Homer's *Iliad* and the *Meghanādbadha Kābya* of Michael Madhusūdan Datta

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Abstract

The debt owed to Homer's *Iliad* by the *Meghanādbadha Kābya* (1861), Michael Madhusūdan Datta's Bengali epic and masterpiece, has long been recognized but has never been examined with any close or academically sensitive reference to the Greek poem. This study sets out to examine the use of the Homeric epic as a model for the Bengali poem, with particular regard to character correspondences, the figure of the simile and narrative structure. In addition to this close analysis, Datta's response to the *Iliad* will be set in the context of contemporary (and earlier) British receptions of the Homeric poem: the Bengali poet's reading of the Greek epic, far from being idiosyncratic ("colonial"), in fact bears the marks of a close engagement with contemporary British appreciation of the poem.

1. Introduction

Bengali poet and playwright Michael Madhusūdan Datta (1824–73)[1] is one of the central figures of modern Indian literature. His corpus, until recently little studied in the West,[2] deserves our attention for its great literary merit, but perhaps especially because of the poet's sophisticated use of Western literary models including the Graeco-Roman classics.

His *Meghanādbadha Kābya* (*MBK*) was written in Bengali and first published in 1861,[3] though a certain number of his works were composed in English,[4] and the *MBK* has recently been translated by Clinton Seely.[5] This epic, widely acknowledged to be his most important work,[6] draws heavily on

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1 I use the form "Datta" (rather than the alternative "Dutt") following Seely (2004, 3, n. 1).
2 But cf., for example, Clark 1967, Radice 1995, Seely 1982, 1988, 1992, 2004.
3 For a plot summary, see Appendix 1.
4 Cf. Murshid (2003, 222–3).
5 Seely (2004) is the only available English translation of the poem; William Radice's is forthcoming. I adopt the method of transliteration for Bengali citations used by Clark 1967. This has the advantage of retaining the Sanskritic flavour of Datta's classicizing vocabulary. Outside of quotation marks I use the Sanskrit names of Indian characters. The Bengali text of the poem used here is that of Sanyal, as reproduced in Majumdar 2004.
6 Seely (2004, 3), for example, remarks that the beginning of the "modern" period in Indian literature is marked with the date of the *MBK*'s publication (1861).

a variety of Western and Indian models,[7] influences that have since first publication received no little critical attention.[8]

I will argue here that the *MBK*, though it narrates an episode from the Indian *Rāmāyaṇa* and uses Indian characters,[9] in many ways takes as its primary poetic model the *Iliad* of Homer.[10] The approach adopted will be broadly in line with that of Hardwick, who constructs "Reception studies" as the "dynamic interaction" of two cultures, arguing that to study a response to a classical text sheds light both on the receiver and the received.[11] Certainly, various features of Datta's response to the *Iliad* imply that he was alive to that work's subtle thematic and structural patterning. In addition, a study of the *Iliad* as a source of the *MBK* complicates and enriches our appreciation of the Bengali poem.

The approach of this study will conform to another aspect of Hardwick's definition of reception, that it is "a field for the practice and study of contest about values and their relationship to knowledge and power".[12] In addition to the examination of the *direct* relationship between the *MBK* and the *Iliad*, it will be contended that Datta's poem was influenced in its response to the Greek epic by Matthew Arnold's "Homeric" poems, and that the *MBK* is best studied in terms of contemporary British literary discourse.

This contention is significant for our understanding of Datta's role in the politics of Anglo-Bengali literary culture: many suggest comparisons between the *MBK* and works of Datta's literary education (*Paradise Lost*, *Comedia Divina*, *Gerusalemme Liberata*); few compare his literary output with that of his contemporary British counterparts.

First of all, I shall introduce Datta and his cultural context, his competence as a reader of Classical Greek, and his attitude towards the contemporary British literary scene. This will be followed by a treatment (in three parts) of the *MBK*'s debt to the *Iliad*: an overview; a discussion of similes; and a close reading of *MBK* 6, 7 and 9 compared with *Il.* 16–24. Finally it will be argued that Datta's response to the *Iliad*, rich and sophisticated in its own right, is also

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7 The *MBK* is not the only work by Datta to draw heavily on Graeco-Roman texts. For example, his *Bīrāṅganā Kābya* (1862) is modelled on Ovid's *Heroides* using characters from Indian mythology (cf. Dasgupta 1933, 130); the drama *Padmāvatī* (1860) is, in Datta's own words, the "Greek story of the golden apple Indianised" (see Murshid 2004, 121); and the *Hektarabadha* (1871) is an unfinished Bengali prose version of the *Iliad*. Indeed Radice has said of Datta's rich use of the Western classics that "[a] whole book could be written on the subject..." (cf. Radice 1987, 231). For a full list of Datta's literary works, cf. Murshid (2003, 222–3).

8 For contemporary criticism of this kind, cf. Radice (1987, 247–50); also Dasgupta 1933; Clark 1967; Dasgupta 1969; Seely 1982.

9 The episode narrated equates roughly to a passage of the Sanskrit epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, Book 6 (of 7), chapters 68–105. For an introduction to the Sanskrit poem, cf. Brockington 1998, esp. 34–40; to the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition (both classical and vernacular), cf. Richman 1992.

10 There are piecemeal accounts of the *MBK*'s debt to the *Iliad*; cf. esp. Dasgupta 1933 and 1969.

11 Cf. Hardwick (2003, 4). For an introduction to the broader field of reception, cf. Machor 2001.

12 Cf. Hardwick (2003, 11).

influenced by Arnold's "Homeric" poems and bears the hallmarks of a close engagement with contemporary British literary culture.

2. Datta and the *Iliad*

The literary work of Michael Madhusūdan Datta represents a cardinal moment in the history of Anglo-Indian literary culture.[13] His oeuvre is to be approached with an awareness of the radical shifts in Bengali society in the nineteenth century: the "collaboration" with the British of religious reformists such as Rammohan Roy (1774–1833);[14] the shift from a Muslim high culture in the late eighteenth century to a British one by the early nineteenth;[15] and the emergence of the "Young Bengal" movement (embraced by Datta and his teachers) which challenged traditional "Hindu" values and literary tastes.[16]

Datta's own attitude towards traditional Indian aesthetics was complex. He complains in a letter to a friend: "As for the old school, nothing is poetry to them which is not an echo of Sanskrit".[17] And yet when the "old school" warmed to his work his pleasure is clear: "You will be pleased to hear that the Pundits are coming round regarding *Tilottama* [Datta's recently published poem]. . .".[18] Indeed in his *MBK* Datta famously "reverses" the traditional distribution of sympathy attaching to the characters in earlier accounts of the *Rāmāyaṇa* story.[19] Chaudhuri, in his *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, says of Datta: "Ravana was to him another Priam, Ravana's son Meghanad a second Hector, and Ravana's city, which to us was the Citadel of Evil, was to Dutt a second Holy Troy".[20] The Rākṣasas (traditionally the villains of the story) for Datta become the Trojans, thereby complicating the reader's antipathy towards them.[21]

Underlying his complex attitude towards India and her literary tradition is Datta's relationship with, and aspirations towards, British and European high culture. As Radice notes, Datta was the first major Indian poet "to acquire a Western education and to learn Classical European languages".[22] Indeed, that Datta read the *Iliad* in the original seems clear. His excellent knowledge of Greek is confirmed by various sources: he refers in letters to his own reading in the language;[23] Bishop's

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13 Cf. n. 6.
14 Cf. Kaviraj (2003, 531–2).
15 Cf. ibid.
16 Cf. esp. Murshid (2003, 19, 61, 86, 111). For further information on Datta's biography, cf. Murshid 2003, esp. 2–14 (synopsis); on Datta's cultural context, cf. Dharwadker (2003), Kaviraj (2003), and Murshid (2003 15 ff.); on Datta's oeuvre, cf. Murshid (2003, esp. 222–3); on his classicizing works, cf. n. 7 and Dasgupta (1933).
17 Cf. Murshid (2004, 179).
18 Ibid., 153.
19 Precisely how this "reversal" is effected, though it has been felt (and sometimes criticized) since the poem's first publication, has been the subject of much debate (cf. esp Seely 2004, 33–9); for Datta does little substantively to change the traditional story.
20 Cf. Chaudhuri (1951, 191); also Kaviraj (2003, 534). For a table of basic character equivalences between the *MBK* and the *Iliad* see Appendix 2.
21 The *MBK*'s debt to the *Iliad* was noticed by his contemporary readership too; cf. n. 8.
22 Cf. Radice (1987, 231).
23 Cf. Murshid (2004, esp. 121, 129).

College Calcutta, where Datta was first schooled, is known to have taught Greek with great care;[24] and we have the direct testimony of a Mr Street, a missionary at the college, who wrote to Rev. Fagan regarding Datta's scholarship: "He is very intelligent, a good Greek and Latin scholar …".[25] In addition it is known that Manomohan Ghosh, who had failed the Indian Civil Service entrance examinations and wished to retake them, came to Datta for help with his Latin and Greek.[26] Given the very high standard of Greek and Latin expected of candidates for the ICS,[27] Datta's facility in those languages must have been deemed, at least by his friend, to be very high indeed.

While it seems clear that Datta was able to read the *Iliad* in the original, his response to the poem appears to have been mediated by the responses of other poets: in a letter to a friend, for example, he quotes Cowper's translation of *Il*. 1.8–9 comparing it with Milton's *Paradise Lost* ll. 33–4.[28] Indeed it is clear that these British poets were an important part of the filter through which Datta "received" Homer.[29]

However, this essay will contend that the reading of the *Iliad* underlying the *MBK* represents, above all, a markedly *Victorian* (contemporary) response to the Homeric poem. While many have treated Datta's debt to his literary antecedents, few have tried to show how he engaged in the discourse of contemporary British poetry. In particular Datta's *MBK* (1861) echoes features of Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum* (1853) and *Balder Dead* (1855): all of the works are "miniaturizations" of the *Iliad*;[30] and the *MBK* is also, like *Sohrab and Rustum*, an "orientalization" of the Homeric poem. Specific resonances between the works will be noted in the course of this article. It will be argued in the conclusion that the evidence, both internal and external, amounts to proof that the *MBK*'s response to the *Iliad* was mediated by Arnold's "Homeric" poems.

Datta stated that his approach in composing the *MBK* was not to "borrow Greek stories but write, rather try to write, as a Greek would have done".[31] In this same letter he stated that his ambition was to "engraft the exquisite graces of the Greek mythology on our own …".[32] Indeed his response to the *Iliad* is sophisticated and sensitive in its own right. However, this article contends that the *MBK*'s engagement with the contemporary British literary discourse

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24   Ibid., 61.
25   Murshid (2003, 61).
26   Ibid., 172.
27   For the rigour of the ICS entrance examinations and their emphasis on Latin and Greek (entailing the virtual preclusion of successful native Indian candidates), cf. esp. Vasunia 2005.
28   Cf. Murshid (2004, 125).
29   Note, especially, Datta's comment in a letter triangulating himself with Homer and Milton: "Homer is nothing but battles. I have, like Milton, only one…" (cf. Murshid 2004, 131). The *MBK*, like *Paradise Lost*, is composed in blank verse (first adapted for Bengali by Datta himself; cf. Seely 2004, 64).
30   For Victorian reactions to the size of Classical epic, cf. Jenkyns (1980, 36–8; 2002, 232–8).
31   Cf. Murshid (2004, 125).
32   Ibid.

is perhaps the most crucial aspect of its reading of the *Iliad*, for it militates against seeing his work as necessarily "subaltern".[33] As the following study contends, Datta's reading of the *Iliad* was not idiosyncratic and subaltern but British and contemporary.

3. The *MBK* and the *Iliad*

(i) Current state of knowledge

The connection between *MBK* 8 and *Aen.* 6 has been treated in great depth by Clark (1967), but studies of the poem's debt to the *Iliad* have been rather superficial. The main contribution of the two key works treating the *MBK*'s use of the *Iliad* (Dasgupta 1933 and 1969)[34] has been to establish a thoroughgoing set of correspondences between the characters of the Bengali poem and their Iliadic models. This set of correspondences is broadly as follows.[35]

Rāvaṇa, king of the Rākṣasas, is thought to be modelled on Priam. (The Rākṣasas are thus equivalent to the Trojans.)[36] Both are kings of a besieged city (Laṅkā and Troy respectively). Both suffer the loss of a great warrior son, whose obsequies are performed at the end of the poem.[37]

Meghanāda, Rāvaṇa's son, is in turn a Hektor-figure. He is the stalwart of his city's defences, the greatest warrior of Laṅkā. His family life in particular and his character in general are depicted with great sympathy:[38] Meghanāda's farewell to his wife Pramīlā at *MBK* 3.523–34, for example, recalls Hektor's farewell to Andromache at *Il.* 6.369–502.[39] Meghanāda's wife Pramīlā, by extension, corresponds to Andromache.[40]

Rāma, leader of the Rāghavas, is like Agamemnon. (The Rāghavas are thus equivalent to the Akhaians.) He leads the invading army and besieges the city. His mission is to recapture his wife Sītā, which also sets him in line with Menelaos. In particular, Rāma's despondency about the war (he declares from time to time that the Rāghavas should go home; cf. *MBK* 6.47–67 and 8.49–78) recalls Agamemnon's exhortation (insincere, unlike Rāma's) of his army to return home at *Il.* 2.110–41.[41] Aligning Rāma with Agamemnon in this way is an extension of the poet's reversal of the traditional attitude towards

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33   Cf. Dharwadker (2003, 231), who emphasizes the desire of Datta and his fellow Bengali poets to "demonstrate that, in spite of their cultural and political handicaps, they could develop the same degree of verbal facility, technical virtuosity ... and imaginative inventiveness as their more celebrated counterparts in Great Britain".
34   Different scholars. Chaudhuri (1951) also touches briefly on the subject.
35   Cf. Appendix 2 for a tabulated arrangement of these basic character correspondences.
36   For the equivalence of Laṅkā to Troy (as of Rāvaṇa to Priam; Meghanāda to Hektor), cf. n. 20.
37   Cf. Dasgupta (1933, 128).
38   This is a "reversal" of the traditional distribution of sympathy among the characters; cf. n. 19.
39   Cf. Dasgupta (1933, 119–20, 122, 124).
40   Cf. Dasgupta (1969, 85). She is, however, also rather like Vergil's Camilla or Homer's Penthesilea in that she is a female warrior (cf. esp. *MBK* 3.67–159); cf. Dasgupta (1933, 121).
41   For treatment of the *Diapeira* of *Il.* 2, cf. Cook 2003 and Katzung 1960, esp. 48.

the conflict (in which Rāma represents good and Rāvaṇa evil);[42] for the Iliadic Agamemnon is not an especially sympathetic character.[43]

Sītā is equivalent to Helen.[44] She is abducted from her husband Rāma. The war is waged because of her. Indeed at *MBK* 9.185–200 her lament is similar to Helen's at *Il*. 3.399–412: both are vehemently self-censuring.[45]

Lakṣmaṇa, as Rāma's younger brother, is aligned with Menelaos (though it is Rāma whose wife has been abducted). As the Rāghavas' champion who vanquishes the enemy's greatest warrior he is equivalent to Akhilleus;[46] however, his subsequent death at the hands of Meghanāda's father recalls Hektor's revenge killing at the hands of Akhilleus; Vīrabhadra's preservation of Lakṣmaṇa's corpse (*MBK* 7.757–761) likewise recalls Apollo's preservation of Hektor's corpse (cf. esp. *Il*. 24.18–21).[47] Lakṣmaṇa's characterization is, therefore, very complex.

Śiva is Zeus.[48] He, like Zeus, has the greatest power of all the gods.[49] Like Zeus he has a wife (Durgā) whose will is in conflict with his. The most famous correspondence is between Śiva's deception at the hands of his wife on mount Kailāsa (*MBK* 2.265 ff.) and Hera's deception of Zeus at *Il*. 14.197 ff.[50]

Durgā, Śiva's wife, is Hera.[51] She, like Hera, is set against her husband, supporting the Rāghava clan (while her husband favours Rāvaṇa) just as Hera supports the Achaians in contrast to her husband's partiality for the Trojan side. In both cases the side supported by the goddess is ultimately triumphant, though on the back foot for much of the poem.

Māyā is equivalent to both Athena and Iris, while her name (literally Deception/Illusion) recalls that of the Iliadic Ate. She protects Lakṣmaṇa from the enemy's weapons (*MBK* 6.607–610) just as Athena protects Menelaos from the Trojan assault (*Il*. 4.130–133).[52] But she is also rather like Iris; at Śiva's command she sends a dream to Lakṣmaṇa at *MBK* 5.109–125 in much

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42 Cf. n. 19.
43 Cf. Schadewaldt (1943, 37–9, esp. 38, n. 1), Lohmann (1970: 35, 76, 221), and esp. Taplin (1990); *contra* Donlan (1971–72, 109–15).
44 Indeed, in his own commentary to his poem *The Captive Ladie* 1849, Datta calls her the "Indian Helen"; cf. Gupta (1974: 487, note "p"). The poet goes on to say: "Seeta was taken away from the forest where Rama resided during his banishment from his kingdom. The consequence is known". Thereupon he quotes (in Latin) Horace *Odes* 3.3.18–21: "*Ilion, Ilion/fatalis incestusque iudex. . .*". It is significant for our understanding of Datta's project in the *MBK* that he considers the fall of Troy to be, as it were, the consequence of the rape of Sītā: Datta considers Indian and Graeco-Roman mythology as directly analogous.
45 Cf. Dasgupta (1933, 128). Note, of course, that in Sītā's case, unlike Helen's, this self-censure is unfair.
46 Ibid., 124.
47 Ibid., 124.
48 Ibid., 120, 124; Dasgupta (1969, 79–80).
49 For a treatment of the power of Zeus, cf. Lesky (2001, esp. 174–6).
50 Cf. esp. Dasgupta (1969, 79). Datta himself comments on this correspondence in a letter; cf. Murshid (2004, 144).
51 Cf. n. 50.
52 Indeed the simile used to describe the goddess' protection is especially resonant with the Iliadic passage; cf. Dasgupta (1933, 124).

the same way as on Zeus' orders Iris communicates, for example, with Priam at *Il*. 24.143 ff.

The establishing of these correspondences represents the most useful work done to date on the *MBK*'s debt to the *Iliad*. Nobody, however, has yet made a study of the respects in which the *MBK*'s structure and narrative strategies are modelled on those of the *Iliad*. These structural and narrative imitations are highly significant for our understanding of how the *MBK* miniaturizes its Homeric model. Furthermore, as will be seen, the way in which this miniaturization is effected in fact complicates the basic character equivalences outlined above.

The *MBK* takes the *Iliad* as the basic model for the structure of its narrative. For example, the *MBK* is set towards the end of the siege of Laṅkā just as the *Iliad* is set towards the end of the siege of Troy. Datta's choice of episode from the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition,[53] which treated the expedition to Laṅkā and the causes of the war in their entirety, was conditioned by the poet's attempt to accommodate the story-arc of the *Iliad* into his narrative.

A feature of the *MBK* concomitant with the poet's selection of this brief episode in the *Rāmāyaṇa* story is that, like the *Iliad*, the poem has external prolepses of the end of the war. Troy's fall (cf. *Il*. 17.406–7) and Akhilleus' death (cf. *Il*. 22.358–60) are foreshadowed in the *Iliad*;[54] similarly Rāma's success and the fall of Laṅkā (cf. *MBK* 8.784–6) are foreshadowed in the *MBK* (whereas they are narrated in full in the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*).[55]

Also on a microtextual level, the *MBK*'s structural devices seem to be modelled on those of the *Iliad*. For example, many of the books of the *MBK* begin with an indication of time.[56] *MBK* 2.1–2, 3.17 ff., and 8.1–6 all bear indications of nightfall, echoing *Il*. 2.1 ff., 10.1 ff., 24.2 ff.[57] Similarly, books of the *MBK* sometimes begin with an indication of dawn, as at *MBK* 7.1 ff. and 9.1.[58] This recalls, for example, *Il*. 8.1, 11.1 ff., and 19.1 ff.[59]

Furthermore, the story-arc of the *MBK* seems to be modelled (in miniature) on that of the *Iliad*. The *MBK*, organized into nine "*sargas*" (or "cantos"), may be seen to fall into three triads. The first of these begins, as at *Il*. 1.1–7, with a poetic invocation.[60] The march of the Rākṣasas at *MBK* 1.555 ff., having the effect of a catalogue of warriors, is narrated early in the poem just as the Catalogue of Ships occurs at *Il*. 2.484–877.

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53 Cf. n. 9.
54 Cf. de Jong (1987, 81–6) and Alden (2000, 150, n. 81, 175, 178).
55 Cf. *Rāmāyaṇa* 6.110.
56 For the book divisions of the Homeric poems and their Alexandrian date, cf. esp. Taplin (1992, 285–93), Stanley (1993), and Jensen (1999, 5–91).
57 Cf. also *Od*. 20.1 ff. and *Aen*. 5.10–11.
58 Note that Arnold's miniaturizations of the *Iliad* use a similar technique. Both poems use indications of dawn: cf. *Sohrab and Rustum* ll. 1 ff.; *Balder Dead* 1.342, 2.1 ff., and 3.213.
59 Descriptions of dawn are even more frequent at the beginning of books of the *Odyssey*; cf. *Od*. 2.1 ff., 3.1 ff., 5.1 ff., 8.1 ff., 13.18 ff., 16.1 ff., 17.1 ff. (and *Od*. 23 (371–2) with an unusual variation); also *Aen*. 4.6–7, 7.25–6, 11.1 ff.
60 There is a second invocation at *MBK* 4.1–20 similar to the second invocation at *Aen*. 7.37–45.

The end of *MBK* 3 (concluding the poem's first "triad") narrates a delibera-tion among the gods; this is paralleled by the council of the gods held at *Il.* 8.350–488 (occurring at the end of the poem's first third). Furthermore, at *MBK* 4.21 ff., just after the second proem, the defenders of the city exult in their success, echoing the Trojans' confidence at *Il.* 8.542–63.

At the end of the second triad, the sixth book of the poem, is narrated the death of Meghanāda. At the equivalent point in the *Iliad*'s narrative (the six-teenth book) Patroklos is killed by Hektor (cf. *Il.* 16.829–63). This slaying is immediately followed by the revenge killing of Meghnāda's slayer by his father Rāvaṇa. In the *Iliad* this second death is relatively later on (in the twenty-second book) but the sequence is analogous: A kills B and C kills A (where C's love of B motivates his killing of A).[61]

MBK 7 is a compression of *Il.* 18–22: Vīrabhadra reports Meghanāda's death to Rāvaṇa (*MBK* 7.95 ff.) just as Antilokhos reports Patroklos' death to Akhilleus (*Il.* 18.2 ff.); Rāvaṇa musters the troops (*MBK* 7.153 ff.) just as Akhilleus inspires the Akhaians by showing himself to them again (*Il.* 18.215 ff.); a *theomakhia* intercedes in the narrative (*MBK* 7.516 ff.), just as in the *Iliad* (*Il.* 20.54 ff.); and finally the revenge killing is narrated (*MBK* 7.729 ff. and *Il.* 22.249 ff.).

The *MBK* ends with the cremation of Meghanāda (*MBK* 9.209-*fin*) just as the *Iliad* closes with the burial of Hektor (*Il.* 24.718-*fin*). In both cases the funeral follows, and is made possible by, something of a reconciliation between mortal enemies: Rāma and Rāvaṇa (*MBK* 9.103 ff.); and Akhilleus and Priam (*Il.* 24.217 ff.).[62]

(ii) Similes

Before examining the implications of this Iliadic story-arc for our understanding of the *MBK* (especially *MBK* 6, 7 and 9), attention is first turned to a structural device of the *MBK* modelled on the *Iliad*. The simile in the *MBK*, like the book-initial indication of time, is to a large extent based on the Homeric model. The poem's response to the Iliadic simile is highly sophisticated and symptomatic of a broader incorporation of Homeric narrative patterns into the fabric of the Bengali poem.

The relationship of the simile at *MBK* 6.607–10 to *Il.* 4.130–33 was first noted by Dasgupta.[63] The allusion is unmistakable: in both passages a goddess protecting a favoured warrior from missiles is compared with a mother protect-ing her sleeping son from flies/mosquitoes.

The Iliadic simile here alluded to is *sui generis*, the vehicle's subject being found only here and nowhere else in the poem.[64] However, what is just as strik-ing, and perhaps more significant for our understanding of Datta's incorporation

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61 Cf. Janko (1992, 310) for the "traditional incident" whereby "A kills B and C kills A".
62 Cf. Dasgupta (1933, 128). Notice also that *Balder Dead* also ends with a funeral: the third part of three is titled "*3. Funeral*".
63 Cf. Dasgupta (1933, 124). Note that Seely 1988, despite his title ("Homeric similes, Occidental and Oriental..."), treats only Datta's debt to Tasso and Milton, not to Homer.
64 For the thirty other subjects found in only one Iliadic simile, cf. Lee 1964, Edwards (1991, 34, esp. n. 39). For an overview of recent scholarship on the Homeric simile, cf. Buxton 2004.

of Iliadic patterns and structures into his narrative, is the poet's imitation of Iliadic simile types. Datta not only makes vivid allusion to unique Homeric similes, as at *MBK* 6.607–10, but he also models whole kinds of simile on the types found in the *Iliad*.

In the case of the Iliadic simile it has been shown that, in addition to the often striking occurrence of unique subjects like that of the mother and child, the narrator also has a stock of frequently recurring subject types. The most frequently occurring types may be said to treat: lions (forty examples, plus seven of an aggressive beast); birds (twenty-two); fire (nineteen); cattle (eighteen); wind and wave (eighteen); and boars (twelve).[65]

To take, by way of example, the similes treating "lions", "fire", and "wind and wave", it may be seen that Datta has modelled his simile types on the Homeric paradigm.

At *MBK* 7.608–700 the narrator says: *pālāilā satrāse caudike/raghusainya* (*jala yathā jāṅgāla bhāṅgile/kolāhale*)..., "The Rāghava army scattered in panic to the four directions (like water breaking its banks with a crash) ...".[66] This simile puts one in mind, perhaps in particular, of the Iliadic extended simile describing Diomedes' onslaught at *Il*. 5.87–91 in which the hero, sweeping over the plain, is likened to a river bursting its dyke in winter. However, the tenor of the *MBK* simile is the "panic" and "noise" of the scattering warriors, and to this extent it may perhaps be said to recall *Il*. 4.452 ff. where the noise and struggle (l. 456) of the warriors are likened to a raging torrent. This *MBK* simile may be said to take the image of its vehicle (the overflowing river) from one Iliadic simile (*Il*. 5.87–91) and its point of comparison (uproar) from another (*Il*. 4.452–6).

However, it is important to note that the Iliadic similes cited above belong to a broader sub-type (which one might label "overflowing river"); and the simile at *MBK* 7.608–700 also conforms to a comparable sub-type within that poem's simile type "wind and wave". To this extent it is perhaps better to compare not the specific simile at *MBK* 7.609–700 with those at *Il*. 4.452–6 and 5.87–91, but the whole of this subset of similes (*MBK* 2.563–5, 4.169–72, 7.532–5, and 7.608–700) with the whole Iliadic subset (*Il*. 4.452–6, 5.87–91, 5.597–600, 13.136–45, 15.381–9, 17.746–53, 21.281–3). An Iliadic narrative pattern has been imitated, not just an Iliadic passage.[67]

This effect, the incorporation of an Iliadic distribution of similes, is not limited to the simile type referred to as "wind and wave". Another type of Iliadic simile imitated in the *MBK* is that of "fire",[68] in particular the sub-type of "forest fire". Here too we find a range of "forest fire" similes (*MBK* 3.363–6, 3.512–3, 6.392–3, 7.611–2) corresponding to the analogous Iliadic "forest fire" subset (*Il*. 2.455–8, 2.780, 11.155–9, 15.605–6, 20.490–4). Once again, there is

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65 Cf. Lee (1964, 65–73).

66 Translation mine (as throughout).

67 Note that there is a correspondence in another sub-type of the "wind and wave" simile, that drawing on the image of the "wind-stirred wave"; compare *MBK* 1.182–4, 1.555–8, 6.196–8 [metaphor] with *Il*. 2.144–6, 4.422–6, 7.63–6, 9.4–8, 11.304–10, 13.795–801, and 14.16–22.

68 Cf. Lee (1964, 65–73), Edwards (1991, 34).

perhaps no *MBK* example corresponding perfectly to a specific Iliadic model, but in both poems the "forest fire" simile occurs with a similar variety of tenors: a bright gleam (*Il*. 2.458 and *MBK* 3.365); an onward march (*Il*. 2.780 and *MBK* 3.512); the devastating attack of a warrior (*Il*. 15.605–6, 20.490–4 and *MBK* 6.392).

In this case, then, as with the "wind and wave" similes treated above, the subset of "forest fire" similes as found in the *MBK* occurs in a variety of contexts and attaching to different tenors. It is the *Iliad*'s very variety of application and emphasis in its deployment of the similes that Datta has imitated. The poet has not only set up an allusion to his Homeric model, he has incorporated within his poem an Iliadic narrative pattern.

The most frequently occurring simile type found in the *Iliad*, that of the lion or the unidentified beast,[69] also finds an analogue in the *MBK*. Here too it may be seen that Datta imitates the variety of contexts in which the similes are deployed in the *Iliad*, and the aspects of the image that are emphasized.[70]

However, what is perhaps even more significant about the poet's adaptation of this simile type is his "orientalization" of it. Often the image described is a straightforward imitation of the Iliadic type, a lion attacking or being attacked; but there are also many instances in which the narrator "orientalizes" the terms of the Homeric simile. The narrator of the *MBK* often substitutes for the Homeric "lion" a non-Homeric "tiger", a markedly Indian animal. At *MBK* 4.48–51, for example, the narrator compares the guards' abandonment of Sītā with a tigress leaving a dying doe to prowl the forest for more prey. At *MBK* 5.350–1 (an implied simile), the goddess Māẏā addresses Lakṣmaṇa, instructing him: *sahasā, śārdulākrame ākrami rākṣase/nāśa tāre!*, "All of a sudden, leap on the Rākṣasa with the leap of a tiger; destroy him!" The Indian tiger is thus substituted for the familiar Homeric lion in many similes in the *MBK*; the phenomenon may also be observed at *MBK* 5.472–5, 6.295–7, 6.413–5, 6.486–7, 6.704–8, 7.572–3, 8.241–6, 9.231–3.

This substitution of the Indian tiger for the Homeric lion is a markedly "orientalizing" effect.[71] Datta's introduction of the tiger into the Homeric lion simile,

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69 For a treatment of the "lion" simile in the *Iliad*, cf. Lee (1964, 65–73) and Edwards (1991, 34).

70 Nine times, for example, we find a lion simile treating a "lion pouncing on prey" (cf. *MBK* 1.179–82, 2.320–3, 3.439–40, 4.48–51, 4.349–58, 5.350–1, 6.40–1, 7.650–1, 8.241–6, 8.393–6); this corresponds to the "lion pouncing on prey" subset found in the *Iliad* (cf. *Il*. 5.161–4, 5.554–60, 7.255–7, 10.485–8, 11.113–5, 11.172–8, 12.299–308, 13.198–202, 15.586–90 ["beast"], 15.630–40, 16.822–8, 17.61–9, 17.657–67). Nine times the narrator deploys a simile depicting a "lion in a snare" or a "lion struggling with hunters" (cf. *MBK* 2.555–8, 5.70–2, 6.3–7, 6.486–7, 6.611–2, 6.618–20, 6.704–8, 7.121–4, 9.231–3); this corresponds to the Iliadic subset of the same theme (cf. *Il*. 5.136–43, 5.475–6, 11.292–5, 11.545–57, 12.41–52, 16.751–4, 17.108–13, 18.161–4, 20.164–75, 21.573–5). Note that the largest simile type in the *MBK* ("lion") corresponds to the largest simile type in the *Iliad*.

71 It is to be noted that Arnold, in *Sohrab and Rustum* 1853, also orientalizes the terms of some of his "Homeric" similes. Like Datta, Arnold draws more often than not on the Homeric material without orientalizing it; cf. ll. 154–9, 293–8, 302–18, 336–9, 390–7, 398–402, 418, 449–54, 470–4, 474–9, 503–6, 556–75, 615–20, 620–4, 631–9, 842–7. But from time to time, like Datta, he does orientalize the vehicle of

as with his use of the elephant (another markedly Indian animal) in a variety of other similes,[72] figures an aspect of the poet's "orientalization" of his Homeric model.[73]

One further respect in which Datta models his use of the simile on the Iliadic paradigm is his use of "consecutive similes". Whereas the simile of Sanskrit epic is used with such frequency that it has hardly any effect of emphasis,[74] the *Iliad* deploys a group of similes particularly at moments of tension, interest and excitement.[75] In this respect, as in others, the *MBK* follows its Greek rather than its Sanskrit model.

At *MBK* 3.158 ff., for example, the narrative reaches a moment of emotional climax: Pramīlā, the female warrior and wife of hero Meghanāda, has delivered a rousing speech before leading a charge through a blockade in order to see her husband. Hereupon, the narrator captures the excitement of the moment by ornamenting his description with three similes: the first comparing the warrior women with a herd of female elephants (ll. 158–9); the second comparing Pramīlā with a forest fire (ll. 160–1); the third comparing the band's brilliance with a flame at night (ll. 164–6).

This feature of "consecutive similes", paralleled at various junctures in the *MBK*'s narrative,[76] recalls a feature of the *Iliad*'s narrative. In the Homeric epic a series of consecutive similes is reserved for "especially impressive effects".[77] In preface to the Catalogue of Ships, for example, the narrator piles up similes in his description of the massed Akhaian forces: a fire simile (2.455–8); four nature similes (2.459–73); a simile from husbandry (2.474–7); and, finally, Agamemnon (like Pramīlā) is singled out for attention, being compared with the gods and with the leading bull of a herd (2.477–83).

This deployment of consecutive similes, paralleled most strikingly at *Il.* 15.605–36 and 17.725–18.1,[78] is an Iliadic "special effect" deployed at moments of great interest. Here, then, the *MBK*, by using consecutive similes

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the simile; cf. 12–15, 111–6, 160–9, 284–90, 408–17, 672–8, 860–4. For Arnold's "orientalization" of his Homeric model, cf. Jenkyns (1980, esp. 37).

72 Cf. *MBK* 1.146–8, 3.155–6, 3.375–6, 3.489–90, 5.34 (metaphor), 6.513–4, 7.527–9, 7.564–6.

73 One should note that tigers and elephants frequently occur in similes of the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* (cf. Pathak 1968, 205–6). Here, then, as in other respects, Datta synthesizes the Greek and Sanskrit epic traditions (cf. also n. 44).

74 Cf. Pathak (1968, 13): "In the Rāmāyaṇa the figure of simile is used with a remarkable degree of frequency. Almost every eighth or tenth line contains a simile".

75 Cf. Snipes (1988, 208–9) and Richardson (1980, 279) on the scholia's attitude towards the function of the Homeric simile; also Edwards (1991, 38–41, esp. 38, n. 49). For modern exegeses of the function of the Iliadic simile, cf. Coffey (1957, esp. 118), and Buxton (2004).

76 Cf., most strikingly, *MBK* 1.142–63 (four similes); 6.607–20 (four); 7.527–48 (five); and 7.736–47 (four). Note that all of these instances occur at moments of high tension or emotion: (respectively) messenger telling Rāvaṇa of Vīrabāhu's death; slaying of Meghanāda; and (the last two instances) slaying of Lakṣmaṇa.

77 Cf. Edwards (1991, 40).

78 Cf. Edwards (1991: 40, and *ad loc*). However, Moulton (1977, 387, n. 38), observes that about seventy of the roughly 330 similes of the *Iliad* are "successive". Cf. also Edwards (1991, 39).

as a means of vivifying a moment of import, has incorporated within its structure a narrative strategy employed by the narrator of the *Iliad*.[79]

Datta's use of his Homeric model in the development and distribution of similes and simile types reflects a close and sensitive reading of the *Iliad*. His adaptation of the Homeric simile and the manner in which he incorporates it within the structure of his poem represents one of the respects in which the *MBK*'s structure and narrative patterning are indebted to the *Iliad*.

(iii) Slaughter, revenge and reconciliation

Datta's use of the *Iliad* as a model for the structure and narrative patterning of his poem extends beyond an imitation of this kind of basic rhetorical figure. The poet's use of an Iliadic story-arc is also significant for the relationship between the *MBK*'s structure and that of the *Iliad*. Furthermore, the manner in which certain narrative sequences of the *Iliad* map on to the Bengali poem serves to complicate our interpretation of the Iliadic character-equivalences as outlined above, and to influence in turn our interpretation of the text as a whole.

Attention is now turned to three books of the *MBK* with an especially complex relationship to the *Iliad*. *MBK* 6, 7 and 9 may be seen to figure a sequence analogous to that of *Il*. 16–24. This analogy, however, complicates any attempt to assign a straightforward set of correspondences between the Iliadic heroes and those of the *MBK*.[80]

As noted earlier, the death of Meghanāda in *MBK* 6 occurs at the end of the poem's second third, just as Patroklos dies at the end of the *Iliad*'s second third, at *Il*. 16.829–63. The problem raised by this correspondence is, as it were, one of identity: with which Homeric character are we to identify the hero Meghanāda? Chaudhuri felt that, for Datta, Meghanāda was "a second Hector".[81] This opinion is understandable considering Meghanāda's status as principal hero and defender of his city. However, although he is like Hektor in this respect, he is also comparable with Patroklos in others. His death, for example, sets in train a revenge killing, just as Patroklos' death sets in train Hektor's.

Furthermore, there are some finer textual resonances that serve to align Meghanāda with Patroklos. For example, at *MBK* 6.651 ff. Meghanāda makes a dying prophecy to his slayer, Lakṣmaṇa, foreseeing Rāvaṇa's untiring efforts to exact revenge for his death. This dying prophecy brings to mind very specifically the last words of Patroklos to Hektor (*Il*. 16.852–4): fate will soon bring Hektor down at the hands of Akhilleus.[82]

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79 Note that, in *Sohrab and Rustum*, Arnold deploys a series of consecutive similes on five occasions, each time at a moment of high tension or interest: cf. ll. 154–69 (two similes), 284–318 (three), 390–417 (three), 470–9 (two), 615–39 (three).

80 Cf. Appendix 2.

81 Cf. n. 20.

82 It is striking that a similar transformation of the Homeric material is found in Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum*. In Arnold's poem, as in the *MBK*, Patroklos' prophecy of Akhilleus' revenge is transformed into a son's foretelling of his father's vengeance (cf. ll. 580 ff.). This transformation is perhaps the most crucial piece of internal evidence suggesting the *MBK*'s debt to *Sohrab and Rustum*: the transposition of the relationship between comrades to one between father and son is very distinctive. Indeed, the basic principle underlying the Homeric motif of the dying prophecy, picked

Meghanāda's dying prophecy to Lakṣmaṇa is more like that of Patroklos to Hektor than that of Hektor to Akhilleus. At *Il.* 22.356–60 Hektor foretells the death of Akhilleus at the hands of Paris and Apollo, a killing that will take place after the *Iliad*'s narrative. Hektor's prophecy is, then, an "external prolepsis".[83] In the case of the dying prophecies of both Meghanāda and Patroklos what we have is "internal prolepsis": the killing foreseen will occur later in the same narrative. Indeed in both cases the slayer foreseen is a single character (Akhilleus and Rāvaṇa respectively). Hektor, on the other hand, foresees a pair slaying his addressee. Meghanāda, though he is in many ways a Hektor figure, is at the point of death more closely aligned with Patroklos.[84]

MBK 7, following immediately after the slaying of Meghanāda in *MBK* 6, is in turn a compression of *Il.* 18–22. As has been noted, critics have seen Rāvaṇa as analogous to Priam,[85] which in some respects is certainly correct: he is the king of a beleaguered city, the father of a hero slain while protecting his people. However, by extension of Meghanāda's dual status as both a Hektor- and a Patroklos-figure, his father Rāvaṇa is not only a Priam but also an Akhilleus. Indeed, Rāvaṇa's revenge-killing of Lakṣmaṇa in *MBK* 7, following the latter's slaughter of Meghanāda in *MBK* 6, is analogous to Akhilleus' revenge killing of Hektor in *Il.* 22.

The analogy of Rāvaṇa's actions to those of Akhilleus begins with the delivery of the news of Meghanāda's death. The manner in which Rāvaṇa learns of his son's death is more akin to that in which Akhilleus hears of Patroklos' death than to that in which Priam learns of Hektor's. Indeed, Priam does not need to be told of Hektor's slaughter, for he witnesses it first-hand (cf. *Il.* 22.408), and it is made clear that he is a spectator of the whole event (cf. *Il.* 22.25–8 where Priam is the first to see Akhilleus).

Just as at *Il.* 18.2 ff. Antilokhos comes as a messenger to tell Akhilleus of his comrade's death at the hands of Hektor, so too at *MBK* 7.95 ff. Vīrabhadra comes as a messenger to tell Rāvaṇa of his son's death at the hands of Lakṣmaṇa. Whereas Akhilleus is prescient of the bad news (*Il.* 18.4), Rāvaṇa erroneously expects good news (*MBK* 7.108–10). However, in both instances the messenger foresees an act of violence in response to the news: Antilokhos

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up by both Datta and Arnold, is emblematized at l. 656 when Sohrab says: "Truth sits upon the lips of dying men . . .". This principle that dying brings precognition is a common Graeco-Roman idea; for references, cf. Janko (1992) *Il.* 16.852–4.

83 Cf. n. 54.

84 Notice also that the slaying of Meghanāda (aligned here with both Patroklos and Hektor) thus implies the comparison of the two Iliadic slayings at *Il.* 16.829–63 and 22.330–67. This comparison would be endorsed by recent criticism of the *Iliad* which has seen structural and thematic connections between the two episodes; cf. Richardson (1993 *ad Il.* 22.330–67 and 830–63), Fenik (1968, 217–8) and Schadewaldt (1959, 262 and 323). This alignment of Meghanāda with both Hektor and Patroklos may go some way to explaining how Datta "reverses" the reader's sympathy (cf. n. 19). Hektor and Patroklos are two of the most sympathetic characters in the *Iliad*: cf. Janko (1992, 317) for the narrator's "sympathetic" apostrophes to Patroklos, and *Il.* 11.804–12.2, 16.21–45, 19.282–300 for episodes in which Patroklos' sympathetic characteristics are emphasized; *Il.* 6.242–493 and 22.430–515 for intimate portrayals of Hektor's family life, and *Il.* 24.267 ff. for his (unique) kindness to Helen.

85 Cf. n. 20.

fears Akhilleus may cut his own throat (*Il.* 18.34); Vīrabhadra, imagining that the king's anger would be directed towards him, refuses to relate the news before Rāvaṇa grants him *abhaya*, "assurance of safety" (*MBK* 7.111–4).

Priam's first impulse, in response to his son's death, is to go to Akhilleus to supplicate him (*Il.* 22.418). Rāvaṇa's response to the news is much more akin to Akhilleus' than to Priam's. Rāvaṇa's response is not desperate, like Priam's, but angry (cf. *MBK* 7.153 ff.); and he exhorts his men to arm for battle to exact revenge (ll. 153 ff.). This angry response echoes that of Akhilleus who, after great lamentation, states that he has no wish to live unless Hektor is slain by his spear and made to pay for his comrade's death (*Il.* 18.90–3).

Indeed this idea, that the sole purpose of the bereaved is to avenge the death of the slain, is echoed clearly in Rāvaṇa's address to his wife. Here, in conversation before going out to battle to exact revenge for his son's death, he states that they live only to avenge Meghanāda (*MBK* 7.339 ff.).[86]

The parallelism between the revenge narrative of *Il.* 18–22 and that of *MBK* 7 extends right up to the killing itself. Lakṣmaṇa, victim of the revenge killing and therefore analogous here to Hektor, swears at *MBK* 7.247: *maribo, nahe māribo rābaṇe. . .*, "Either I shall die or kill Rāvaṇa. . .". This echoes Hektor's deliberation before facing Akhilleus which he concludes by exhorting himself to test which way the Olympian will give victory (*Il.* 22.129–30). In both cases the hero who will be slain commits himself to mortal combat, conceding that his own death is a possible outcome and an acceptable risk.

The subsequent combat between Rāvaṇa and Lakṣmaṇa is itself reminiscent of that between Akhilleus and Hektor in *Il.* 22. Akhilleus refuses a pact and insists that he will feed Hektor's body to the dogs and birds (*Il.* 22.353). Similarly Rāvaṇa, upon joining with Lakṣmaṇa in fight, addresses his opponent in wrath, saying (*MBK* 7.716–7): *māṃsa tor māṃsāhārī jībe/dibo ebe. . .*, "now I will give your flesh to flesh-eating beasts. . .". Akhilleus taunts his victim, telling him that he was wrong not to fear his wrath and to think he could get away with killing Patroklos (*Il.* 22. 331–3). In the same way, Rāvaṇa makes it clear to Lakṣmaṇa that killing Meghanāda was a mistake and that he will pay for it (*MBK* 7.718 ff.).

Furthermore certain rhetorical devices used to describe the *MBK*'s revenge killing itself recall those used in the Iliadic scene. For example, the slaying of Lakṣmaṇa is described with a series of similes.[87] As Rāvaṇa delivers the lethal blow the narrator ornaments the narrative with four similes (*MBK* 7.736 ff.). This concentration of similes to describe the fall of Lakṣmaṇa echoes the concentration of similes in the description of Hektor's death, not only at the moment of his slaying (at 22.306–21 the narrative culminates in two similes), but also in the narrative building up to it (cf. esp. 22.162–6 and 189–93).

Another device for focusing attention on the event of Lakṣmaṇa's death is the spectatorship of both men and gods, a markedly Iliadic feature.[88] At *MBK* 7.729–30 the narrator comments: *cāhilā biśmaye/deba nara dõhā pāne. . .*, "Gods and men looked at them in wonder. . .". This device echoes the *Iliad*'s narration of Hektor's death. In the *Iliad*'s account of Hektor's death there is a

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86   Cf. also *MBK* 7.384–6.
87   See above for a treatment of Homeric "consecutive similes".
88   On divine spectatorship in the *Iliad*, cf. Griffin (1980 ch. 6, esp. 181 *ad Il.* 22.166–70).

"framing" of the event whereby, both before and after the event, the spectator-ship of both gods and men is described. At *Il.* 22.166 the gods are said to be spectating; and immediately upon Hektor's death the spectatorship of his mother is mentioned (*Il.* 22.407). Like Hektor's downfall in the *Iliad*, Lakṣmaṇa's death sequence in the *MBK* is also accentuated and "framed" by the narrative device of divine and human spectatorship.

The complex relationship between the characters of the *MBK* and their Iliadic counterparts (the overlaying of features of various Iliadic characters in the characterization of a single hero of the *MBK*) continues through to the "reconciliation" that occurs in *MBK* 9.[89]

Various critics have noticed striking parallels here between Rāvaṇa and Priam, notably in his successful call for a truce during the funeral ceremonies for his son Meghanāda.[90] Once again, however, this neat correspondence between Rāvaṇa and Priam is disrupted by further Iliadic allusions. In some respects the *rapprochement* between the two characters for the duration of the funeral is a clear allusion to *Il.* 24. However, the manner in which the reconciliation is effected puts one in mind not so much of Akhilleus and Priam in *Il.* 24 as of the Embassy to Akhilleus in *Il.* 9, aligning Rāvaṇa not with Priam nor with Akhilleus (as in *MBK* 7) but with Agamemnon.

For example, whereas the negotiations between Akhilleus and Priam in *Il.* 24 are conducted in person, the embassy of *Il.* 9 is a negotiation by proxy using third-party representatives, a crucial difference that may to an extent underlie Akhilleus' distinct responses to the two requests: sincerity, dear to Akhilleus (cf. *Il.* 9.312–3), is perhaps more successfully expressed in person.[91] In this respect, Rāvaṇa's overtures to his enemy (cf. *MBK* 9.70 ff.) are more akin to Agamemnon's embassy to Akhilleus than Priam's supplication of him: the king does not go in person, like Priam in *Il.* 24, but sends an embassy (his minister Sāraṇa), like Agamemnon in *Il.* 9.

This allusion to *Il.* 9 is deepened at *MBK* 9.103 ff. Here Sāraṇa, rather than apologizing or conveying Rāvaṇa's apology for the abduction of Sītā (here the "Indian Briseïs" rather than the "Indian Helen")[92] makes excuses for the king that are reminiscent of Agamemnon's failure in *Il.* 9 to "make things up" with Akhilleus "in person" or to make a truly contrite apology.[93]

At *MBK* 9.115–6, Sāraṇa blames Rāvaṇa's folly on the "*māyā*" (deception)[94] of Fate. This claim that Fate is responsible for the offender's actions, rather than

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89 Note that *MBK* 8, charting Rāma's descent to the underworld, has been shown by Clark (1967) to owe much to *Aen.* 6. The book interrupts the sequence under discussion (slaying, revenge and reconciliation) in the same way that the funeral games of Patroklos in *Il.* 23 effects a narrative break between Hektor's death in *Il.* 22 and the "reconciliation" of Akhilleus and Priam in *Il.* 24. Moreover, both *Il.* 23 and *MBK* 8 provide a kind of "closure" that is complementary to the kind provided by the final book (cf. Macleod 1982, 17, 28–32).

90 Cf. n. 62.

91 Cf. Taplin (1990, esp. 71).

92 Cf. n. 44.

93 Cf. n. 91 and Thornton (1984).

94 Note that "Māyā" (here not personified) is the Indian equivalent of the Greek Ate (though in the *MBK* she performs, above all, the role of the Iliadic Athena; cf. Appendix 2).

the offender himself, recalls Agamemnon's speech at *Il.* 9.115 ff. Here Agamemnon claims to have been blinded (ll. 116), a claim elaborated at *Il.* 19.91–2 where, like Rāvaṇa's minister, he claims that it was a divinity who brought about the mistake – namely Ate, the Greek Māẏā.[95] Rāvaṇa's negotiation with Rāma here in *MBK* 9, as with much of the preceding narrative, uses Iliadic resonances to add layers of complexity to the basic character correspondences between the two poems.

This allusion in a single narrative sequence to both *Il.* 9 and *Il.* 24 represents a subtle reading of the Greek epic; for the two Iliadic scenes, as has been suggested by Macleod, are connected by a variety of narrative and thematic devices.[96] Furthermore, this alignment of one Indian character with several Iliadic heroes is part of a broader pattern. As we have seen through the course of this section, Rāvaṇa is not only aligned with Priam,[97] but also (in *MBK* 7) with Akhilleus and to an extent (in *MBK* 9) with Agamemnon; Meghanāda is not only a Hektor figure,[98] but (in *MBK* 6) also recalls Patroklos; Lakṣmaṇa, the aggressor's brother and therefore most naturally equivalent to Menelaos, is also (in *MBK* 6) a Hektor-figure. Or to put it another way, Hektor becomes two characters in the *MBK* – Meghanāda and Lakṣmaṇa; Agamemnon becomes two characters, Rāma and Rāvaṇa (and so forth).

This technique of combining several Iliadic characters into one, and *vice versa*, represents a sophisticated response to the Homeric model. Indeed it reminds one of the *Aeneid*'s use of Iliadic resonances; as Knauer has observed: "... Vergil has sometimes combined several Homeric characters into one ... But the reverse too may occur. One Homeric character is split up into three ...".[99]

4. Conclusion: Datta, Homer and Victorian poetry

Datta's use of his Iliadic model is very sophisticated. The *MBK* represents a highly sensitive reading of the Homeric poem: Iliadic narrative patterns are incorporated into it; its story-arc is closely modelled on the *Iliad*'s; complex allusions serve to conflate several Homeric characters into one (and *vice versa*). Datta's response to the Homeric poem implies a sophisticated appreciation of thematic and structural connections between certain episodes of the *Iliad*[100] and his "Vergilian" use of Homeric characters serves to disrupt the traditional distribution of sympathy accorded to the various Indian heroes in earlier accounts of the *Rāmāyaṇa* story.[101]

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95 Cf. n. 94.
96 Cf. Macleod (1982, 34–5).
97 Cf. n. 20.
98 Cf. n. 39.
99 Cf. Knauer (1990, 394–5) and Gransden (1984). Notice also that in *Sohrab and Rustum* the father is both Hektor and Akhilleus (cf. Jenkyns 1980, 38).
100 Note especially that the slaying of Meghanāda in *MBK* 6 implies a comparison between the slaying of Patroklos in *Il.* 16 and that of Hektor in *Il.* 22 (cf. n. 84 and esp. Richardson 1993 *ad Il.* 22.330–67); and the "reconciliation" between Rāma and Rāvaṇa in *MBK* 9 implies a comparison between the Embassy of *Il.* 9 and the "reconciliation" between Priam and Akhilleus in *Il.* 24 (cf. n. 96).
101 Cf. n. 19.

Furthermore, Datta's response to the *Iliad* is markedly in line with that of the *contemporary* British poet. His compression of the Homeric model is itself a distinctly nineteenth century reaction to the poem; although the *MBK* is still a lengthy work, it is much shorter than the *Iliad* and compresses a narrative arc of twenty-four books into one of nine cantos.[102] In particular it has been suggested throughout the essay that there are striking resemblances between the *MBK* (1861) and Matthew Arnold's *Balder Dead* (1855), and especially *Sohrab and Rustum* (1853). These correspondences are perhaps so striking as to suggest that Arnold's poems influenced the composition of the *MBK*. In any case, the resonance is sufficient to show that both the Bengali and English poets were engaged in certain shared literary discourses: Datta's response to the *Iliad* was informed by contemporary Western attitudes towards the Greek poem.

Both the *MBK* and *Sohrab and Rustum* miniaturize and "orientalize" the *Iliad*, Datta's poem taking an Indian source and Arnold's a Persian.[103] Furthermore it has been shown that, like Arnold's poems, the *MBK* is marked (at important junctures in the narrative) with Iliadic indications of time.[104] Both the *MBK* and *Sohrab and Rustum* sometimes "orientalize" the terms of the Homeric simile.[105] *Sohrab and Rustum*, like the *MBK*, deploys Iliadic consecutive similes.[106] Moreover, and perhaps most strikingly, both the *MBK* and *Sohrab and Rustum* transpose the central Iliadic relationship between comrades (Akhilleus and Patroklos) to one between father and son (Rāvaṇa/Meghanāda and Rustum/Sohrab respectively):[107] this transposition, being such a distinctive alteration of the Homeric model, is a key piece of evidence.

Further internal evidence to be considered is the simile at *MBK* 8.385–6, describing the flitting of ghosts in the underworld: *śuṣka patra uṛi yāẏ̇ yathā/ bahile prabala jhaṛa* ..., "They flee **like dry leaves** when a fierce storm blows".[108] Clark argues: "Datta had read Shelley whose famous simile is echoed here; but in Shelley's Ode it is the leaves that are driven away 'like ghosts'; whereas in Datta it is the ghosts that flee away 'like leaves'".[109] However, an even closer match is found in Arnold's *Balder Dead* (*ll.* 176–7):

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102   Cf. n. 30 and Turner (1989, 18–23). For example, Tennyson's *Ulysses*, 1833 (imitated by Datta in *Song of Ulysses*, 1842) takes the brief episode at *Od.* 11.100–37 and extends it; the poem is a brief response to the monumental epic. A similar effect is seen in *Lotus-Eaters* 1832 and *Oenone* 1832. In *Sohrab and Rustum* 1853 and *Balder Dead* 1855 Arnold reworks his Iliadic model in miniature by retelling a story from an alien tradition in a Homeric manner. For Arnold's attitude towards *translating* Homer, cf. *On Translating Homer*, 1861.

103   For a treatment of Arnold's response to Homer in this poem, cf. Jenkyns (1980, 36–8).

104   Cf. n. 58. Compare *Sohrab and Rustum* ll. 1 ff. and *Balder Dead* 1.342, 2.1 ff., 3.213 with *MBK* 2.1–2, 3.17 ff., 7.1 ff., 8.1–6, 9.1.

105   Cf. n. 71. Compare *Sohrab and Rustum* ll. 12–15, 111–6, 160–9, 284–90, 408–17, 672–8, 860–4 with *MBK* 3.313–5, 5.334–5, 5.448–9, 6.288–95, 6.410–12, 6.481–3, 6.708–12, 8.230–2, 9.238–9.

106   Cf. n. 79. Compare *Sohrab and Rustum* ll. 154–69, 284–318, 390–417, 470–9, 615–39 with *MBK* 1.128–45, 3.150 ff., 6.609–23, 7.540–61, 7.760–70.

107   Cf. n. 82. Note that *Sohrab and Rustum* also conflates Homeric characters; cf. n. 99.

108   Emphasis mine.

109   Clark (1967, 346).

"Then might he not regard the wailful ghosts/Who all will flit, **like eddying leaves**, around . . .".[110] Here (unlike in Shelley's Ode) the tenor and vehicle of the simile are the same way round as in the *MBK*, and so the resonance is even greater.

There is also a certain amount of external evidence that Datta knew Arnold's work. In Madras in 1854 Datta delivered a series of lectures (in English) entitled *The Anglo-Saxon and the Hindu*, the first of which was delivered in June 1854,[111] over six months after the first publication of *Sohrab and Rustum*.[112] In this lecture Datta declares: "I have moralised with Saddi, and seen Roustom shedding tears of agony over his brave but hapless son. . .".[113] It seems quite possible that this is a direct allusion to Arnold's poem, though we should note the difference between Arnold's spelling of "Rustum" and Datta's of "Roustom".[114]

Whether or not this is taken to show Datta's knowledge of Arnold's work, there is further evidence suggesting Datta had been exposed to *Sohrab and Rustum* as early as the summer of 1854. In Madras during the 1850s, Datta edited various English-language periodicals. One of these, the (*Madras*) *Athenaeum*, often published material (typically with a lag of only two months) from important British literary journals, especially *Blackwood's Magazine*.[115] In the edition of March 1854, *Blackwood's Magazine* published an anonymous article treating Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum* in which a great deal of the poem is quoted in full.[116] The article discusses in depth Arnold's use of his Homeric model (cf. esp. p. 311), and so Datta's reading of the article (if we assume he read it) would have drawn his attention specifically to Arnold's response to the *Iliad*.

Whether or not Datta had read *Sohrab and Rustum* and *Balder Dead* by June 1854 (and the evidence presented above suggests that he could have done),[117] it

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110   Emphasis mine.
111   Seely (2004, 27) places these lectures "in 1854 or possibly somewhat before", but I have discovered advertisements for them in the Madras *Athenaeum*: there are four such advertisements in June 1854, occurring in consecutive weeks, and they appear on the 6, 15, 17, and 22 of that month.
112   For the date of first publication, cf. Allott (1986, 541). Note that Datta had acquired and read a copy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (published 1852) by the time of *The Anglo-Saxon and the Hindu* since he quotes it liberally during the lecture (cf. Seely 2004, 27–8); therefore it is not unreasonable to assume that Datta may have read Arnold's work so soon after its first publication.
113   Cf. Gupta (1974, 608).
114   Note, however, that unlike Arnold (cf. Tinker et al. 1957, 493) Datta was able to read Persian (cf. Murshid 2003, 13–14), so this could be a direct reference to Ferdousi's poem in the original language. But it is striking that the "tears of agony" are a central feature of Arnold's poem (cf. esp. ll. 726–7).
115   Datta's longstanding personal admiration for *Blackwood's Magazine* may be inferred from his submission to that publication of one of his own poems in October 1842 (cf. Murshid 2003, 35), and from the obituary of the regular *Blackwood's* contributor Professor Wilson (apparently written by Datta himself) published in the *Athenaeum* 1854, 16 May.
116   Cf. pp. 309–12.
117   Datta does not mention Arnold in his letters (although various other contemporary British poets are discussed). However, there is a lacuna in the collection (edited by Murshid 2004) spanning from 22 November 1849 to 20 December 1855; this represents

is hard to imagine, given his avid reading of contemporary British literature,[118] that the poet would not have been exposed to Arnold's "Homeric" poems by the time he composed the *MBK*.

However, what is perhaps most crucial about the resonances detected between the Homeric readings of Datta and Arnold is the suggestion that the Bengali poet was thoroughly engaged in *contemporary* British literary discourse. Datta is rarely compared with a contemporary British poet. So often critics treat Datta's debt to poets of Europe's literary *past* (Dante, Tasso, Shakespeare, Milton, or Cowper).[119] Of course his work is very heavily indebted to these models. But it is crucial to note that Datta's interest in these poets, like his reading of the *Iliad*, represents a markedly *Victorian* feature of his work. That is to say, British poets (and the reading public) of the Victorian period also had a particular interest in Milton,[120] Shakespeare,[121] Dante,[122] and Cowper.[123] Datta's interest in the West's literary past was a crucial part of his engagement in its literary present.[124]

This omission leads to the inaccurate sense that Datta's literary oeuvre was somehow disconnected, isolated, and separate from contemporary British poetry. This gives the false impression that Datta's poetry is essentially subaltern and, as "colonial" literature, disengaged from the élite discourses of British poetry.

Datta and his Bengali contemporaries, according to Dharwadker's recent article treating their attitude towards contemporary British poets, "dreamed (impossibly) of being acknowledged as artistic equals. . .".[125] In this essay it has been argued that Datta's use of his Homeric model represents a sophisticated, but moreover a strikingly Victorian, response to the *Iliad*. Datta may never have been acknowledged as the "artistic equal" of his British contemporaries, but his reading of Homer was very markedly British and contemporary.

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the period when Datta is most likely to have read Arnold's "Homeric" poems for the first time.

118 For Datta's avid reading of early and contemporary English literature, cf. n. 112 and Murshid (2003, esp. 22–3).

119 Cf. Chaudhuri (1951, 103), Seely (1988), Kaviraj (2003, 534–5); *contra* Dharwadker (2003, esp. 230–2).

120 Cf. especially Tennyson's *Milton, Alcaics*.

121 Cf. Douglas-Fairhurst (2003) and Karlin (2003).

122 Cf. Milbank (1998).

123 This is made clear from his prominence in such Victorian anthologies as Gilfillan (1851) (cf. esp. section 4, "From Cowper to present time"). Cf. also Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Cowper's Grave*.

124 This is fittingly emblematized by Datta's sonnet, *Kabiguru Dante* (*Dante, Master Poet*), composed on Dante's six-hundredth birthday 1865, and sent to King Victor Emmanuel of Italy (cf. Gupta 1974, 188 and Dharwadker 2003, 230). By coincidence, Tennyson also wrote a short poem for "the Florentines" on the same occasion called *To Dante*. Datta probably knew nothing of Tennyson's poem (it was not published until 1880; cf. Ricks 1989 vol. 2, 691), but it is striking that even in this respect Datta treated the West's literary past like a contemporary British poet.

125 Cf. Dharwadker (2003, 231).

Appendix 1: *MBK* plot summary

Book 1: Vīrabāhu has died; Meghanāda is instated as principal defender of Laṅkā.
Book 2: Goddess Durgā procures weaponry for Lakṣmaṇa to slay Meghanāda.
Book 3: Meghanāda reunites with Pramīlā.
Book 4: Sītā relates (in an embedded analepsis) her capture by Rāvaṇa.
Book 5: Preparations are made for battle.
Book 6: Lakṣmaṇa slays Meghanāda.
Book 7: Rāvaṇa slays Lakṣmaṇa.
Book 8: Rāma goes to the underworld to revive Lakṣmaṇa.
Book 9: Lakṣmaṇa is revived and Meghanāda is cremated.

Appendix 2: Basic character correspondences

MBK	Iliad
Rāvaṇa	Priam
Meghanāda	Hektor
Pramīlā	Andromache
Rāma	Agamemnon
Sītā	Helen
Lakṣmaṇa	Menelaos
Śiva	Zeus
Durgā	Hera
Māẏā	Athena
Ratidevī	Aphrodite
Kāmadeva	Hypnos
Vāruṇī	Thetis

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