



How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics

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With this volume, for the first time, we can see how Sima Qian stands not so much *behind* as *within* his text. Our perception of the *Shi ji* as narrative, as literature, as a personal creation, is immeasurably enriched, thanks to Durrant. I enjoyed reading this book more than I have any sinological work in the past few years—partly because it is both sinology and something more. Clearly and persuasively written, in parts deeply moving, it is informed by the author's extensive knowledge of ancient Chinese texts and his mastery of the scholarship on Sima Qian in various languages (see the fifty-three pages of substantive notes, containing many an enlightening excursus and comprising nearly a fourth of the book), as well as by his own humanistic concerns. SUNY Press, whose seemingly scattershot approach to the publication of monographs on China has been responsible for loosing a good many scholarly eyesores into the world, has this time brought us a wonderful gift. I am grateful for it. This is a book that shows what scholarship is at its best. Buy; read; feast.

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How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics. By CALVERT WATKINS. New York: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1995. Pp. xvi + 613. \$65 (cloth).

For some thirty-five years now Calvert Watkins' published work has dealt extensively with philological and linguistic issues arising out of close readings of texts in a wide range of Indo-European languages, particularly those of the Anatolian, Celtic, Italic, and Hellenic subgroups. His *œuvre* has focused increasingly on problems of lexicon (and associated cultural matrices) and poetics, with the evident goal of teasing out inherited Indo-European material in each of these areas. The book under review is at once an impressive summation of what has gone before and a bold step forward into new waters whose sources spring in no small measure from Indic, Iranian, Greek, and Germanic, with major contributions from Anatolian and Celtic. Watkins has a basic idea whose logic is ineluctable. If we accept the results of the comparative method, which tell us that two languages, A and B, are genetically related and therefore spring from a common proto-language O, then recognizing some subset A' of A which represents that part of the lexicon of A implemented in "poetic language" and a corresponding subset B' of B, it must follow that the forms of A' and B' that are found to be cognate presuppose a reconstruction within a language O' that can be said to represent the underlying "poetic proto-language" of A and B. This reconstructed language by

definition possesses a level of sound and a level of meaning. The implementation of sound in poetry results in phonetic figures. At higher levels of structure we find grammatical figures, diction (involving both syntax and lexicon), and formulas, which are for Watkins the vehicle of themes, which are in turn the verbal expression of culture. It should be noted that by "poetic language" Watkins does not mean only poetry as most of us would understand this term in opposition to a broad, undifferentiated category which we call "prose," but includes those instances of "prose" which show in general the same features of lexicon and stylistic *tourneurs* associated with poetry ("rhythmic prose"). Watkins does not limit himself to the reconstruction of merely the lexical items found in the poetic language of cognate traditions, but goes beneath these to reconstruct formulas and themes.

The book is divided into two nearly equal parts. The first, "Aspects of Indo-European Poetics" (pp. 1–291), provides a richly varied potpourri examining poetic structures in Indo-Iranian, Greek, Italic, and Celtic, with side glances at Anatolian. By identifying many aspects of "poetic grammar," Watkins here sets the stage for the central "case study" of his work: the Indo-European dragon-slaying motif (pp. 293–544). From such syntagms as Rigvedic *āhann āhim* (I.32.1, etc.) 'he slew the serpent', Young Avestan (*yō*) *janaŋ aži̯m dahākəm* (Y. 9.8) '(who) slew Aži Dahāka', Hittite ^{MUŠ}*Illuy[(ankan)] kuenta* (KUB 17.5 i 17) 'he slew the serpent', and Greek *épephnen te Gorgóna* (Pindar *Pyth.* 10.46) 'he slew the Gorgon' (which was *ophiódēs* [Pindar *Ol.* 13.63] 'having the form of a snake'), Watkins reconstructs an Indo-European formula (HERO) SLAY (**g^when-*) SERPENT (**og^whi-*). This structure, to which peripheral instrumental arguments (with WEAPON) or (with COMPANION) may be appended, is termed by Watkins a "flexible formula," in that it is susceptible to semantic, grammatical (morphosyntactic) and lexical variation. Thus, in addition to SLAY one finds KILL, SMITE, OVERCOME, BEAT, etc., and the SERPENT (more generally, ADVERSARY) may surface as a WORM, MONSTER, BEAST, HERO₂, or ANTI-HERO, with attendant change in the lexical items represented (e.g., in addition to **g^when-*, both **wedh-* and **terh₂-* are widely represented among verbs; and in addition to **og^whi-*, one finds, inter alia, both **wṛmi-* and **k^wrmi-* for the ADVERSARY). On the level of morphosyntactic variation, WEAPON may be promoted to direct object (RV IV.27.9 *jahí vadhár* 'strike the weapon') or grammatical subject (RV X.96.3–4 *só asya vájro hárito yá āyasáh . . . tudád āhim hárisipró yá āyasáh* 'This is his golden cudgel, which is of bronze . . . The golden-lipped [weapon] of bronze struck the serpent'), the verb may be passivized (AV 2.32.4 *ható rájā kṣmīnām* 'slain is the king of worms'), and the subject and direct object may switch roles (Bacchylides 9.12f *tón . . . péphne . . . drákōn* 'him did the dragon slay'). Moreover, there may be derivational change of the lexical items of the formula (*vṛtra-há* 'slayer of the obstacle', *phónos* 'murder', *hatá-* 'slain', Gmc. [Old Norse] *orms* [ein] *bani*

'the serpent's [single] bane' [*bane* from *g^when-, etc.). Watkins shows how this "basic formula" lies at the foundation of a number of mythological episodes and is carried over from myth into both epic and charm. Perhaps most ingenious is his derivation of the story of Typhoeus, via language contact and bilingualism in the mid-second millennium B.C., from the Anatolian Illuyankaš-myth. The *détail singulier* which Watkins takes as the key lifting this case out of the realm of mere typological similarity and setting it in the framework of transmission across a language boundary is the peculiar lashing motif associated with the binding of Typhoeus prior to his being cast into Tartarus by Zeus. The verbal expression of this act is the verb *himássein* 'to lash', cognate with the Hittite verb *išhai-lišhiya-* 'bind, tie', which appears in the Hittite Illuyankaš-myth, when the serpent was bound with a CORD (*išHIMANTA kaleliet*). In the later Pindaric version of the myth, Typhon is not lashed but is bound (*dédetai*, *Pyth.* 1.27) with Aetna as the binding force (*desmós*, fr. 92). Watkins assumes that in the process of transmission of the tale Hittite *išhimanta kaleliet* (the Hittite instrumental is indifferent as to number) was borrowed into Greek as *dēsen himánti/himāsi* (cf. *Iliad* 21.30 *dēse . . . himāsi*, Pindar *Nem.* 6.35 *himánti dethéis*) in part because at the time of the borrowing the Anatolian form of Hittite *išhiman-* heard by the bilingual transmitter was sufficiently close in both sound and meaning to his version of *himánt-* 'thong' that the latter form was used as a kind of phonetic echo in the Greek retelling. Watkins then produces a scenario in which an original *dēsen himánti/himāsi* splits, via the *figura etymologica*, into *dēsen desmōi/desmoīsi* 'bound with bond(s)' and *himāssen himánti/himāsi* '*corded with cord(s)' > 'lashed with a lash' with the attendant creation of a new and textually restricted denominative verb *himássein* whose meaning was inextricably linked to and obsequiously shifted with that of its base noun. All this is of course speculative but immensely alluring.

In its methodology, in its breadth, Watkins' book can only be termed a *tour de force*. While building on a rich foundation (the references alone take up thirty-two pages, and the breadth of reading thereby evidenced is astounding), he has integrated and extended, nay transformed that which his predecessors have accomplished to such a degree that one can only speak of an entire recreation of the field of Indo-European poetics. To employ a derivative of a root that comes into play in Watkins' discussion, we have here a new *puthmén*, a *fundamentum* which must henceforth serve as the starting point and inspiration for a discipline whose future is now secure.

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Philology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedānta. Edited by WILHELM HALBFASS. Albany: STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS, 1995. Pp. 369, abbreviations and index.

While the voice of Paul Hacker (1913–78) was barely noticed during his lifetime due to his personality and his confrontational interactions with his colleagues and contemporaries, after his death in 1978, first in small circles in Germany and more recently also abroad, some of his ideas found their ways into others' discussions and writings. However, it was frustrating for those who knew the fecundity of his ideas to see the Orientalism debate proceed and other recent developments in comparative religion and cultural studies go on as if Hacker never existed.

But now a first attempt has been made to cross at least the linguistic barrier by publishing in the English language a collection of his articles stretching from 1947 until 1978. According to the interests of the editor, these articles deal with questions of Vedānta in its classical and modern forms. As the editor declares very rightly, this is only a fraction of Hacker's published work. More can be found in his seminal study on the Prahlāda myth—which book should not even rhetorically be characterized as an extension of Willibald Kirfel's (1885–1964) purāṇa studies (p. 7), for it contains a detailed relative chronology of the purāṇas and is, in fact, a history of Hindu religion from the asceticism of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* to the most emotional expressions of bhakti. This, and also his book on auxiliary verbs in Hindi, are still available only in their original German. So much must suffice here to adumbrate the breadth and richness of Hacker's writings in their entirety.

Hacker entered the field of Indology at a crucial moment in its history: after the disturbing experiences of Nazism and the second World War, German Indology emerged in much the same form as it had been in the beginning of the twentieth century, when it celebrated the victory of textual scholarship and boasted of a nearly endless series of masterly publications. In 1946, the philological text-critical method was not impaired by the political situation, although some Indologists had undergone various forms of deprivation, persecution, moral debasement, etc. But when the German universities opened their doors again, Indologists continued the textual studies of earlier times. Names such as Walter Schubring (1881–1969), Ludwig Alsdorf (1904–78), Heinrich Lüders (1869–1943), Paul Thieme (1905–) may stand here for many others.

Paul Hacker, who had a degree in Slavic languages, was different from the other Indologists and his interest in Indian philosophy pointed early in a direction different from the mainstream. His thinking, also, showed, right from his earliest publications, an urge to go to very essential questions, not only of his texts but also of the ideas which had guided Indian culture over centuries and which reverberated even in most recent dis-