trope" that Indian philosophy "is not concerned with argument" but with unwarranted beliefs. However, he shows that a careful reading of Haribhadra's *Victory Flag of Non-One-Sidedness* (*Anekāntajayapatākā*) reveals the contrary, that *pratīti* in fact refers to the "widely-shared immediate apprehension that underlies the epistemological warrants employed by systematic philosophers" (pp. 159ff). This means, at least for certain thinkers, that *pratīti* "is not simply any old belief but is a logically warranted one" (p. 161).

[30] On the varying degrees of the mimetic force of different types of speech, see Genette (1980, pp. 169–85).

[31] Whereas Anna Aurelia Esposito (2015) particularly discusses Jaina didactic dialogues in the form of sermons, her observations on the dialogue's operation are similarly applicable for other types of literary public dialogues.

[32] My use of "realistic" is qualified by Daud Ali's remarks (Ali 2013), discussed earlier in this essay.

[33] Anna Aurelia Esposito (2020) provides a useful review of Jaina Universal History and the sixty-three illustrious persons.

[34] We should not mistake "real" or "true" with "historical." See Nandy (1995, p. 57ff).

[35] *aha dukkha-nivāraṇi jīvaṇa-kāraṇi tāsu iṇaṃ* | *kammaṃ iya jaṃpahu amha viyappahu kaṭṭham iṇaṃ* | | *taho esā kīlā vajjiya-vīlā jaï bhaṇahu* | *āṇiya-kaṭṭhāṇaṃ tā amhāṇaṃ taha muṇahu* | | *ahavā kammā vihu āṇae so vihu saṃcaraï* | *amhārisu māṇusu kamma-paravvasu kiṃ*

karaï | | *HaDhP* 3.21.3*-5 | | muṇahu MS. 4] muṇahuṃ; kammā MS. 3] kassā; saṃcaraï MSS. 2, 3, 4] saṃcara; kamma-paravvasu B2] kamma-parāvasu. I reconstructed the first stanza (3.21.3*) from the manuscripts, as it was omitted from Bhagchandr Jain's printed edition (1990).

36 These authors allude here to the idea of the *līlā*, the divine play, which became associated predominantly with the devotion of the *avatāra* of Kṛṣṇa, as it manifests in works such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, where he, not unlike our protagonists, "behaves contrary to convention. . .challenge[s] the limits of human expectation, sometimes in a guise that would in normal circumstances be unequal to the task. . . and often in response to the devotee's supplication, to vindicate the faith of those who have eyes to see" (Lipner 2022, p. 307.)

37 In formal terms, the anonymous narrator operates on the *extradiegetic* level, the encounter between the Vidyādharas and the Brahmins takes place in the *intradiegetic* or *diegetic* level, and the biographical story-within-story occurs on the *hypodiegetic* or *metadiegetic* level of the narrative. For a discussion on narrative levels and these formal categories, see Genette (1980, pp. 227–34); Rimmon-Kenan (2002, pp. 87–106).

38 On the types of relationships between the story within a story and the main narrative in the intradiegetic level, see Genette (1980), p. 231ff.

39 *bhramantau dharaṇīm āvāṃ nagarākara-maṇḍitām* | *bhavadīyam idaṃ sthānam āgamāva dvijākulam* | | *AmDhP* 15.87 | | .

40 As the literary theorist Gérard Genette (1980) puts it: "[T]he temporal (and spatial) interval that until then separated the reported action from the narrating act becomes gradually smaller until it is finally reduced to zero: the narrative has reached the *here* and the *now*, the story has overtaken the narrating" (p. 227; emphasis in original).

41 *AmDhP* 14.43-44.

42 *aho loka-purāṇāni viruddhāni parasparam* | *na vicārayate ko 'pi mitra mithyātva-mohitaḥ* | | *AmDhP* 15.3 | | .

43 *bhavatām āgamaḥ satyo na punar vacanaṃ mama* | *pakṣapātaṃ vihāyaikaṃ param atra na kāraṇam* | | *AmDhP* 13.14 | | .

44 *apatyaṃ jāyate strīṇāṃ panasāliṅgane kutaḥ* | *manuṣya-sparśato vallyo na phalanti kadācana* | | *antarvatnī kathaṃ nārī nārī-sparśena jāyate* | *go-saṅgena na gaur dṛṣṭā kvāpi garbhavatī mayā* | | *maṇḍūkī mānuṣaṃ sūte kenedaṃ pratipadyate* | *na śālito mayā dṛṣṭā jāyamānā hi kodravāḥ* | | *śukra-bhakṣaṇa-mātreṇa yady apatyaṃ prajāyate* | *kiṃ kṛtyaṃ dhava-saṅgena tadāpatyāya yoṣitām* | | *AmDhP* 15.4-7 | | .

45 *yady eka-mūrtayaḥ santi brahma-viṣṇu-maheśvarāḥ* | *mithas tathāpi kurvanti śiraś chedādikaṃ katham* | | *ete naṣṭā yato doṣā bhānor iva tamaś-cayāḥ* | *sa svāmī sarva-devānāṃ pāpa-nirdalana-kṣamaḥ* | | *AmDhP* 13.77-8 | | .

46 The decapitation story itself is narrated elsewhere in the *Investigation* (*HaDhP* 4.13-7; *AmDhP* 11.29-59).

47 The *Investigation* enumerates these faults (*HaDhP* 5.17.8cd-10ab; *AmDhP* 13.52-3).

48 *brahmaṇā yaj-jalasyāntar bījaṃ nikṣiptam ātmanaḥ* | *babhūva budbudas tasmād etasmāj jagad-aṇḍakam* | | *tatra dvedhā kṛte jātā loka-traya-vyavasthitiḥ* | *yady evam āgame proktaṃ tadā tat kva sthitaṃ jalam* | | *nimnagā-parvata-kṣoṇī-vṛkṣādy-utpatti-kāraṇam* | *samasta-kāraṇābhāve labhyate kva vihāyasi* | | *ekasyāpi śarīrasya kāraṇaṃ yatra durlabham* | *tri-loka-kāraṇaṃ mūrtaṃ dravyaṃ tatra kva labhyate* | | *kathaṃ vidhīyate sṛṣṭir aśarīreṇa vedhasā* | *vidhānenāśarīreṇa śarīraṃ kriyate katham* | | *AmDhP* 13.79-83 | | .

49 Wendy Doniger (2007) discusses such paradoxes in Hindu creation myths, including this one (p. 97).

50 For classical Indian theories of causality, see Potter (1999, pp. 106–16). See also Matilal (1975); Dasgupta (1951, pp. 319–23).

51 Such a comprehensive account of a Jaina refutation of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika's notion of a creator God is laid out, for instance, by Guṇaratna in his commentary on Haribhadra's *Compendium* (see Van Den Bossche (1998); Dasgupta (1951, pp. 203–6)).

52 *pūrvāpara-viruddhāni purāṇāny akhilāni vaḥ* | | *AmDhP* 13.87ab | | .

53 *śruto deva-viśeṣo yaḥ purāṇārthaś ca yas tvayā* | *na vicāravatāṃ tatra ghaṭate kiñcana sphuṭam* | | *nārāyaṇaś catur-bāhur viriñciś caturānanaḥ* | *tri-netraḥ pārvatī-nāthaḥ kenedaṃ pratipadyate* | | *ekāsyo dvi-bhujo dvy-akṣaḥ sarvo jagati dṛśyate* | *mithyātvākulitair lokair anythā parikalpyate* | | *AmDhP* 13.89-91 | | .

54 Think of authors who created coherent worlds where people are only six-inch tall (Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*) or two dimensional (Edwin Abbott Abbott's *Flatland*).

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