SINGING THE BODY OF GOD

The Hymns of Vedāntadeśika
in Their South Indian Tradition

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master of six languages" (*sadbhāṣa parameśvara*), Toṭagamuvē Śrī Rāhula.[67] Like Deśika, Śrī Rāhula adapted secular literary forms of his mother-tongue, Siṅhala, to deal with religious subjects, which included verses in the erotic mode. And in ways analogous to the Śrī Laṅkan master, Deśika's "complex religious profile" can be said to be a "microcosm" of the "total field of religion" in his time.[68] This is precisely what was meant by Deśika's epithet *sarvatantrasvatantra* ("master of all the arts and sciences"), a title recognized and celebrated by those within and those outside the Śrīvaiṣṇava community. An interesting difference between the Buddhist court poet and the Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācārya has to do with their alliances with kings. Whereas Śrī Rāhula, like the Teṉkalai Ācāryas of the fifteenth century and after, developed strong ties with both the secular and religious authorities of his age (he was a member of a royal family), Deśika—if we have read his stories aright—remains an ambivalent, transitional figure. This difference, however, has more to do with the era than with individual sensibility.[69]

While Deśika is but one of a small but significant elite of South Asian philosopher-poets, his work remains a distinctive example of this elite cosmopolitan stream *within Śrīvaiṣṇavism*. Deśika's use of language—his combination of Sanskrit and Prākrit with their competing "cosmopolitan vernacular," Tamil, and skill in a variety of literary and religious genres—sets him apart from his Śrīvaiṣṇava contemporaries, as well as from the earlier Āḻvārs.

In the last verse of the "Garland"—quoted at the very beginning of this chapter and referred to throughout this book—we read about Deśika's fateful meeting near the banks of the Peṇṇai. We hear there of the poet's charge to write praises of Devanāyaka "in his own words," and of how he combined praises in "lovely," "fertile" Tamil with those in "heart-captivating Prākrit" and in "old tongue" Sanskrit. We hear of the genesis of some of the stanzas we have studied in this chapter.

Next, in chapter 5, I will consider an example of Deśika's Sanskrit style by way of his *dhyāna-stotra* modeled after the Tamil poem of the Untouchable saint-poet Tiruppāṇāḻvār. I will focus on a particular type of poetic writing in Tamil and in Sanskrit, the *pādādikeśānubhava* or "limb-by-limb" enjoyment of the "body" of God. This will reveal another facet of Deśika's devotional poetics, from the Sanskrit side, and show more concretely how his poetic voice compares with that of an Āḻvār. Along with an analysis of these poems I will also take a close look at some commentarial texts, both on Deśika and by Deśika himself. I will give a sense of Deśika's *maṇipravāḷa* style by citing passages from his prose commentary on Tiruppāṇ's poem, his only extant full-length commentary on an Āḻvār poem. And so we will build more layers—of genre and of language—into our study of Deśika's poetry and poetics in its South Indian tradition.

Then in Part III of this study (chapters 6 and 7), we will return to the "Elephant Hill" at Kāñcī and to the banks of the river Peṇṇai—to Deśika's Sanskrit *stotras* in praise of Varadarāja and his Sanskrit and Prākrit praises of Lord Devanākaya.

5

A God *from Toe to Crown*

In Love with the Body of Vishnu

niṉṉuruniṉṟum miṉṉuruttōnṟum

The forms of the world appear—
lightning
from your dark body
—Vedāntadeśika
Mummaṇikkōvai, 10

añcaṇamum kāyāvum aṇaiya mēṉi
aṭiyavarkku meyyanē ayintai vāḻum
mañcu enavē aruḷpoḻium vaḷḷalē niṉ
vaṭivaḻuku maṟavātār piṟavātārē

O Lord of Truth to your servants
your lovely body is dark
like *kohl*
like the deep blue *kāyā* blossom.

O munificent king
who showers grace like torrents
from a monsoon cloud
over Serpent Town,

if we do not forget the beauty of your body
we will not be born again!
—Vedāntadeśika
Navamaṇimālai, 6

Introduction: From Praise to Parody to the Language of Visionary Joy

In this chapter I will focus on a distinctive genre of devotional poetry in the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition, with an eye on many of the themes that have so far shaped my discussion of Deśika's Tamil *prabandhams*. I will continue to explore the uses of the erotic to speak about the relationship between the human and divine; the vivid "personality" of God's

miraculous cultic "icon body" (*arcāvatāra*) in the poetic imagination and visions of Deśika and the Āḻvārs; divine beauty, salvation, and surrender; and the many ways a fourteenth-century philosopher, theologian, and poet responded to a body of venerated poems not only by writing commentaries but by writing poems of his own. This chapter will offer another glimpse of Deśika's craft and polyglot poetics by comparing a poem he composed in Sanskrit in praise of Lord Raṅganātha of Śrīraṅgam to an Āḻvār *prabandham* composed in honor of the same form of Vishnu.

I will also explore, as I analyze our primary texts, some striking examples of the interanimation of poetry and commentary (or more broadly put, of philosophy and literary art) in the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition.

Human and Divine Bodies, One Step at a Time

One of the most widespread, though little studied, descriptive devices in Indian literatures is the sequential description of a god or goddess, a hero or heroine, from foot to head or head to foot (*pādādikeśāḥ, āpādacūḍānubhavam* or *nakha-śikha*, literally "toenail to topknot" for Krishna *tribaṅga*). The actual origin of such limb-by-limb descriptions is far from clear. One obvious textual and perhaps cultic source—alluded to by some poets—may well be the Vedic *Puruṣa sūkta* (Ṛg Veda 10. 90), though some of the earliest literary examples come from Pāli descriptions of the body of the Buddha in the *Lakkhaṇasuttāna* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* (c. 3 B.C.E.), inspired in part by ancient conventional accounts of the thirty-two auspicious marks of the "great" person (*mahāpuruṣa*). By the third century C.E., in the Buddhist *stotras* or "hymns" of Mātṛceta, we have fully developed examples of the adaptation of this form of sequential description to the body of the Buddha.[1] By the seventh century, the Chinese pilgrim I-tsing attests to the fact that two of Mātṛceta's stotras, the *Catuḥśataka stotra* and the *Śatapañcaśatika stotra*, were widely chanted throughout "India."[2]

In the Pāli *Therīgāthā* (lyrics with commentaries and attached biographical narratives collected in fifth-century Kāñcīpuram), such descriptions are used ironically to satirize a love poet's erotic descriptions of a human female beloved. The verses of Bhikkhunī Ambapālī, a self-portrait of the nun-heroine from head to foot, are a parody of the erotic love tradition. They juxtapose conventional images of the young girl's hair, "glossy and black as the down of a bee," "a casket of perfumes," her teeth "like the opening buds of the plantain," her throat of "mother-of-pearl" and her arms "shining like twin pillars," with the old woman's body, "wrinkled and wasted" with years. The language of love is turned on its head and used in the service of a meditation on impermanence.[3] The irony is even more savage in the verses attributed to Bhikkhunī Subhā of the Mango Grove, where the young male lover's hyperbolic praise of the beautiful nun's eyes—compared to "gazelles," "enshrined" in her face as in the "calyx of the lotus"—is answered by the nun tearing out her eye in contempt and handing it to the young man.[4] "Here then," she says in disgust, "take your eye!" (*handa te cakkhuṃ harassu*).[5]

Other early examples of this form directed not to human lovers, nuns, or holy men, but at actual temple icons, include Bāṇa's *Caṇḍī Śataka* (c. seventh century C.E.), which contains a detailed foot-to-head description of the loveliness of the goddess Caṇḍī's body, with a distinctive focus on the toenails; and a work Winternitz claims as contemporary with Bāṇa, Mūka's *Pañca Śasti*, a praise in five hundred verses of the charming form of

the goddess Kamākṣī of Kāñcīpuram. Also by the seventh century there are analogous Buddhist and Jain Sanskrit *stotras* that describe in elaborate detail the bodies of Buddha or of the Jinas.[6]

In later centuries limb-by-limb descriptions become widespread in pan-Indian cosmopolitan Sanskrit literature (*kāvya*), as well as in various Prākrits and "cosmopolitan" vernaculars, such as Sri Lankan Buddhist *kāvya* literature in Siṅhala—developed from Sanskrit models—beginning in the thirteenth century. The important thirteenth-century Siṅhala *mahākāvya*, the *Kavsiḷumiṇa*, contains, for instance, an elaborate foot-to-head description of the beauty of queen Prabhāvatī, the wife of the Buddha in his birth as King Kusa.[7] The *Pūjāvaliya*, another thirteenth-century Siṅhala *kāvya*, contains long passages describing, limb by limb, the beautiful bodies of women, along with an emotionally charged description of the beautiful body of the Buddha as seen by his lovesick wife Yaśodharā upon his return to his father's palace.[8] Such Buddhist Siṅhala texts, the exquisite products of a second wave of vernacularzation in Sri Lanka after the twelfth century, are imbued with a rich atmosphere of religious emotion that is deeply indebted to the aesthetic models of Sanskrit erotics.

Such descriptions also play an important role in Āgamic and tantric ritual texts such as the *Pāñcarātra*, where they form the basis of visualizations of a deity from foot to head. They also form part of iconometric texts for *śilpins* (icon makers) shared by Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains from a very early period. According to south Asian art historian Gustav Roth, the iconometric lists drafted by craftsmen in texts such as the sixth-century *Citralakṣaṇa*, begin from the crown of the head and proceed down to the foot, while early Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain religious texts, miming the attitude of the worshiper, move from foot to head.

> Buddha worship started with the veneration of Bodhi trees, which, placed inside a railing, came to be regarded as caityavṛkṣas. They existed long before Buddha images were formed for the purpose of veneration. The worshipper of Bodhi trees naturally started from the base of the sacred tree raising the face with folded hands in devotion. When Buddha images came into being they were treated in the same way. The worship of divine beings generally starts with paying homage to the feet. The list which starts from the top-point of the head is the list drafted by craftsmen who usually start drawing human figures with the head and the upper portions of the body. This is the reason why all the texts dealing with the iconometry of figures begin with the head, as far as they have come to our knowledge.[9]

While this directional distinction will not always hold true in later religious traditions—we have already seen how Deśika at times choses to describe a god from head to foot—it brings up an important issue in any study of such descriptive devices: that is, a history of such descriptions must take into account not only their literary genealogy, but their religious and cultic objectives as well: a theme to which we will return.

Anubhava: *Enjoying the Body of a God in South India*

From the eighth through the fourteenth centuries in South India this trope is used in distinctive ways first by Tamil saint-poets (Āḻvārs), and later by Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas composing in Sanskrit and Tamil, to describe the male bodies of temple images (*vigraha*;

mūrti; *mēṉi*): the various standing, seated, and reclining images of the god Vishnu in a growing network of shrines that dot the landscape of Tamil Nadu. Śrīvaiṣṇava commentators call such foot-to-head or head-to-foot descriptions *anubhavas*: "experiences" or "enjoyments" of the body of the god. Sanskrit and Tamil *anubhavas* in Śrīvaiṣṇava literature are visionary pictures of the deity meant not only as a tool for systematic tantric-style visualizations (*dhyānāni*), but, as devotional visions, they are meant also to inspire emotion, an atmosphere of "divine passion," a direct experience of amorous feeling through a refined erotic language inherited from Sanskrit *kāvya*.

Like the *waṣfs* of the Hebrew *Song of Songs*[10] and dissembling metaphor-rich descriptions of the Beloved in ancient Arabic *qaṣīda*,[11] the Śrīvaiṣṇava *anubhava* is a language of overflowing joy, and one of the most potent vehicles of love-language in the literature. In the rush of images, the concrete object of contemplation, the temple icon, expands before one's eyes. The poets' similes, metaphors, and double entendres serve at times to dissemble the original object of gazing—a jeweled belt, a toe, a thigh, earrings, crown, or navel—this, along with mythic and cultic associations from Purāṇic or Pāñcarātra liturgical texts, create a complex composite image of a vigorously Protean god.[12]

Yet in spite of their lyrical energies and dissembling metaphors, such descriptive texts are decidedly rooted in a "cultic" context. The saint-poet's experience—to use Richard Davis's phrase—his "devotional eye"—is shaped by sanctum icons, by their liturgical service and ritual honor (*pūjā*).[13] Even when Vishnu is seen to change form, to move about like a living being, or to be played with like a doll (as in the charming narrative of the Muslim princess who fell in love with the plundered temple image of Raṅganātha), the poets often simply oscillate in imaginative vision between the immobile standing or reclining stone *mulabera* and the bronze festival images (*utsava mūrtis*) that stand before them in the "literal" space of the temple sanctum or as booty in the palace storerooms of a Delhi Sultan. After all, as we have seen in the poetry of Deśika, Vishnu in this southern Tamil and Sanskrit poetry is the god who "stands" (the verb *nil* is most commonly used in the Tamil verses)—he "abides" (*niṉṟa*) in the temple and its environs, but most vividly "stands" there (*niṉṟa*) right in front of the adoring poet.

Deśika's Eye on the Body

Some of Vedāntadeśika's finest lyrics include *anubhavas* of the most audacious and luxurious sort. As we have already seen with his description of Varadarāja, some of these go from head to foot, presupposing familiarity. We will read more head-to-foot enjoyments of Devanāyaka later in this study. But there is one very special Sanskrit *stotra* that, for good reason, describes a form of Vishnu, Raṅganātha at Śrīraṅgam, from the foot to the head. This is Deśika's *Bhagavaddhyānasopāna*, "The Ladder of Meditation on Bhagavān [The Lord]." Deśika's poem and its *anubhava* of Raṅganātha's body is modeled after one of the most famous of Āḻvār Tamil compositions, the *Amalanātippirāṉ*, "Pure Primordial Lord," by eighth-century Untouchable saint-poet Tiruppāṇāḻvār. This poem seems to have been as important to Deśika as it was to the early Ācāryas who compiled the *Divyaprabandham*, for the Kāñcī Ācārya not only composed his own Sanskrit homage to Tiruppāṉ, but composed a *maṇipravāḷa* commentary on the Tamil poem, called *Munivāhanapōkam*—which might be translated as "The Enjoyment of the Poet Who Carried the Sage on His Back"—the only extant commentary of Deśika on an Āḻvār poem.[14]

Comparing these two poems—one in Tamil by an Āḻvār, one in Sanskrit by Deśika—while we also keep an eye on Deśika's prose commentary—will add more layers to the argument of this book on the hymns of Deśika "in their South Indian tradition." It will reveal another facet of Deśika's connection with the Āḻvārs and creative appropriation of the bhakti poetics of a previous generation. Specifically, it will introduce us to our first Sanskrit poem by Deśika by way of an Āḻvār poem that served as its model.

I will first discuss the remarkable descriptive praise of God's body by the Untouchable Tamil saint, then move on to a treatment of Deśika's Sanskrit "enjoyment" of God. I will also allude as I go along to the insightful and original *maṇipravāḷa* exegeses of these poems by Śrīvaiṣṇava sectarian commentators, including Deśika himself. For in this tradition, as we will see, to comment on a text is not so much to dissect it into minute doctrinal particulars, but rather to *reexperience* it. There are certainly many examples in the tradition where the commentators theologically or allegorically reduce the native richness of a poetic text.[15] But Śrīvaiṣṇava commentary can be, at certain moments, a kind of imaginative participation, a "spiritual enjoyment" (*anubhava*) equal in intensity of relish to the enjoyment of God in the root-text. We will certainly discover many such moments in Deśika's own commentarial relish.

This is a rich field of study. Numerous forms of verbal "iconicity" are found in every genre of Indian literature—Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Christian, and Muslim—from tantric ritual visualization texts, women's wedding songs, songs and lyrics for children (including *piḷḷaitamiḻ*), and even songs to "headless heros"; the versified template-texts of *śilpins*, to the generalized iconic "epiphanies" of the sixteenth-century northern saint-poet Sūr Dās, beautifully studied by Kenneth Bryant and John Stratton Hawley.[16] But in the following south Indian Vaiṣṇava poems verbal icons and "iconicity" reach a veritable apotheosis of expression. Dennis Hudson has produced some remarkable readings of Āḻvār poems that foreground their cultic context, showing how, in almost allegorical detail, they mirror personages and actions in Pāñcarātra rites of initiation or the consecration of kings.[17] While not ignoring the technical vocabulary of such ritual action behind the poems I study in this chapter, my work rather foregrounds, as does this book as a whole, the literary textures of such ritual poetry: the *poetry* of *pūjā*.

I will not only argue that these poems offer us some of the most vivid examples of the dynamic relationship between text and icon in Indian devotional literatures but will address issues of verbal iconicity and "visual poetics" in general, along with saying something about sacred poems in a "cultic context" of *pūjā*. Ultimately, I argue that these poems, in literally bodying forth the god, become themselves, in a peculiarly vivid way, "verbal icons" of icons.[18]

"His Lovely Dark Body Fills My Heart!" A Poet's Ecstasy Before the Icon

kōlamāmaṇi yāramum muttut tāmamum
muṭivillatōr eḻil
nīla mēṉi aiyō niṟai koṇṭatu eṉ neñciṉaiyē

My God! his lovely dark body
of unfading beauty
strung with pearls
and big dazzling gems
fills my heart!
—Tiruppāṇāḻvār
Amalaṇātipiraṇ, 9

There are many versions of Tiruppāṇāḻvār's story, told at different times and places by those with particular doctrinal and social nuances to add.[19] According to South Indian Vaiṣṇava tradition, the oldest account of the life of the Āḻvār is the Sanskrit *Divyasūricaritam* (eleventh–twelfth century C.E.). Two important later *vitae* are included in two different lives of the saints, both titled *Guruparamparāprabhāvam*, written respectively by Ācāryas of the Southern (Teṉkalai) and Northern (Vaṭakalai) subsects of the Śrīvaiṣṇava community around the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. There also exist two other important sources, one from the fifteenth century (the *Āḻvārkaḷ vaibhāvam*) and the other from the sixteenth century (the *Periyatirumuṭiyaṭaivu*).[20] But the popular version I will recount here—important to any discussion of the Lord's icon body—is rather late: it does not appear in these early biographies.[21] Vasudha Narayanan conjectures that this version may not be more than 300 years old—but admits that its centrality in all modern accounts of the saint is highly significant.[22]

The story's basic outline runs as follows: Tiruppāṇāḻvār was born into a caste of Untouchable singers (Pāṇars) in the village of Uṟaiyūr (in the modern district of Trichy) on the southern bank of the Kāvērī river, near the great temple of Śrīraṅkam.[23] He was an extraordinary boy who, as soon as he began to speak, took in his hands a *vīṇā* and composed songs.[24] Being an ecstatic lover of Raṅkanātha, the Lord of Śrīraṅkam,[25] he went every morning to the banks of the Kāvērī river across from the temple to sing the praises of the god on the other shore. Though his Untouchable status denied him access to the temple, even to the holy temple grounds, he was unstinting in his devotions on the river bank, and for eighty years poured out praises for the god in song. One day the senior temple priest, Lokasaraṅgamāmuni, happened to come to the Kāvērī's banks to fetch water for worship.[26] Absorbed in his ecstasies, the Untouchable bard did not see the brahmin approach, nor did he hear the command to move out of the way. Annoyed, the priest threw a stone at the singer, wounding him on the forehead. On his return to the shrine, the priest saw to his great amazement the image of Lord Raṅganātha bleeding from the head, in exactly the same place he had wounded the bard.[27] The prayers of the king and the rituals of his fellow brahmins did not stop the bleeding. Finally, the Lord of Raṅga himself came in a dream to the temple priest, telling the him of the wound he shared with his devotee. He instructed the priest to fetch the bard from the far shore of the Kāvērī, and carry him on his own shoulders over to the temple and into the sanctum sanctorum. Finally the bard saw (*kaṇṭu*) and enjoyed (*anupavittu*) with his bare eyes the body of the god he had been praising his whole life from a distance. And more than saw—one text uses a vivid image, popular in later commentaries, that joins the metaphors of tasting, touching, and seeing: the saint enjoyed God as a child who seeks its mother's breast, and finding it, puts it into its mouth.[28] Then, facing the image, he sang the beauty of the god

one part at a time, humbly beginning with the feet, in what Vedāntadeśika would later call a spontaneous "outpouring of ecstatic enjoyment" (*anubhava parivākamāka*).[29] And thus we have in the ten stanzas of Tiruppāṇāḻvār's *Amalaṇātipiraṇ* ("Pure Primordial Lord") one of the most important descriptions of the beloved god in the Vaiṣṇava Tamil tradition, one that would have a considerable influence on later Śrīvaiṣṇava devotional poetry in both Sanskrit and Tamil.[30] I translate in full the Pāṇar's poem:

Amalaṇātipiraṇ

I
Pure primordial lord,
radiant god who has made me a slave
of slaves; flawless
overlord of angels
who lives in Veṅkaṭam of fragrant groves;
sinless dweller
in righteous heaven—
our dear father,
here in Araṅkam of long high rampart walls:

It seems as if his lovely lotus feet
have come and entered
my eyes!

II
His heart filled with joy
when he spanned the three realms;
his tall thin crown grew taller
and grazed the worlds' rim.

Descendant of Kakut[31]
whose cruel arrows ate night demons
crouched in ambush
that day—

our dear father of Araṅkam of fragrant groves:

Ah! my mind runs
to the red cloth
he wears on his waist!

III
He who reclines on the serpent couch
in Araṅkam
stood in the north on Veṅkaṭam hill
loud with monkeys
so the gods might see him:

The sweet core of my slave's heart
rests on his waist-cloth
the color of twilight—

on the shining navel,
creator of our creator, Brahmā,
above it.

IV
That Lord the color of the sea
who, driving
the demon back,
let fly an arrow that shattered
the ten heads of the king
of Laṅkā—
that city girt
with high square ramparts:

He is the Lord of Araṅkam
where the big peacocks dance
and sweet fat bees
sing.

The waist-band around
his lovely belly
strolls in my mind!

V
Cutting me loose from my burden
of old sins,
he made me his own—
it was after that
he entered me.

I don't know what long terrible penance
I've done
to deserve this:

the chest of the Lord of Araṅkam
with its long garland
of flowers
and lovely goddess

has captured this slave
of God!

VI
He who quelled the grief of Lord Śiva
who wears on his forehead
a new moon's
white sliver

is our Lord who lives in the city of Araṅkam
surrounded by groves,
loud with dark-winged bees:

You see, his throat
that swallowed all things—
this precious earth
and its pedestal of seven peaks,
all of space
and the celestial worlds—

it has saved me,
his slave!

VII
He holds in his hands
the spiral conch
and fiery discus—

his body like a low broad hill—

our father
whose long crown
exudes the fragrance of holy basil—

our elusive lover
seated on the serpent couch
in the jeweled city of Araṅkam:

Ah! my mind is ravished
by his red lips!

VIII
When it came at him
he tore into pieces the demon's massive
body, primal Lord
awesome even to immortals!

I see his face,
the pure Lord of Araṅkam:

his wide open shining eyes—
dark pupils darting
glances, whites
streaked with red,
swelling the edges of the lids—

make a fool of me!

IX
He who swallowed the seven worlds,
the little baby

lying on a leaf of the great Banyan tree
sleeps here

on the serpent couch of Araṅkam—
My God! his lovely dark body
of unfading beauty,
strung with pearls
and big dazzling gems
fills my heart!

X
As the cowherd boy
his mouth ate the sweet butter:

that Lord the color of a rain cloud
entered me,
ravished my heart.

Ruler of all worlds,
jewel of Araṅkam—
these eyes, seeing him,
my nectar,
will never see anything else![32]

And according to the tradition, he never *did* look again on anything other than the Lord of Śrīraṅgam, for while "all intelligent beings looked on," the saint entered bodily into the holy body of the great Perumāḷ, "mercifully purifying those whose minds were muddied by confusion"[33] Thus the poem maps, in an intriguing double movement, both the way the temple image enters and "ravishes the heart" of the bard (*eṉṉuḷḷaṃ kavarntāṉai*, in verse 10), and the way the bard himself enters (both in mind *and* body) the temple image.

"The Thick Nectar of Enjoyment": The Poem and Its Commentators

vyācikhyāsati bhaktyā viraktatoṣāya veṅkaṭeśakaviḥ
mukundavilokanamudita munivāhana sukavisuktimimām

The poet Veṅkaṭeśa,
out of devotion, for the delight of those who have
abandoned the pleasures of this world
desires to comment on this hymn
of the good poet
who was carried piggy-back on the old priest,
filled with joy
at his sight of Mukunda!
—Vedāntadeśika
Invocatory Verse for his *Munivāhanapōkam*

The surface texture of the bard's song is simple; the emphasis is on direct emotion, what Deśika in his fourteenth-century commentary describes as the "thick nectar of ecstatic enjoyment" (*anupava kana rasamāyirukkiṟatu*)—a miraculous, seemingly spontaneous transcription of a unique experience of Vishnu. In Deśika's view, it is set apart from other poetic works (*prapantaṅkaḷ*) that are, in his words, either "too long or too short, that require proper preparation for study, that are abstruse, hard to understand, that give rise to doubt, express the anguish of separation, describe the sending of messengers, preach about ultimate reality or refute rival systems of thought."[34] As the list makes clear, the Untouchable bard's poem is treated as a spontaneous revelation beyond the poetry and poetics of Sanskrit or Tamil. It is a miraculous transcription of an overpowering "experience" (*anupava*; Skt: *anubhava*).[35] The poem would seem to be as much beyond traditional forms of aesthetic analysis as the poet's birth is beyond traditional caste hierarchy in some accounts of his life.[36] Tiruppāṇāḻvār's praise is born, Deśika implies, from no conventional poetic or doctrinal "womb." Later on in his commentary, in a Tamil summary verse, Deśika describes the poem as nothing less than the "essential meaning (*poruḷ*) of the old Veda" in ten stanzas "composed, out of grace, by the Lord of Bards."[37]

But this is not the whole story. At the same time the traditional Śrīvaiṣṇava scholastic commentators—from Periyavāccāṉpiḷḷai in the thirteenth century, Deśika in the fourteenth, Maṇavāḷamāmuṇi in the fifteenth, to Aṇṇaṅkarācārya in the twentieth—see this poem as far more than an "outpouring of spontaneous emotion." Their elaborate theological commentaries in the philosophical prose dialect of *maṇipravāḷa* treat the Untouchable bard's poem as a full-blown *rahasya* or "esoteric treatise." Given this perspective, what in the West one might think of as the elaborate airy structures of doctrine are inseparable from feeling, from revelation's raw magma. The realms of experience and intellection, the connative and cognitive, are held together in one synoptic gaze: they are both equally fundamental and primordial.

Aṇṇaṅkarācārya, following Deśika's commentary closely, draws his readers' attention immediately to the first three letters of the first three stanzas of the poem, the *a*, the *u* and the *m* of the sacred syllable Auṃ, the metaphysical "root" of all things (*mūlamākiya*). For this reason, he claims, the poem is to be interpreted as a *rahasya*.[38] Deśika also claims straightaway that one can read into the poem not only the cryptogram "Auṃ," but references to three secret mantras crucial to later Śrīvaiṣṇava doctrine: the *tirumantra* or "eight-syllable" (*aṣṭākṣara*) mantra; the *dvayamantra*; and the *caramaśloka*.[39] This is why Deśika's commentary on the *Amalaṇātipirāṉ*, as Ramaswamy Ayyangar notes in his English commentary on the poem, is itself a *rahasya*, and not merely a "book of commentary" (*vyākhāyana grantha*).[40]

This is a good example—common in the Indian context—of a commentary taking on the charisma of its source text: the revealer houses its own secrets, itself demanding a spiritual hermeneutics. Other traditions of the esoteric exegesis of this poem include the reading of the first three words of the first three verses—*amalaṇ uvanta manti*, literally "the monkey who was loved by (or who loved) the Lord"—as referring to Hanumān, the famous monkey devotee of Lord Rāma. Here the saint inscribes within the semantic lineaments of his praise the very cipher of devotion. Another reads into the next four verses the word *capātukai*, alluding to Rāma's sandals.[41]

Another common interpretive strategy of the commentators is the allegorization of natural imagery. This may have the effect, particularly for modern Western readers, of removing the poem from a certain existential immediacy. It is, however, yet another example of the union of feeling and doctrine, the natural and moral worlds, in Śrīvaiṣṇava discourse. Both in Aṇṇaṅkarācārya and in Deśika we find the big dancing peacocks and "sweet fat bees" in verse 4 turned respectively into celestial dancers and gods such as Brahmā,[42] while the dark-winged bees in verse 6 are religious teachers (*ācāriyarāka*). Even the loud monkeys do not escape an exuberant, but nonetheless rather moralistic allegorization: they are described in verse 3 as a "motley crew of transmigrators" (*capalarāṇa saṃsārikaḷ*) who, trapped in the wheel of birth and death, leap from life to life after the worthless fruits of their desires (*kṣutrapala kāmikaḷ*) as restless monkeys leap from branch to branch.[43] In the same verse we find the two commentators training their learned passion on the Lord's waistcloth, "like the color of twilight" (*antipōlniṟam*). The Tamil word *anti*, like the Sanskrit *saṃdhyā*, indicates a "meeting of lights," which can be interpreted to be either dawn or evening, the ruddy glow of sunrise or sunset (*cewvāṇam*).[44] It usually denotes evening twilight, but both Deśika and Aṇṇaṅkarācārya exploit the ambiguity of the word to drive home a theological point. Deśika claims, and the modern Ācārya commentator follows him closely, that the word means both morning and evening "twilight." As the tawny hue of the cool evening twilight (*paścimasamdhyā*), it "extinguishes the burning afflictions of the Lord's devotees;" and as the red glow of dawn (*pūrvasaṃdhyā*), it heralds the sunrise of "ultimate knowledge that utterly destroys the darkness of [their] ignorance"[45] This lively hair-splitting on the meaning of the color of the Lord's waist-cloth finally leads us to the poem's center of gravity, something that brings out a lyrical energy in poet and commentator alike: God's beautiful body.

An Anubhava *of the Lord*

In declaration after declaration, the poet expresses his wonder at the harrowing beauty of the deity's body: "It seems as if his lovely lotus feet have come and entered my eyes!" (verse 1); "Ah! my mind runs to the red cloth he wears on his waist!" (verse 2); "The chest of the Lord of Araṅkam, with its long garland of flowers and lovely goddess, has captured this slave of God!" (verse 5); "His wide open shining eyes, dark pupils darting glances, whites streaked with red, swelling the edges of the lids—make a fool of me!" (verse 8). The splendors of each and every part are enjoyed in ascending order—as the Sanskrit invocatory verse or *taṇiyaṇ* to the commentary tells us—"from foot to head" (*āpādacūḍamanubhūya*):

> Let us meditate with firm resolve on the singer who rode
> piggy-back on the old priest,
> whose heart's core was filled with deep delight
> at the sight of Hari
> reclining in the middle of the Kāvērī's twin streams—
>
> and who,
> after enjoying the Lord from his feet to his head,
> vowed that his eyes would never again
> see anything else![46]

As Deśika says in his gloss on verse 9, one is suffused with a glorious splendor (*śōpai*; Skt: *śobhā*) when one "unites with the splendors of each and every limb" (*carvāvayavaśōpaikaḷ*) of the Lord. And these splendors do not only extend in all directions, permeating the space around the poet, but enter into the depths of his heart, itself flooded with the glorious splendors of the Lord's every limb.[47]

The terms used here by both the poet and his scholastic commentators for such an ecstatic, limb-by-limb seeing of God's body are all cognates of the Sanskrit word *anubhava*: "experience," "perception," and, in Śrīvaiṣṇava theology, "enjoyment," a kind of spiritual delectation. Aṇṇaṅkarācārya puts it succinctly: this poem is a *pādādikeśa anubhava*, an "enjoyment of God, one limb at a time, from the foot to the head."[48] As K. K. A. Venkatachari has observed in his study of Śrīvaiṣṇava *maṇipravāḷa* prose style, this same term is used for the act of commentary itself. In this tradition, to comment on a text is not so much to strip away its aesthetic skin for the sake of a philosophical or esoteric core—though at times this seems to be the case. Ideally, to Śrīvaiṣṇavas, the goal of commentary is a kind of "spiritual enjoyment" that matches the root-text's more direct "enjoyment" of God.[49] And we find the most striking examples of this "imaginative participation" of the commentator in the object of his commentary, of his aesthetic and religious "relish" of the primary text, in the treatment of the beauty of God's temple body.

The Icon's Ritual Body and the Language of Love

The poets and commentators alike rarely use the usual technical terms to describe temple images (*mūla; pratibimba; vigraha; arcāvatāra; mūrti*), but rather those terms which evoke the real presence of *a body*—such as Sanskrit *tanu* or *vapus*; Tamil *uru* (Skt. *rūpa*) or *vaṭivu*, "form/body." Vishnu's beautiful body seizes the heart of this Tamil devotional poet like a beloved seizes the heart of his lover, inspiring in him a rich "language of joy." Yet this is not an encounter entirely lost in visionary devotional space; neither is it one that merely serves in the production of an aesthetic ideal, the perfect poem of praise, a "verbal icon" in the purely literary sense.[50] We are also dealing with a cultic context of temple and ritual.

The body of God as temple icon dominates as much the imagery of the commentators as it does that of the poet. Aṇṇaṅkarācārya, for instance, glosses one of the four Sanskrit synonyms of the first verse, *vimalaṇ* ("faultless, pure"), by a phrase that alludes to the "lovely tawny hue" (*ciṟantapukarai*) of the golden festival image (*utsava mūrti*) of Raṅganātha that stands in front of the god's dark stone image in the temple sanctum, along with those of his two wives.[51] It is these icons that, after being lavishly ornamented, are paraded in the streets in royal palanquins for all to see on festival days. In his prose commentary, the modern Ācārya speaks of *vimalaṇ* as referring to the poet's "enjoyment of a certain extraordinary splendor (*tējassai*; Skt: *tejas*) produced by our Lord's holy body" (*tirumēṉiyiṟpiṟanta*).[52]

But luminosity is not the only attribute of this image/body. Aṇṇaṅkarācārya also uses the image of Raṅganātha as dark as the "pupil of an eye."[53] One of the most common words used by all the Āḻvārs to describe the temple image is *mēṉi*, meaning "beautiful or perfect body." The term *mēṉi* evokes images of concentrated energy, alluring beauty, awe, fecundity (it can also mean "full crop"), and mystery; it gives a sense of both darkness and effulgence. Often poets use an adjective denoting darkness or blue-

blackness, as in Tiruppāṇāḻvār's *nīla mēṉi* in verse 9, which inspires in the mind of the reader-listener an image of the deep blue of monsoon clouds or of the sea, the season of lovemaking, and the blue-black, *kasturi*-smeared immovable stone icon (the *mūlabera*) in the sanctum, shiny and wet from lustrations.[54] Deśika glosses verse 4, where the Lord is described as being the "color of the sea" (*ōtavaṇṇaṉ*), with an inspired allusion to the *mūla* icon in the temple sanctum: "He has an auspicious holy body (*tirumēṉi*), glossy blue-black like the sea, that can utterly destroy the burning heat of sins in those who see it!"[55] *Tirumēṉi*, "auspicious/divine beautiful body" has a technical meaning: it is a conventional Tamil phrase meaning "holy image," commonly used from a very early period to refer to Hindu as well as Jain icons.[56] The poet sees both the visionary and the ritual "material" images—these multiple forms of Vishnu—as he stands before the "stander" in the shrine.

Which brings us to another dimension of this experience. As in the Hebrew *Song of Songs*, God's beloved icon-body is continuous with the landscape in which it is placed—in this case not Mount Gilead or Hebron, the rich fragrant paradise gardens or fertile fields, but the shrine and its environs.[57] In the words of the commentator, the poet simply "exults, seeing before his very eyes Raṅganātha who sleeps in the holy city of Śrīraṅgam, [his feet] gently massaged by the waves of the golden Kāvērī."[58] In a gloss on "the color of a rain cloud" (*koṇṭal vaṇṇaṇai*) in verse 10, Deśika conjures one of his most vivid word-pictures of a temple landscape transfigured by the material presence of God: "He has an auspicious holy body that soothes the weariness of those who see it, like a black cloud come to rest in the very middle of the Kāvērī, having drawn into itself all the waters of the sea."[59]

The icon-body, in the poet's "devotional eye," is a living image, an animated body—something material, standing "out there."[60] It is a divine body whose visual beauty has salvific power. But there is more. This god's body is also in the heart.

Manifestations of the Image

Gérard Colas has observed, in a perceptive article on the devotee and the priest in South Indian image worship, that the inner image in the heart and the exterior image in the temple define a common "imaginal space."[61] Colas cites as one example among many in the early Āḻvārs of such "mental devotion" a passage from Pēyāḻvār in which the saint-poet describes Krishna as "the young cowherd [who] has taken as his abode the minds of those who have withdrawn into the lotus with fine petals."[62] This mental language of yoga emphasizes the *unity* of devotee and deity, in that the latter is the "indweller" (*antaryāmī*) of the former. We add another layer to the icon's charged field of meanings.

The temple image, as Colas notes, is the point of intersection of several perspectives. There is the temple priest's notion of an inert statue conventionally fashioned by artisans (*śilpins*) that awaits a consecration ritual that will bring it to life, and the tantric idea of an "external appearance of an interior image that is conjured and controlled by yoga."[63] On the other, more "realist" spectrum, the image can be seen either as the concrete, living object of "violent and divinatory possession" in an atmosphere of hierarchy and difference, or as a kind of "sacred puppet" (*poupée sacrée*) suffused with the real powers of the deity, a deity that allows himself to be manipulated by priests as if it were a little character on the sacred "ritual stage" of the temple shrine—bathed, dressed,

talked to, sung to, put to sleep—to the delight of the audience-devotees, in an intricate miming of everyday details. One has the general image here of the momentary divinization of the shadow puppets in Balinese ritual theater. This latter perspective, Colas observes, leads us finally to the "more general problematic of the relation between play and the sacred."[64]

Vishnu as Sacred Puppet

The notion of the *arcā* as a "sacred puppet" is certainly one way of understanding the vivid presence of Vishnu to Tiruppāṇ. Colas alludes to some examples of ritual "theater" and sacred "marionettes" in the southern regions of Andhra and in Karnataka, and notes an interesting example of the puppeteer-priest in a suburb of Madras, pulling the threads of his holy dolls as the winds of God's spirit move him. This is indeed, as Colas remarks, "a modern (though hardly scriptural)" example of the South Indian Vaiṣṇava tendency to "represent the divine as alive as possible."[65]

Perhaps most telling is Colas's example of a story in the medieval "Chronicles" of Śrīraṅgam temple (*Kōil Oḻuku*) that I discussed in chapter. 2. This is the story of the daughter of the Muslim king of Delhi who fell in love with the bronze festival image (*utsava mūrti*) of Raṅganātha taken by her father in the sack of Śrīraṅgam. The girl took the image into her bedroom to play with as if it were a doll and was devastated to the point of suicide when her playmate was taken away.[66]

Vasudha Narayanan tells a similar story from another Śrīvaiṣṇava source about the *utsava mūrti* at Melkote, known affectionately as the "Precious Son" (*celvap piḷḷai*). In this version, the philosopher Rāmānuja goes in search of the missing image and, in a dream, finds out from the Lord himself that his festival image is in Delhi, "delighting in his sport" in the house of the Turkish king. The morning after, Rāmānuja goes immediately to Delhi and pleads with the Muslim king to return the image to Melkote. The king, granting the philosopher's request, tells Rāmānuja to search for it in the lockers that hold his plunder. But to the devotee's great disappointment, the image is not among the others locked away in the king's "war chests." He falls into a fitful, exhausted sleep where, once again, the Lord comes to him in a vision and tells him that he is playing in the inner apartments of the king's young daughter. And it is there, in the daughter's room, that he finally finds the Lord, who, upon seeing his devotee, "with all his golden bells and ornaments tinkling," jumps into his lap in front of everyone. Rāmānuja ecstatically embraces the image come to life, addressing it as "my precious son." According to oral tradition, as Narayanan informs us, the Muslim princess (Tuluka or "Bibi" Nācciār), "unable to bear separation from Rāmapriya, followed the Lord to Tirunārāyaṇapuram where she is still honored in the temple ritual." And because this lover of God is from the north, "she is served wheat bread (*rōtti*; *chappāti*) every day instead of rice, which is the customary diet in South India."[67]

From the Doll to the Divine Lover

This doll imagery emphasizes, in a charming way, the radical accessibility, even the vulnerability, of God. Yet these stories allude to far more than the notion of the temple image as an animated "sacred doll."[68] What is also important is the overall *devotional atmo-*

sphere of the stories, their language of delight. One of the more significant devotional motifs in these stories—along with the obvious socioreligious ones of Muslim conversion and "humanization"—has to do with the erotic overtones of the relationship between the girl and her divine playmate,[69] the vivid physical reality of God's *arcāvatāra*, and the girl's agonies of separation when the image is returned to its temple. Such stories speak the emotional language of human love—of playful union and the misery of separation, of blissful innocence and of passionate fidelity—brought to bear on divine and human partners. They speak—to use a phrase coined by anthropologist Owen Lynch—about *divine passions*.[70]

This multiform, metaphorically dissembled object of the saint-poet's ecstasy—his experience of the palpable interior presence of a transcendent, purely spiritual deity who yet captured, entered into, devoured the mind, and ravished the eyes of his human "slave" (Tamil *aṭi*, "slave," is synonymous here with "devotee")—is most vividly captured by the language of human love, the touching and sexual mingling of human bodies. The erotic lexicon of swallowing and devouring, of kissing, of entering, of tasting and being tasted is far more common, and more significant, in the Tamil and Sanskrit poetry of the southern Vaiṣṇava tradition in which this poem holds an important place, than the imagery of playing with dolls.[71]

In the other works of Tamil poets, such as Nammāḻvār, the mental and material forms of Vishnu are evoked by means of a striking use of alimentary vocabulary, where the poet (in the voice of a girl) himself devours the god, holding in his "belly for keeps" that great Lord who once swallowed the worlds. Ramanujan calls this "drastic" imagery of partaking or merging that of "mutual cannibalism." He gives as an example of such mutual devouring a stanza from Nammāḻvār's *Tiruvāymoḻi* (9.6.10):

> My dark one
> stands there as if nothing's
> changed
>
> after taking entire
> into his maw
> all three worlds
> the gods
> and the good kings
> who hold their lands
> as a mother would
> a child in her womb—
>
> and I
> by his leave
> have taken him entire
> and I have him in my belly
> for keeps[72]

What this passage makes clear (and its immediate context, like that of Tiruppāṇāḻvār's poem, is the saint-poet standing before the temple icon) is that Colas's "violent and divinatory possession" (*la possession sauvage et divinatoire*) can go both ways in this literature: God both possesses *and is possessed by* the devotee. In extraordinary moments

of religious ecstasy, the normal hierarchical relation is reversed. As Ramanujan summarizes: "[T]he reciprocity is carried all the way; the eater is eaten, the container is contained, in a metonymy many times over."[73]

Tiruppāṇāḻvār's rhetoric is less extreme; there is some ambiguity as to who has "devoured" whom. Though the poet's senses, "or better his eyes," as Friedhelm Hardy has observed,[74] "seem to devour each part of the body and bring them into his soul," and though his "slave's heart" reaches out to rest on the waist-cloth and the shining navel, the accent seems rather to be on passivity, the poet *having been* entered, filled, ravished, taken captive. Rather, it is Raṅganātha who has laid his eyes on the saint-poet. Another important dialectic in any reading of these poems is that between passive and active seizure.

Aṇṇaṅkarācārya focuses on this double movement in his commentary on the first two stanzas of the poem. First, he says, it is the Lord who, of his own accord, rushes in upon the Āḻvār (*mēlviḻunta*) to take the poet captive as his slave (the martial imagery here is striking); then, in the second verse, it is the poet's turn to do the seizing: seeing the Lord's shining beauty (*ruci*), he in turn rushes in ambush on the Lord.[75] And then, immediately after this gloss, the commentator tackles this movement from and toward God using very different metaphors. In a passage reminiscent of the poet's *vita* quoted above, where the seeing of God is vividly spoken of as suckling at the mother's breast, Aṇṇaṅkarācārya turns to the metaphor of the mother cow (*nāku*) and its calf. In the first verse, the mother herself puts the calf's mouth to her teats, as the newborn is not yet aware of the sweetness of her milk; in the second, it is the calf that takes the initiative. Because it now recognizes its mother's scent (*cuvaṭu*, lit. "mark," "scar"), the calf will rush toward it and demand the milk, even if the mother herself should reject its advances.[76]

So briefly we add to the predominantly erotic atmosphere of male and female encounter the images of parental love. As we have already seen, the sense of the Tamil word *aṉpu* is linked not only to the sweetness of sexual love and sexual contact but to the overpowering loving affection of mother cows for their calves, and to alimentary images of flowing mother's milk. In chapter 6 we will add the very taste of the afterbirth to our lexicon of terms for parental devotion. "Love" in these poems takes on as many dimensions as the bodies of God that inspire it, from love of parents, to that of friends, to the all-consuming and often painful love of lovers.

As for male and female god and saint-poet, the gender symbolism that permeates this poetry has resonance in the actual daily practice of image worship among Hindus. We never, even in the definition of divine passions, leave the shrine and sanctum very far behind. As C. J. Fuller has pointed out in his recent study of forms of "popular" Hinduism, one might understand the system of exchanges in *pūjā* between a worshiper and the temple deity—particularly in regard to food—as conforming to the patterns of a household. By accepting food from a partner of inferior status (the lay person or priest), who then in turn eats the "leftovers," the deity essentially acts as a husband in relation to his wife in a traditional household. It is thus literally true on the social level that—as the bhakti poets imply, if not outright proclaim—"the worshiper stands in relation to the deity as a wife to her husband."[77]

Here we enter into the real complexities and ambiguities of what Fuller calls "the hierarchical inequality" between man and woman, deity and worshiper. For in the bhakti

poetic tradition, as in *pūjā*—along with moments of awe and the overwhelming sense of the gulf that separates the divine and the human—there are vivid moments of union, of interrelationship, even of reversal: hierarchy dissolves for brief ecstatic instants. The moment of union, to use an example from Fuller, is like the moment one touches the camphor flame and, after moving the still-warm fingertips to the eyes, absorbs the energies of the divine fire through the eyes into the heart.[78] One such instant is wonderfully caught in verse 9 where Tiruppāṇ calls out "My God! (*aiyō*) his lovely dark body / of unfading beauty / strung with pearls / and big dazzling gems / fills my heart!"[79] The object of worship has filled the worshiper until for a moment they are one composite being.

Yet the "real presence" of the temple image is never more puzzling and intriguing than when one contemplates the meaning of the final, most sublime "marriage," when the lover enters and disappears into the beloved—where God finds one particularly delectable devotee in *his* belly "for keeps." The body of the saint, like that of God, is precious in the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition. In one hagiographical source, as Vasudha Narayanan has pointed out in a recent paper, it is compared by the Lord himself to a vial of rare perfume. Must one break the bottle to enjoy the perfume? This sense of the delectable bodies of saints is perhaps one of the motifs at work in Tiruppāṇāḻvār's nuptial disappearance. He is one of only two saints—the other is a woman, Āṇṭāḷ, also a poet of divine love—said to have one day merged into the sanctum icon at Śrīraṅgam.[80]

Ultimately, there is in Tiruppāṇāḻvār and in the other Āḻvārs and Ācārya-poets a complex interweaving of mythic/literary imagery and ritual practice, of the material bodies of temple icons and the mental images of the deity evoked in the saint-poet's heart. Vishnu the master, that "flawless overlord of celestials," *standing there* (*niṉṟa*) in front of the poet-slave, visible to the "naked eye" (*kaṇṇārakkaṇṭu*), as the commentators say, is the same as Rāma, as Krishna Gopāla, the god-king of Mathurā, awesome *avatāras* who performed such magnificent deeds in "those days" long ago. Yet "He"—Father, Mother, and Lover—is equally the bronze or stone image smelling of worship and the image present in the "sweet core" of the heart. The Āḻvār here strongly affirms the *ontological* reality of the material and mental "bodies" of God: the "lovely lotus feet" of the great old tales that seem to come and enter his eyes as a kind of interior animated image, and the temple icon with its red waist cloth that *his* eyes in turn capture and take into his mind. Deśika, as we cited earlier, speaks of the poet's *simultaneous experience*, in his ecstasy, of an exterior and interior glory radiating from the limbs of the Lord's body. An exhaustive interpretation of each poem would have to take into account the sometimes subtle interplay of these various symbolic structures.[81]

To again use Richard Davis's terminology, the "dispensation" of this vision—the framing set of cultural assumptions and ideas brought to bear upon the temple image—is indissolubly multiple.[82]

I end here with a Tamil verse by Deśika that *begins* his commentary on *Amalaṇātipirāṉ*. It is a verse that elegantly gathers together many of the themes and certainly much of the spirit of my discussion of the bard's enjoyment of God:

> After we see him joined to our hearts
> as our creator,
> standing in his temple, mingling with his loving slave,
> our protector and husband,
> in the ten stanzas sung by the Lord of bards
> that bestow the fruits of the Vedas
> in Tamil song—
>
> we take a hint from the cowgirls who did their *kuravai* dance
> that day long ago
> for the lord who became
> their cowherd
> and king:
>
> we leave behind the loneliness of sinners,
> uniting with him
> like the hen with her cock![83]

Visualization and the Eros of Devotion in Sanskrit

Tiruppāṇāḻvār's poem is one of many such poems in the Āḻvār corpus that describe the god sequentially from foot to head and head to foot. Nammāḻvār, in *Tiruvāymoôi* 1.9, in an intriquing variation on the imagery of swallowing God, who swallowed the worlds, the Āḻvār describes how the Lord inhabits his every "limb," beginning with the hip, and moving up to the heart, arms, tongue, eyes, brow, and finally head.[84] Here the body of the saint merges (mingles: *kalantaṇa*) with the "Body of God." There are also some vivid examples of this genre in Rāmānuja's *gadyas* and prose treatises and the poetic work of the later Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas, especially in the Sanskrit *stotras* of Kūreśa (Kūrattāḻvāṉ) and Parāśara Bhaṭṭar. As Nancy Nayar has shown, the visionary/cultic/literary structures of Kūreśa's and Bhaṭṭar's *stotras* are particularly marked by limb-by-limb descriptions of specific icons. These verses are steeped in the Āḻvār tradition; they bring the vivid emotional experience of seeing (*darśana*) God's body, particularly in the icon form, into fluid Sanskrit.[85]

Bhakti texts such as Tiruppāṇ's and the Sanskrit *anubhavas* of the Ācāryas are also clearly related to yogic ritual visualizations (*dhyānāni*) in contemporary Pāñcarātra texts such as the *Ahirbudhnyasaṃhitā*. In a way analogous to yogic or tāntric/ritual visualization, they attempt a systematic building up of an image of the deity inside the body of the adept. However, the *anubhavas* of the Āḻvārs and Ācāryas are visualizations with a difference.

The Indian tāntric texts—perhaps themselves related to other iconometric texts that served as visual/mental guides for makers of images (*śilpins*)—downplay personal emotion (erotic or otherwise) and for the most part avoid use of exaggerated imagery (they are mostly prose), for the sake of esoterically and iconically accurate visualization.[86] However, there *are* exceptions, such as this vigorous *dhyāna* of a tāntric goddess from a Kashmiri text whose tradition has links to the south:

> She should be visualized (*saṃ[sā]smaret*) black as a crow, as a swarm of bees or the clouds at the world's end, three-faced, awesome, eighteen-armed, roaring horribly as she destroys the universe, mounted emaciated and terrible on [the shoulders of] the Great Transcended with various weapons in her hands, her limbs clad with [a skirt made of] strings of bones, and her hair flowing upwards.[87]

Or, in another key, this standard verbal icon of auspicious Sarasvatī found in the South Indian cult of Lalitā Mahātripurasundarī:

> Seated on a spotless lotus, her lotus-like hands holding pen and book, white as jasmine or mandāra flowers, with the moon's crescent shining on top of her mass of braided hair, may Sarasvatī destroy for you all the terrors of existence.[88]

In some of her *dhyāna* texts, however, Lalitā's sensuality is emphasized in a way that approaches the eroticization of bhakti *anubhava*:

> Anklets and other ornaments on her feet produce a charming tinkling sound. The sound of her bangles is likewise charming. Her lower legs have subdued the pride of Love's arrow quiver. Her thighs bear a complexion like that of an elephant's trunk and forelobes or a plantain tree. Her loins are rapped [sic] by a thin red silk cloth, smooth to the touch.[89]

Some of the most powerfully affective descriptions of deities in tantra tradition come from the ritual visualizations of the ḍākiṇīs, female tantric deities of early Indian and Tibetan Buddhism. As Miranda Shaw has noted in her reading of the *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa-tantra*, such texts are often suffused with "exuberant delight, graceful sensuousness," and "open and unashamed affirmation of sensuality in a religious context." She cites a text from the *Hevajra-tantra* in David Snellgrove's translation:

> In a forest, a secluded place, or even in your own home,
> A knowledgeable yogi should continually worship
> a superlative female consort who has disrobed.
> Having kissed and embraced, stroke the vulva.
> The tip of the man, pressing (or kissing),
> Drinks sweet nectar from the lips below.
> The possessor of the scepter should with his hands steadily do
> Activities that produce the musk of desire . . .
> Again and again unite by means of the diamond scepter,
> Looking her up and down.
> Thus one obtains extensive spiritual perfections and
> Becomes the equal of all the Buddhas.

And even more concrete in this verse of Babhaha on the mixing of male (white) and female (red) fluids in tantric sex:

> In the sacred citadel of the vulva of
> A superlative, skillful partner,
> Do the practice of mixing white seed
> With her ocean of red seed.
> Then absorb, raise, and spread the nectar, for
> A stream of ecstasy such as you've never known.
> Then for pleasure surpassing pleasure,
> Realize that as inseparable from emptiness.[90]

In such texts the physical pleasure and bodily touching associated with such religious experience is of course to be distinguished from the physicality of bhakti "enjoyments" of the body of God. Desire (*madana*) for the other (partner) here is not an end in itself, but is a ritual tool of enlightenment; desire is *used* to transcend all desire. This is vividly made concrete in the very practice of the "mingling of essences," which in most tantric and yogic traditions is ultimately the male absorption (by sucking or drinking) of the female "seed" until enlightenment is reached.

Ultimately, in most forms of tantra such affective experience, however concretely physical and focused on pleasure, serves the goal of detachment that is foreign to bhakti as we see it in the South Indian tradition. In tāntric forms of yoga one is urged to transcend the physical form of the object of one's meditational or visionary or physical devotion. The goal is to experience the impersonal and universal aspects of one's chosen god or goddess. In tantra proper, one does not *fall in love* with a deity; the goal has little to do with feeling (*bhāva*) per se, as an end in itself, and everything to do with union, identity, the ritual incorporation of the other. The deity contemplated is finally nothing more and nothing less than a vehicle of one's own enlightenment.

In the bhakti "enjoyments" of the body of God the otherness of the deity/Beloved is always preserved; desire and various registers of physicality and visionary experience are harnessed in the service of pure adoration or for the subtle agonistic nuances of an experience of union-in-separation.

Ramanuja's Anubhava of Vishnu

To return to the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition itself, we find in the *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, a prose treatise by the great eleventh- to twelfth-century Viśiṣṭādvaita philosopher Rāmānuja, a fine example of a post-Āḻvār *anubhava* of the "auspicious and holy form" (*divyamaṅgalavigraha*) of Vishnu from head to foot. This remarkable passage—a string of long intricately textured compound phrases—mingles the styles of tāntric and iconic visualization with the surplus of descriptive detail that evokes the charged emotional atmosphere of bhakti. One has the distinct impression that the writer is describing both a real icon—its various ornaments and attributes, including even the *pītāmbaram*, or yellow waist-cloth—and some transcendental or interior vision. Rāmānuja is glossing a passage from the *Brahmasūtra* 1.1.21 that speaks of "the one who dwells in the sun and in the eye," which the theistic philosopher interprets as proof that the "the highest brahman possesses a form" (*parasya brahmaṇo rūpavattvam*):

> He is the one who dwells within the circle of the sun. His lustre is like that of a high mountain of molten gold and his brilliance that of the rays of hundred thousand suns. His long eyes have the beauty of the petals of a lotus, just unfolding under the rays of the sun and crowning a rich stalk rooted in deep waters. His brows and forehead and nose are full of charm; his lips, like coral, radiate a pure smile. His cheeks are tender and radiant; his neck lovely as a conch. His long divine bud-like ears, exquisitely formed, almost touch his high shoulders. His arms are thick, round and long; he is adorned with fingers reddened by nails giving off a lovely red glow. He has a slender waist and

broad chest—all his limbs are held in perfect symmetry—his fine body gives shape to an inconceivable divine form. His complexion is lucent and tawny; his lovely feet like two petals of a full-blown lotus. He wears the shining yellow waist-cloth fit to adorn his beautiful form.[91]

Rāmānuja goes on to list, in downward order, Vishnu's various ornaments and weapons, as would a text on icons, and then resumes a precipitous concluding litany describing the Lord whose "infinite, unsurpassed beauty" (*anavadhikātiśayasaundarya*) "captivates the eyes and hearts" of all creatures, sentient and nonsentient, who fills them to overflowing with the "nectar of his loveliness (*lāvaṇyāmṛta*), and whose "eternal and inconceivable youthfulness is utterly astonishing" (*atyadbhutācintyanityayauvanaḥ*). One gets the heady sense at the end of this passage of a kind of liquid loveliness of form, a sensuous radiance alternately congealing and melting before the eyes.

But this *anubhava* of the Lord's supernal form "dwelling in the sun, in the eye, in the heart," and in the temple on earth—as alluring as it is—has little of the sensual detail and intimacy of the Āḻvār's poem.

Tamil and Sanskrit as Vehicles of Bhāva

This is true of some, but not all, of the later Sanskrit *stotras* of the Ācāryas. Some, like Ramanujan, have attributed this difference to language. Tiruppāṇ's poem is emotionally charged because it is written in Tamil—the mother tongue, the language of feeling, of the household, of everyday passions. Such direct expression, it might be said, is out of the reach of Ācāryas who compose in the artificial, "perfected," therefore impersonal "father tongue" of Sanskrit (tantric transgressions, of course, by definition, the exception to the rule).

In the context of bhakti literature, there is some truth to this. Not even brahman boys of the more Sanskritic northern Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition grow up speaking Sanskrit with their mothers in the kitchen. *Rasa* and *bhāva*—to return to an earlier discussion—will always be in tension. But such a theory can be taken too far. Right off the kitchen, to keep to the household metaphor, is the main room of the house, or an open courtyard with its well or *tulsī* plant, where Sanskrit is spoken and memorized with the fathers and grandfathers. Two languages, one roof. At least in the traditional south, among most Śrīvaiṣṇava brahmans, this has long been the case.

As I said in chapter 1, Sanskrit, along with being a language of elite learning and rigorous logic, is also the vehicle for "feeling," the *bhāva* of bhakti, in the *stotra* literature of South Indian devotion. It, too, like the Tamil of the Āḻvārs, is chanted in daily household rituals by both men and women.

In Vedāntadeśika, as in the early Ācāryas, bhakti *bhāva* is present in Sanskrit as well as in Tamil. We have already studied his rich Tamil *prabandhams* that favorably compare in their emotionalism (their *bhāva*) with the Tamil of the Āḻvārs. But along with writing accomplished poems in Tamil and Prākrit, Deśika is perhaps the finest Sanskrit devotional poet in the later Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition.[92] He is, as we have also had occasion to observe, one of the best examples of the complex interanimation of the Tamil mother and Sanskrit father tongues in the southern tradition.

We turn next to his *anubhava* of Raṅkanātha, his poetic homage to the Untouchable saint-poet.

"Those Who Paint Their Eyes with Your Dark Body": Vedāntadeśika's Enjoyment of Śrīraṅgam's Lord

siddhañjaṇam va sāmam tuji taṇum ṇiaviloaṇesu khivantā
accua lacchiṇi vāsam ṇiccaṇiudam ṇihim va pecchanti tumam

Those who paint their eyes with your dark body
as with a mystical eye-black
conjured by siddhas

O Acyuta

see you
as they would a treasure:
the ever-secret hiding place
of Lakṣmī!

—Vedāntadeśika
Acyutaśatakam, 45

Deśika's fourteenth-century Sanskrit poem for Raṅganātha is called *Bhagavaddhyānasopānam* ("The Ladder of Meditation on the Lord"). Deśika's poem is far more richly textured and ornamented than *Amalaṇātipirāṇ*. But artistic self-consciousness does not make Deśika's poem any less emotional, any less ecstatic or playful than that of the singer-saint. In fact the sensual richness of its surfaces, its bold mingling of colors, smells, and textures at times brings it closer to the "flaunted figuration" of the *Song of Songs*. We find in Deśika also a more subtle (i.e., self-conscious) intermingling of the material and mental bodies of God, of yogic trance and ecstatic love. As Veṅkaṭagopāladāsa, a modern Sanskrit commentator on the poem, remarks: "When it comes to Śrīraṅganātha, the image in the temple and the image in the heart are one!"[93] The following is a full translation of Deśika's *anubhava* of Raṅganātha:

A Ladder of Meditation on the Lord

I
Ineffable inner light of ascetics, mystical *kohl*
of a yogi's eye; precious stone,
vessel of perfect liberation, healer of the sorrows
of the poor and afflicted—

God of gods, divine eye in the assembly
of the Vedas:

we see him here,
in the middle
of Śrīraṅgam town!

II
The lotus feet of the Lord of Raṅga,
exuding the perfume of the infinite Veda,

touched by the pious crowns of all the gods
and fondled by the lotus hands
of Lakṣmī and Bhū:

they appeared on the sandy banks
of the Kāvērī,
loud with geese–

and I see them now, mirrored
in my mind's deep lake.

III
O Lord of Raṅga!

I see the exquisite curves of your calves,
the lustre of anklets bathes them in colors;

swift runners between armies in time of war,
long ladles to catch the liquid light of your beauty–

their loveliness doubled by the shade
of your knees:
seeing them,
my soul stops running
the paths of rebirth.

IV
They seem like firm stems of plantain
growing in a pleasure garden;

wrapped in the linen cloth, on fire
in the dazzle of the jeweled belt,

they are pillows for his wives,
Kāmala, Bhūmī, Nappiṉṉai:[94]

Ah! my mind plunges into the mysterious depths
of Raṅga's young thighs

as into a double stream of beauty.

V
What can equal it?

It's so deep that once all worlds
were tucked away inside it;
creator of all creators,
its lotus flower spews out
shining pollen.

In its lustre,
a whirlpool of beauty–

this fine navel of the Lord of Raṅga
gives endless delight
to my mind.

VI
His broad chest burns with a vermilion
of shining jewels; blessed
by the touch of goddess Śrī's small feet,
its luster deepened
by the mole, Śrīvatsa:

with its long king's garland of victory,
its shining pearls bright
as the full moon–
strewn with the tender leaves of holy basil–
this cool shade
between the long arms of the Lord of Raṅga
soothes the fever
of my mind

VII
Seeing his one arm playfully stretched back
as a pillow for his head
and the other reaching down the length
of his body to his knees–

two branches of heaven's wish-granting coral tree–

drawn in tight by the rays
of his ornaments,

this lady elephant of my mind,
crazy with love,
turns round and round on her rope,
tied close to the lovely peg
of the Lord who sleeps
in Śrīraṅgam.

VIII
His half-smile, that just-blooming
flower, as if he were about
to say something–his pouting
lower lip, red
as a ripe bimba fruit.

His up-turned glance, as if fixed on a distant
horizon, holds in one thrall
all those who long for an end to their grief–

this lovely face of Raṅga's Lord,
adorned with a golden
tilaka–

his welcoming eyes cling close to my heart
and will not let go!

IX
Below the tall crown of Raṅga's Lord,
dappled with a fiery light
of flowers and jewels,

his dark wavy hair, with its fine garlands
knotted with sweet spices and
fragrant herbs,

is graced by the touch of his wives' slender fingers,

and wild as the barbed words
of angry Cōḷa girls–

my mind's mad wandering finds its rest
on that good king's crown.

X
So my mind touches the lotus feet of Raṅga's Lord,
delights in his fine calves, clings
to his twin thighs and, slowly
rising, reaches
the navel.

It stops for a while on his chest,
then, after climbing
his broad shoulders,
drinks the nectar of his lovely face
before it rests at last
at the crown's flowery crest.

XI
The noble beauty of his arms;
his body scarred by a warrior's bowstrings
and women's bangles–
his chest belongs to Lakṣmī,
goddess of luck.

And the thick club
studded with iron: his weapons
show his fearlessness.

He is here, asleep on the coiled serpent,
where, just in front of himself,

his very own self, his image,
shines. Here,
in the middle of Śrīraṅgam town,
a king with his three queens–

here, in the middle
of my heart!

XII
Veṅkaṭeśa, his mind made pure
by serving the sages,
composed these verses in Śrīraṅgam–

a holy place praised by poets and connoisseurs,
their hearts burning
with deep delight.

He made this poem for those who long to climb, with ease,
the hard path of yogīs
whose minds are fixed
on one goal alone:

May this "Ladder of Meditation on the Lord"
grant them deep devotion![95]

"Deep Devotion:" Turning Yoga on Its Head

Thus ends the praise-poem that, in the words of the Sanskrit commentator, "describes, with each successive limb, the yogic ascent."[96]

But this is no ordinary yoga, and these no ordinary "limbs." This yoga has nothing to do with the usual *aṅgas* ("auxiliary limbs")–the difficult postures, tortuous breathing exercises, harrowing asceticism, or elaborate preparation of drugs.[97] This is not about systematic suppression of the senses, but their ecstatic release; it is not about withdrawal (*kaivalyam*), but about opening oneself to an experience (*anubhava*) of "an astonishing, otherworldly beauty" (*alaukikādbhūtasaundaryam*)[98] and of "sweet, deep inner delight." Here–again according to our commentator–meditation (*dhyāna*) is not merely a serene "uninterrupted recollection" (*nirantarasmaraṇa*) but "continuous burning desire" (*nirantarotkaṭakāma*). It is a "ladder of love (*kāma*) that has as its sole object the Lord."[99] In Deśika's *dhyāna*, "devotion to the Lord" (*īśvarapraṇidhānam*), which plays a rather minor role in early yoga, is made the concentrated focus of highly eroticized emotions. It thus turns the yoga tradition on its head and also moves beyond the comparatively reserved, formal *bhaktiyoga* of Rāmānuja. Such Sanskrit devotional poetry must also be distinguished from tantric sexual symbolism, meant to serve an experience that far transcends desire and any sense of loving separation. Finally, as Veṅkaṭagopāladāsa points out, Deśika's ladder of love has its model not in Tiruppāṇ's praise or in Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*, but in the erotic poetry of Kālidāsa–most particularly in the poet's limb-by-limb description of young Umā, Lord Śiva's future wife, in *Kumārasaṃbhava* 1.32–49. This latter passage is perhaps one of the most well-known foot-to-head sequential descrip-

tions in Sanskrit literature. The commentator glosses Deśika's "ladder of meditation on Bhagavān" with the following line from Kālidāsa's *anubhava* of the young goddess:

> At her waist like an altar, curving and slender,
> there were three gentle folds of the skin,
> as if a woman in her youth could freshly grow
> steps for the God of Love to climb.[100]

This citation is very suggestive on more than one level. The immediate fact that even a traditional commentator, writing, like Deśika, in Sanskrit, focuses not only on the poem's immediate religious inspiration, the Tamil source-text, but also on its roots in the erotic tradition of Sanskrit *kāvya* or "court" lyric, is a vivid witness to the poem's rich intertextuality and to the breadth of Śrīvaiṣṇava exegesis.

This is also a significant example of "bhakti as *kāma*" outside of the Āḻvār tradition; it belies Hardy's sense that such passionate bhakti was either "not tolerated by Sanskritic ideology" or "altogether abandoned (both as religious experience and as intellectual construct) by Śrīvaiṣṇavism."[101]

Veṅkaṭagopāladāsa describes this poem in terms identical to those used by Tiruppāṇ's commentators and *taṉiyaṉ* verses. Deśika's work, like that of the Untouchable bard, is also a formal "foot-to-head enjoyment" of the temple image (*āpādacūḍamanubhavam*),[102] as well as a presentational yogic vision of the "ineffable inner light of ascetics." The poem, like the icon after which it is patterned, is a point of convergence of many perspectives. I will explore below only those directly relevant to our discussion.

Enjoying the Enjoyer of God

Hardy has remarked on the "seemingly irreconcilable descriptions" in Deśika's baroque litany of the Lord's body. He notes, for instance, that the thighs in verse 4, ambiguous at first, gain solidity, then melt into an image of a "double" stream, two rivers in flood tide.[103] We also see a rich interanimation of inner and outer worlds: the inner contemplative vision of the yogi (evoked right away in the first stanza, and underscored by the repeated use of *mati* or *cittam*, "mind," as the subject) and the physical erotic playfulness of the lover/devotee. In verse 7 Deśika evokes an image often used to describe yogic concentration, in both the Mahāyāna Buddhist and Hindu traditions. The mind of the poet is tied to the dazzle (*raśmi*, the "rays" or "ropes") of jeweled ornaments on the image like an agitated female elephant tied close to a tent peg: she goes round and round the peg in her agitation, like the poet's mind circles around the lovely icon.[104] Madness, wildness (*dṛptā*), is a trope here not only for deep yogic concentration (*nididhyāsana*),[105] as Veṅkaṭagopāladāsa has it, but also for infatuation, sexual arousal. Here the commentator softens rather than underlines the erotic overtones of the text. Verse 8 describes the god's face: the half smile, the golden *tilaka*, the lower lip full and red as bimba fruit. The god's eyes are deeply riveted (*gāḍhāliṅgana*) on his devotee: to have *darśana*, sight of God, is both to see and *be seen*.[106] Here Veṅkaṭagopāladāsa returns to medieval Sanskrit love poetry to illustrate a devotional attitude. He cites here, as an analogy to this "embrace of eyes" between devotee and deity, a description of Rāma and Sītā's embrace written by the eighth-century playwright and poet Bhavabhūti—a secular love lyric regarded by traditional Sanskrit scholars as the finest in the language:

> When we talked at random—
> our cheeks pressed close
> together, deep in love
>
> softly, oh softly
>
> of something unspeakable,
> our arms busy in close embrace
>
> only the darkness ended—
>
> the night-watches passed
> unnoticed.[107]

In verse 9 Deśika comes up with an image that rivals Kālidāsa in its evocative sensuality and audacity: the thick, wavy hair of God is compared to the oblique, barbed words of "angry Cōḻa girls." This image, too, leads the commentator to more literary citation, this time among Deśika's own *kāvya* verses. Both are exquisite examples of the Sanskrit erotic mood (*śṛṅgārarasa*). One, from his play *Saṃkalpasūryodaya* (1.32), describes black *śaivala* creepers that undulate on the surface of the Kāvērī as being like the loose black hair of bathing Cōḻa girls; and the other is from his short *sandeśakāvya* or "messenger" poem, *Haṃsasaṃdeśa* (1.36–37), where Deśika speaks of the white flowers in the dark hair of Cōḻa women as being a quarrel between moonlight and darkness.[108] Here Deśika, with great finesse, transforms the traditional Indian erotic motif of the sexual power of a woman's disheveled hair into a trope for the alluring beauty of a male god. One is tempted here to see this reversal in gender terms as an attempt by a male poet to imagine a woman's eros of devotion using the conventions of his own sex.

Verse 10 sums up the amorous journey: the mind touches the lotus feet, relishes the knees, and slowly moves up, touching the two thighs, the navel, the chest, shoulders, drinks in the nectar of the face and, finally, rests on the tiara. After alluding in verse 11 to his reduplication[109] in the festival image (*utsava mūrti*), which is placed in the sanctum directly in front of the dark stone *mūlava* (this is a rare mention of *both* sets of images in such poetry), he goes on in the last verse to describe this vision in terms of both yoga and deep devotion (*bhaktim gāḍhām*).[110]

A Jeweled Belt in Ecstasy: Variations on a Theme

Deśika wrote several limb-by-limb *anubhavas* to Vishnu, most prominently to Lord Devanāyaka in the village temple of Tiruvahīndrapuram.[111] While the quoted Sanskrit praise of Raṅganātha is his only *anubhava* of that form of Vishnu, he wrote two complete descriptions of Devanāyaka, the god of a village he reputedly lived in for thirty years. *Devanāyakapañcāśat* in Sanskrit and *Acyutaśatakam* in Prākrit both depict, from head to foot, the icon of Vishnu at Tiruvahīndrapuram with intense erotic energy. The two Tamil poems to this god and this shrine, *Mummaṇikkōvai* and *Navamaṇimālai*, do not include limb-by-limb *anubhavas*, but they both are suffused

with the erotic mood in the Tamil way: the icon retains its strong associations with the real body of a beloved.[112]

To return to the brief comparative note on the *Song of Songs*, these bhakti descriptions share with the Ancient Near Eastern *waṣf* the desire of a poet to overwhelm and delight the reader/listener, to open an emotional space where that reader/listener might share the poet's experience of love, of endless erotic joy and the pains of separation. Deśika says time and again in his *anubhavas* that he longs to look on the god endlessly, with "unwinking eyes." Love here, as in the *Song*, is a process. Deśika's thirsty eyes drink in the beauty (*lāvaṇyam*; *saundaryam*; *abhirūpyam*) of God, never sated with seeing.[113]

But unlike in the *Song*, here even inanimate objects share in the erotic atmosphere generated by the lover. In these descriptive poems to temple icons objects such as Krishna's flute or Lord Vishnu's conch, even the various ornaments that decorate the image share the lover's delectation. The latter, in *Devanāyakapañcāśat* (14), are even seen to have themselves sought out the body in order to increase their radiance: it is *the body that serves as ornament for the jewels!*[114]

He says in a remarkable passage of the *Devanāyakapañcāśat* 27, which follows very closely in Sanskrit the sentiment of Āṇṭāḷ's Tamil poems in praise of Vishnu's conch-shell:

> O Lord of immortals!
>
> mad with love,
> my mind kisses your lower lip red as *bimbā* fruit,
> as the tender young shoots
> from the coral tree
> of paradise:
>
> your lips enjoyed by young cowgirls,
> by your flute
> and by the prince
> of conch-shells.[115]

Both words used here for "enjoyment," *anubhūtam* and *niṣevitam*, allude to sexual pleasure.[116] In verse 37 of the same poem, Deśika, in his *anubhava*, describes the jeweled belt surrounded by the yellow waist-cloth—whose beauty "enslaves" his mind—as itself thrilling to the touch of the god's hand: like a lover or a possessed devotee in the conventions of the poets, the "hairs" of the belt stand on end. And even more: the verse is an example of skillful double entendre (*śleṣālaṃkāra*), where the belt can also refer to a young girl "of high birth" (*sujātā*) dressed in a golden sāri who thrills in ecstasy at the touch of her lover's hand.[117]

Deśika takes the fine art of hyperbole here to a level above even that of the *Song*.

Icons of Icons: Concluding Reflections

A major difference, however, between the Vaiṣṇava *anubhavas* of Tiruppāṇāḻvār and Vedāntadeśika and the *awṣāf* of the ancient Near East is the former's undeniable extra-erotic, esoteric context. Such limb-by-limb descriptions get part of their literary inspiration from the poetics of early Indian *kāvya* (both Hindu and Buddhist), but, as I have shown, they also allude to yogic visualization practices based on the southern tantra, the Pāñcarātra Āgamas.

In tāntric meditation, adepts are taught, by way of certain seed mantras, how to construct within their own bodies the body of the deity. The *anubhavas* spoken of in this study in a sense do this for us. Their very recitation bodies forth God. They articulate both the spontaneous enjoyment of the beauty of God and the rarified ritual map of a spiritual elite, the connative and cognitive. It is within this meditational tradition that we are able perhaps to understand these poems themselves as "icons," "bodies" of God. Understood in this way, they are "icons of icons." With this in mind, it is significant that one of the early Śrīvaiṣṇava commentators on Nammāḻvār, Vaṭakkuttiruvīttippiḷḷai, compares Nammāḻvār's great cycle of poems, the *Tiruvāymoḻi*, to the temple image (*arcāvatāram*).[118] Whatever one might say about the apparent "iconicity" of these poems, no one would deny that the tradition ascribes great spiritual power to their recitation. These are not only literary but liturgical/cultic texts. As Norman Cutler has observed in regard to the Tamil bhakti tradition as a whole, a bhakti lyric not only records a specific saint-poet's experience but is also the "occasion for a ritualized reenactment of the events and emotions portrayed in the poem."[119] In bodying forth God, they too are able to grant grace.

One sees this dimension most clearly in the *phalaśrutis*, or end verses describing the fruits of singing the poem, as common in Deśika as they are in the early Āḻvārs. I simply quote from the *phalaśruti* of Deśika's praise of Lord Varadarāja at Kāñcī:

> Those who accept this lofty hymn
> sweet to the ear
> composed by Vēṅkaṭanātha out of devotion
> will pluck with their bare hands
> every last fruit
> from the wish-granting tree
> set on the summit
> of Elephant Hill![120]

It is time now for us to treat the poetics of Deśika's Sanskrit *stotras* not merely as imitations or "translations" of a *specific* Tamil model but in their own right. Only by closely studying Deśika's *stotra* styles, as we studied his Tamil *prabandhams*, can we get a fully nuanced picture of Deśika "the philosopher as poet," or get a sense of his dynamic relationship with the Tamil Āḻvār tradition. Only after setting ourselves the task of studying selections of his hymns in all three of his working languages will we be able to begin to see in what complex way Deśika's texts are "indexical" symbols of Āḻvār emotionalism.[121] We will also see how his texts further the regional and linguistic scope of southern bhakti emotionalism.

In pursuing my study of the *stotras* to Varadarāja at Kāñcī and Devanāyaka at Tiruvahīndrapuram, I will continue what I have begun in the final section of this chapter, though my context will be not only that of Tamil bhakti but also Sanskrit poetics and the "northern" traditions. We will explore the many ways in which Deśika's Sanskrit hymns to Vishnu's temple icons (the *arcāvatāras*) creatively echo not only the Tamil tradition but create something new out of their own indigenous Sanskrit materials.

54. This last phrase, in the left-branching syntax of Tamil poetry, is the first one to meet the reader's eye: *orumati aṉpar uḷam karvantaṉa*. See *Navamaṇimālai* (NMM), verse 1 in STP, p. 406. Cf. Deśika's description of the feet of Raṅganātha at Śrīraṅgam in a Tamil verse at the very end of the *Rahasyatrayasāram*, chap. 32. This verse uses some of the same mythic images, though it is far less intimate in tone.

55. See Ramanujan, "Three Hundred Rāmāyaṇas," in Richman, ed., *Many Rāmāyaṇas*, pp. 24–32.

56. See Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, pp. 417–18. For Āṇṭāḷ's poems, see Dehejia, *Āṇṭāḷ*, especially the cycle *Nāccciyār Tirumoḻi*, p. 75ff.

57. See, in this context, Dennis Hudson, "Bathing in Krishna: A Study in Vaishnava Hindu Theology," Harvard Theological Review 73, 3–4 (July–October 1980): 539–66. Vasudha Narayanan, in *The Way and the Goal*, refers on pp. 144 and 222 to the sexual overtones of bathing in early Tamil literature and in the Ācāryas. See also my discussion of this theme in Deśika 's Sanskrit *stotra* to Devanāyaka in chap. 7, "Bathing in God."

58. See Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, p. 308.

59. See the many examples in Freedberg, "Live Images," in ibid., especially pp. 301–12 for the experiences of Caesarius and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. Freedberg recounts one old tale: "A monk was especially devoted to an image of the Virgin, before which he was accustomed to say his prayers. One day he fell ill and developed a terrible growth on his throat. He could not talk; he was pallid and dolorous. At the height of his pain he had a vision in which the Virgin appeared especially beautiful; and then, having wiped his wounds with a cloth, she withdrew her breast from her bosom and placed it within his mouth, 'et puis en arousa toutes ses playes.'" (p. 312).

60. This seems to imply that *mokṣa*, liberation, is granted to those who merely "see" and "remember" the *arcāvatāra* of Vishnu—a radical theology implied by Deśika's poetry, but tempered by his prose. For a detailed discussion of Deśika the philosopher and poet, see conclusion.

61. I have already noted, the reference to Gajendra in the last extant verse of the *kōvai*.

62. *añcaṇamum kāyāvum aṉaiya mēṉi*. *Añcaṉa* is *kohl* or *collyrium*, a deep blue-black cosmetic used as makeup for the eyes. Its rich dark color is often used as a comparison for the dark color of Vishnu/Krishna's body. See Āṇṭāḷ's *Nāccciyār Tirumoḻi* 1. 6: *karuvuṭaimukil vaṇṇaṉ kāyāvaṇṇaṉ karuviḷaipōl vaṇṇaṉ. . .* ("[My Lord] dark as the rain clouds, the purple *kāyā* blossom, the shining *karuviḷai*"). Tamil text in Śrī Kāñcī Prativāti Bhayaṅkaram Aṇṇaṅkarācāriyar 's edition, with the *Tivyārttatīpikai* (Kāñcī: Krantamālā Āpīs, 1956), p. 11. See Dehejia, p. 77.

63. This verse plays on the two meanings of the word *mey*: truth and body. Devanāyaka, as we already have seen, is the "Lord of Truth for his servants" (*aṭiyavarkku meyyaṉē*). The epithet can also mean "He who takes on [a] body for [the sake of] his servants." The same word is used for "body" in the first phrase, and for the subject "Lord of Truth" in the epithet.

64. STP, p. 415. See also Deśika 's allusion to the crow in the *Aṭaikkalapattu*, quoted in chap. 3.

65. See Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, p. 442ff.

66. As I have already noted in chap. 1, Hardy himself says as much in *Viraha-Bhakti*, p. 480, n. 216.

67. The six languages he is supposed to have mastered (a task, as I have noted, also popular among Jain intellectuals) are Apabhraṃśa, Māhārāṣṭri, Śauraseṇī, Māgadhī, Pāli, and Sanskrit. Deśika, of course, while being analogous to Śrī Rāhula and the Jains in his breadth of learning and expression, was never a *sadbhāṣī*—for Deśika, the major fields of literary activity remained Sanskrit and Tamil. For Śrī Rāhula as *sadbhāṣa-parameśvara*, see N. de S. Wijesekera 's introduction to his translation of the *Sāḷalihiṇi Sandēśaya* ("The Message of the Mynah-Bird"), one of Śrī Rāhula's *sandeśa* ("messenger") poems, *The Selalihini Sandēśaya of Totagamuwe Sri Rahula* (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena, 1934), p. vi.

68. This is John Holt 's claim for the Śrī Laṅkan master. See his *Buddha in the Crown: Avalokiteśvara in the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 113–15.

69. See chap. 2, especially sec. 5, "The Writing on the Wall." Śrī Rāhula's literary work and political alliances in the Kotte era of king Parākramabāhu VI of course reflect a cultural context very different from fifteenth-century Tamil Nadu, but in both eras and in both regions religious leaders had a crucial role to play in shaping the political order. In Śrī Laṅkā and in South India, from ancient times, religion and polity have never been separate arenas of action and ideology.

Chapter 5

1. For a discussion of Mātṛceta's stotras, see Warder's *Indian Kāvya Literature*, vol. 2, *Origins and Formation of the Classical Kāvya* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974), pp. 228–30. Quotation on p. 230. And this Buddhist notion of the "great man" (*mahāpuruṣa*) obviously has its roots both in the royal notion of the *cakravartin* and in the ancient Vedic tradition of the "cosmic person" from whose sacrificed body the cosmos and the social order were created. See Ṛg Veda 10.90 (esp. verses 12–14) for a sequential description of the *mahāpuruṣa*. For further discussion of the Vedic hymn and its relationship to Vishnu's temple icon-bodies, see chap. 7.

2. This reference is taken from Nancy Nayar's study of the poetry of the early Ācāryas, *Poetry as Theology*, p. 39.

3. For Ambapālī's verses see *Therīgāthā* 252–270 (in Oldenberg and Pischel's Pali Text Society edition [London, 1883], pp. 147–50). For an English translation, see Rhys Davids, *Psalms of the Early Buddhists*, vol. 1, *Psalms of the Sisters* (London: Pali Text Society, 1909), pp. 120–25. Cf. also K. R. Norman, trans. *The Elder's Verses*, vol. 2, *Therigatha* (London: Pali Text Society, 1966). For a contemporary translation and running commentary, see Susan Murcott, *The First Buddhist Women: Translations and Commentary on the Therigatha* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991), pp. 129–34.

4. Therīgāthā 366–99 (Oldenberg and Pischel, 158–52).

5. Ibid., no. 396. For an English translation and discussion, see Murcott, *The First Buddhist Women*, pp. 177–83. See also Kevin Trainor, "In the Eye of the Beholder: Non-Attachment and the Body in Subhā's Verse (Therīgāthā 71)," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59, 1 (spring 1993): 57–79.

6. I am indebted to Nancy Nayar for these references. See *Poetry as Theology*, pp. 20 and 38. See also Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, vol. 2, p. 377. Other important poems include Harṣa Vardhana's *suprabhāta stotra*, a "wake-up" poem for the Buddha (in the style of shrine poems for the deity), and Jain poet Mānatuṅga's *Bhaktāmara Stotra* and euology for the Jina Ṛsabha (Winternitz vol. 2, p. 548; Nayar, *Poetry as Theology*, p. 38).

7. The *māhākāvya* is based on a Jātaka tale (no. 531), as its original title of *Kusadāvata* indicates. See Canto 5: 224–44 in McAlpine and Ariyapala's translation. For one of the few discussions in English of the *Kavsiḷumiṇa*, see C. E. Godakumbura's seminal study *Sinhalese Literature*, pp. 148–52.

8. See excerpts from Mayūrapada Buddhapatra's *Pūjāvaliya* in *An Anthology of Sinhalese Literature Up to 1815*, ed. introd. C. H. B. Reynolds (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), pp. 168–91 (esp. pp. 182–83, for a translation of passages describing Yaśodharā's ecstatic vision of the Buddha as the hairs on "every part of her body" stiffened with joy.

9. From Gustav Roth, "Notes on the *Citralakṣaṇa* and Other Ancient Indian Works on Iconometry," in *South Asian Archaeology 1987: Proceedings of the Ninth International Conference*

of the Association of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe, Held in the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Island of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice, ed. Maurizio Taddei, with the assistance of Pierfrancesco Callieri, pt. 2 (Rome: Istituto Italiano Per Il Medio Ed Estremo Oriente, 1990), p. 1026 [48]. I am grateful to Heino Kottkamp for drawing my attention to Roth's work on Indian art and iconography, when we were colleagues at the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University.

10. See Richard Soulen, "The *Waṣfs* of the Song of Songs and Hermeneutic," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86, 2 (June 1967): 183–90. The purpose of the *waṣf* (plural *awṣāf*), Soulen suggests, is "presentational rather than representational." "Its purpose," Soulen observes, "is not to provide a parallel to visual appearance" or "primarily to describe feminine or masculine qualities metaphorically." Rather, the images want to evoke *feeling*; they "seek to create emotion, not critical or dispassionate comprehension; their goal is a total response, not simply a cognitive one." The lovers' metaphorical hyperbole is, in Soulen's words, "the language of joy" that seeks to "overwhelm and delight the hearer." We are invited, even gently coerced, to share a lover's awe, joy, and erotic delight in the physical beauty of the beloved. The visual exaggerations of the *waṣf* in the *Song* are related to other rhetorical extravagances of the text, which include tactile images of entering, eating, tasting, and feasting on the beloved, and the olfactory eroticism of flowers, fruits, spices, perfumes, and the many aromas of the Lebanon mountains (pp. 187–90).

11. Michael A. Sells has studied in some detail "dissembling similes" and "semantic overflow" in the classic pre-Islamic Arabic odes. Such "semantic overflow" is part and parcel of head-to-foot descriptions of the alluring female beloved, the *ghūl*, in this pre-seventh-century literature. See, for a discussion of issues similar to those in this chapter, Sells's essay "Guises of the Ghūl: Dissembling Simile and Semantic Overflow in the Classical Arabic Nasīb," in *Reorientations: Arabic and Persian Poetry*, ed. Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 130–64. See also, for translations of such poetry, Michael Sells, *Desert Traces: Six Classic Arabian Odes by 'Alqama, Shanfara, Labīd, 'Antara, Al-A 'sha, and Dhu al-Rūmna* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), especially the poem "To the Encampments of Māyya," pp. 67–76.

12. For *The Song of Songs*, see Soulen, "*Waṣfs* of the Song of Songs," p. 188. See also Sells, "The Guises of the Ghūl," for a similar argument about the language of the Arabic odes.

13. See Richard Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, p. 11.

14. We might also reflect on the importance of the poem and its *maṇipravāḷa* commentary to the later Vaṭakalai community, given the fact that it has survived, when most of the commentaries on Āḻvārs attributed to Deśika have not.

15. This is Friedhelm Hardy's general opinion. See *Viraha-Bhakti*, pp. 243–45; 479–80. John B. Carman, Vasudha Narayanan, and Francis X. Clooney have strenuously argued for continuity. See bibliography for Carman and Narayanan, *The Tamil Veda*, and Clooney's many articles on the subject, as well as citations and discussion in the later section "An Anubhava of the Lord."

16. See Kenneth E. Bryant, *Poems to the Child-God*, especially chap. 3, "The Verbal Icon," and John Stratton Hawley, *Sūr Dās: Poet, Singer, Saint*. See also Hawley, "Sūr Dās, Iconreader/Iconmaker," a paper for the 25th Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, Wis. 1996.

17. I have already mentioned some pertinent studies. See Hudson, "The Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa in Stone: The Text as an Eighth-Century Temple and Its Implications, *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* 3, 3 (summer 1995): 137–82, and his paper "The Initiation of the Emperor," presented at the Twenty-fifth Conference on South Asia, Madison, October 20, 1996.

18. See my earlier version of this comparative analysis, which puts more emphasis on the *Song of Songs*, "In Love with the Body of God: Eros and the Praise of Icons in South Indian Devotion," *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies*, 2, 1 (winter 1993): 17–54.

19. All quotations from poems of the Tamil saint-poets are taken from the Tamil text, without commentary, of the "Sacred Collect," the *Nālāyira Tivviyappirapantam* (Madras: Tiruvēṅkaṭattāṉ Tirumaṉṟam, 1987) (NTP). For the *Amalaṇātipiran* of Tiruppāṇāḻvār I have also consulted a modern Tamil commentary, the *Tivyārtta Tīpikai* of Aṇṇaṅkarācāryar (Madras, 1966), as well as the helpful English translations and commentaries of D. Ramaswamy Ayyangar (Madras: Visisthadwaita Pracharini Sabha, 1970), and of V. K. S. N. Raghavan (Mylapore, Madras: Śrī Viśiṣṭādvaita Pracāriṇī Sabhā, 1986), pp. 67–102.

20. For a concise treatment of some of the various versions of the Āḻvār's life and his legacy to the later tradition, see Vasudha Narayanan, "Tiruppan alvar: Life, Lyrics and Legacy," a paper presented for the panel "Untouchable Saints of Medieval India" at the national meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Washington, D.C., April 3, 1992, in manuscript (forthcoming in a volume on Untouchable saints, to be edited by Eleanor Zelliot for State University of New York Press). See also Eleanor Zelliot, "Untouchable Saints: An Indian Pheomenon," MS, 1998 (also for prospective volume), which uses material from my "In Love with the Body of God" for its section on Tiruppāṇ.

21. Though it is found in some manuscripts of the southern (Teṉkalai) tradition, and included in brackets in the printed editions.

22. Narayanan, "Tiruppan alvar," pp. 6–7 of typescript. I am very grateful to Professor Narayanan for sending me a copy of her essay.

23. The Vaṭakalai version—showing its anxiety over the lowly origins of the saint—emphasizes his miraculous birth "outside of a womb" (*ayōnijarāṇa*). In the Vaṭakalai *Guruparamparāprabhāvam* (GPPv), he is found in the middle of a rice field (*vayal*) by a very pious couple who, because of a particular remnant of bad karma from a previous life, had been born in the class of caṇḍālas. Because they had no children, they were delighted to have come upon the baby: immediately upon seeing him, they took him up and raised him as their own. For the *maṇipravāḷa* text, see the GPPv, p. 37: *mahāsukrutikaḷāyum oru prāraptaviśēṣattalē caṇṭāḷajanmikaḷāyumirukkiṟu tampatikaḷ vayal naṭuvē inta śiśuvaik kaṇṭu anapatyarkaḷākaiyālē makiôntu eṭuttukkoṇṭupōy vaḷarttukkoṇṭirukka . . .*

24. *āḻvārum pēccut toṭakkamākak kānam paṇṇikkoṇṭu vīṇaiyum kaiyumāy . . .* Ibid., p. 37.

25. In Tamil the town is called Tiruvaraṅkam (or simply "Araṅkam"), which, like the Sanskrit name, means "Holy Stage" (for the Lord's "play"). See introduction for a note on Sanskrit and Tamil orthography.

26. In earlier versions it is the Lord himself who, delighted with the music of the Pāṇar, appeared to the temple priest in a dream and requested him to bring the bard into the temple sanctum on his shoulders (some accounts contain the added detail of Lakṣmī's intercession in their sending out for the bard).

27. I do not have to remind the reader here of the many cross-cultural resonances of "bleeding icons." See Freedberg, "Live Images," in *The Power of Images*. Narayanan notes the similarity of this stone-throwing motif to an episode in the life of Saṅkarācārya, where the philosopher-saint hurls a stone at an outcaste to get him to move—one, she says of many common motifs in the story literature of the Advaitins and the Śrīvaiṣṇavas. "Tiruppan alvar," p. 8, and 34, n. 8.

28. *stanantayaprajai mulai tēṭi vāy vaikkumāpōlē . . .* GPPv, p. 38.

29. See Deśika's *maṇipravāḷa* commentary on this poem, *Muṉivāhanapōkam* (MVP), in a privately printed text, with Tamil commentaries and notes, of the *Taṉi rahasyaṅkaḷ* (the "Independent Esoteric Treatises") (Madras 1974): *. . . santōṣa yuktarāṇa tiruppāṇāḻvār, piṉpu parama patattilē peṟum pēṟṟai iṅkē periya perumāḷ tiruvaṭikaḷilē (ruḷālē) peṟṟu, ippēṟṟai aṭitoṭaṅki, 'Amalaṉ Āṭi Pirāṉ' mutalāṇa pattu paṭṭālē anupava parīvāhamāka aruḷiceykirār,* ". . . Tiruppāṇāḻvār, filled with happiness, obtaining here, at the holy feet of the great Perumāḷ the same bliss he will obtain after death in highest heaven, composed, in an outpouring of ecstatic enjoyment [*anupava*

parīvāhamāka], in ten verses, beginning with the words 'O pure primordial Lord,' a poem on that bliss starting with the feet," p. 115.

30. For another detailed account of the legends associated with Tiruppāṇāḻvār—including a close analysis of the many differences in each major version of the story—and the importance of his poem in the subsequent Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition, see Friedhelm Hardy's essay "TirupPāṇ-Āḻvār: The Untouchable Who Rode Piggy-Back on the Brahmin," in Diana L. Eck and François Mallison, eds. *Devotion Divine: Bhakti Traditions from the Regions of India. Studies in Honor of Charlotte Vaudeville* (Grönigen: Egbert Forsten, and Paris: École Française d'Extrème-Orient, 1991), pp. 129–54.

31. A name of Rāma, the hero-god and one of Vishnu's *avatāras*.

32. *Nālāyira Tiviyappirapantam, muṭalāyiram*, 927–36.

33. *aṅkuḷḷa cētanarellāruṅ kāṇap periya perumāḷ tirumēṉiyiḷ antarpavittaruḷik kalaṅkiṉa cētanarkaḷai teḷivippittaruḷiṇār* in the GPPv, p. 38.

34. This list is made up of Sanskrit terms transliterated into a Tamil alphabet salt-and-peppered by occasional grantha letters—one of the strangest aspects of the *maṇipravāḷa* style to a native reader. The terms are: *ativistaram, ati saṅkōsam, a(n)atikrutātikāratvam, tūrkrahatvam, turavapōtārttatvam, samṣayāti janakatvam, virahaklēṣam, tūtaprēkṣaṇam, parōpatēṣam, paramata nirasanam*. . . . MVP, p. 115.

35. This use of the term *rasa*—a rich word meaning, among other things, aesthetic "taste" or "experience " in classical Sanskrit poetics—to describe a bhakti experience of course anticipates later uses of *bhakti rasa* in Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇavism and other schools of North Indian Vaiṣṇavism. See works by Haberman, Hawley and Juergensmeyer, and Wulff in the bibliography. See also Shrivatsa Goswami, "Radhā: The Play and Perfection of Rasa," in Hawley and Wulff, eds. *The Divine Consort: Radhā and the Goddesses of India* (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 1982), pp. 72–88.

36. As in the Vaṭakalai account (discussed earlier) of the Untouchable as *ayonija*, "born of no womb."

37. *kāṇpaṇavum uraipaṇavum maṟṟoṉṟiṉṟi/kaṇṇaṇai kaṇṭu uraitta kaṭiya kātal/pāṇ perumāḷ aruḷceyta pātal pattum/paḻamaṟaiyiṇ poruḷ eṉṟu paravukiṉṟōm* ("We praise as the essential meaning of the old Veda the ten stanzas composed out of grace by the Lord of Bards who, seeing Kaṇṇaṉ, full of love, disdained to speak of anything else—for whom anything else was unworthy of being spoken of or seen"). MVP, p. 149. See also the passage in stanza 12 of Deśika's Tamil poem *Pirapantacāram* ("The Essence of the Āḻvārs"), where Tiruppāṇāḻvār's poem is described as the "essential meaning of the many Vedas" (*palamaṟaiyiṇ poruḷ*). For the latter passage, see STP, p. 435.

38. *ittiviyaprapantattiḷ mutal mūṉṟa pāṭṭukku mutalāṇa akṣaram A-U-M ākaiyāl mūlamākiya oṉṟai eḻuttiṉ mutal naṭu iṟutiyāṇavai eṉṉum rahasyam uyttuṇarattakkatu*. Tivyārttatīpikai (TAT), p. 88. Deśika's gloss on the first stanza reads: *itiḷ mutaṟpaṭṭa mūṉṟu pāṭṭukku mutalāṇa akṣaraṅkaḷ mūlamākiya oṉṟai eḻuttiṉ mutal naṭu iṟutiyāṇavai*. ("The first syllables of the first three songs in this work represent the beginning the middle and the end of the single letter which is the root [of all]"). MVP, p. 115.

39. The first, an ancient mantra mentioned by the Āḻvārs and by the Pāñcarātra tāntric texts, was thought by the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition to be *Oṃ namo nārāyaṇāya* ("Om: Homage to Nārāyaṇa"); the second—also part of a fully developed Śrīvaiṣṇava theology influenced by the mantras of an earlier tāntric ritual tradition—is *Śrīman nārāyaṇa caranau śaraṇam prapadye Śrīmate nārāyaṇāya namaḥ* ("I take refuge at the feet of Nārāyaṇa joined with Śrī; Homage to Nārāyaṇa, Lord of Śrī"); and the third is from the *Bhagavad Gītā* 18.66: *sarva dharmān parityajya, mām ekam śaraṇam vraja/ āhaṃ twā sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi, mā sucaḥ!* ("Giving up all dharmas, take refuge in me alone; I will save you from all sins: do not grieve!"). For a detailed analysis of the Śrīvaiṣṇava exegesis of these mantras, see Patricia Y. Mumme, *The Śrīvaiṣṇāva Theological Dispute*, pp. 273–75.

40. D. Ramaswamy Ayyangar, *Amalaṇātippirāṉ*, 13.

41. Ibid., 14.

42. See Deśika's exuberant rereading: *rāvaṇavatam panṇiṇa vīralakṣmiyuṭaṇē niṇṟa aḻakaik kaṇṭu prahmātikaḷ stōtram paṇṇa, apsarassukkaḷ maṅkaḻa nruttam paṇṇiṇārpōlē* ("It's as if—seeing the radiant beauty of the killer of Rāvaṇa who abides with his wife, Vīralakṣmī, at his side—the gods themselves, beginning with Brahmā, sang praises and the heavenly apsaras performed auspicious dances"). MVP, p. 133.

43. In Deśika's concise phrasing: *capalarāṇa saṃsārikaḷukku nitarṣaṇamāka vānaravarkkam nānāśākaiyiluḷḷa kṣudra palaṅkaḷai pujippataṟkāka* . . . (". . . this band of monkeys, so devoted to the trifling, vile fruits which hang from the various branches of trees, can be compared to a ragtag group of transmigrators"). MVP, p. 127. See also Aṇṇaṅkarācārya, TAT, p. 91.

44. The Tamil compound *anticanti*, a combination of the two words, means "morning and evening," i.e., continuance, perpetuity. The Tamil word is obviously derived from the Sanskrit *sandhi*, a "joining," "connecting."

45. *āśritaruṭaiya ajñānāntakārattaik kaḷikkavalla saṃyakjñānasūryōtayattiṟkup pūrvasantyaipōlavum, avarkaḷuṭaiya tāpatrayaṅkaḷai kaḷikkaikkup paścimasantyaipōlavum pukaṃta niṟattaiyuṭaittāṇa cevvaratta uṭaiyāṭaiyum* ("The blood-red cloth which has the tawny hue deep as twilight to extinguish the burning afflictions of those who take refuge [in the Lord], and the red glow of dawn that heralds the arising of ultimate knowledge and utterly destroys the darkness of their ignorance"). MVP, p. 128; cf. TAT, p. 91.

46. See Aṇṇaṅkarācārya, TAT, p. 87, for a Tamil transcription of the Sanskrit *taṇiyaṇ* verse. The original is as follows: *āpādacūḍamanubhūya hariṃ śayānaṃ madhye kaveraduhitur muditāntarātmā/adraṣṭṛtāṃ nayanorviṣayāntarāṇāṃ yo niścikāya manavai munivāhanaṃ tam*. V. K. S. N. Raghavan, in his translation and commentary on the text, quotes a related "oft-quoted " passage from the Āgamas on the virtues of seeing the Lord from foot to crown: *āpīṭhānmauliparyantaṃ paśyataḥ puruṣotamaṃ/pātakanyāśu naśyanti kim-punastu upapātakam* ("Those who see the supreme person from his pedestal to his crown destroy unendurable crimes —not to speak of their petty offences!"). See V. K. S. N. Raghavan, *Amalaṇātipirāṉ*, p. 87.

47. See MVP, p. 141: *avayavaśōpaikaḷilē āḻaṅkāṟpaṭṭa tamuṭaiya neñcu varuṅki, eṅkum vyāpittu carvāvaya śōpaikaḷōṭum kūṭiṇa samudāya śōpai[yālē]*. . . .

48. His *maṇipravāḷa* phrase is *ovvoru avayavamāka pātātikēcāntam anupavittu*. . . . TAT, p. 87.

49. See Venkatachari's *Maṇipravāḷa Literature of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas*, pp. 93–94: ". . . it is interesting that the commentaries are later called *anubhavagranthas*, a term that is interpreted by the Śrīvaiṣṇavas to mean 'works of enjoyment.' . . . *Anubhava*, which usually means 'experience,' is used by the Śrīvaiṣṇava commentators to mean that experience which is the relish of all kinds of emotional relations with the Lord. The fullness of the experience of different emotional relations is enjoyment. Hence *anubhava* in this literature may be commonly understood as 'enjoyment.' . . . Each commentator on the hymns of the Āḻvārs wished to understand the glory of the Lord as well as to share in the experience of the Āḻvārs. Consequently their imaginative participation in the Āḻvār's hymns gave rise to individuality of style." His summary is particularly vivid on this point: "Śrīvaiṣṇavism can be called a tradition of spiritual enjoyment. The basis of the tradition is the Āḻvārs' enjoyment (*anubhava*) of the Lord. Secondly, there is the commentators' enjoyment (*anubhava*) of the hymns of the Āḻvārs. Because the commentators did not consider their task of commenting a pedantic work, but rather the very embodiment of their own enjoyment, their commentaries in turn became a literature to be enjoyed by the subsequent generations. *In the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition direct enjoyment of the Lord can be indirect enjoyment of Him through the hymns of the Āḻvārs and also the commentaries, which are testimonies of the spiritual experience of the community.*" (Ibid., p. 94; italics mine). Though Venkatachari may be overstating the case a bit, this is an insight crucial to a nuanced comparative study of the history of commentary in Indian philosophy and

literature. See also two excellent studies of the Śrīvaiṣṇava commentators by Francis X. Clooney, "Unity in Enjoyment: An Exploration into Nammāḻvār's Tamil Veda and its Commentators," *Sri Ramanujavani* 6 (July 1983): 34–61, and "Nammāḻvār's Glorious Tiruvallavāḻ: An Exploration in the Methods and Goals of Śrīvaiṣṇava Commentary," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111, 2 (1991): 260–76, along with the recent book-length study by John B. Carman and Vasudha Narayanan, *The Tamil Veda: Piḷḷāṉ's Interpretation of the Tiruvāymoḻi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

50. The coinage originally comes from W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1954). Like Kenneth Bryant, I am generally using the term *icon* "in a sense very different from (and far more literal than) that employed by Wimsatt and Beardsley." See Bryant, *Poems to the Child-God*, p. 75.

51. TAT, p. 88 in his individual word gloss.

52. "*. . . emperumāṉatu tirumēṉiyiṟpiṟanta oru vilakṣaṇa tējassai anupavippār vimalaṉ eṉkiṟār . . .*" Ibid., p. 89.

53. *karumaṇiyākiya raṅkanātaṉai*. TAT, p. 87. "Karumaṇi" can also mean "dark jewel."

54. This reference to the Lord as "dark" or "blue-black" of course is very old in Tamil literature. As early as the poems of the *caṅkam* period Vishnu is known as Māyoṉ ("The Dark One"), most likely a translation of the Northern Sanskrit name of Krishna. For an exhaustive survey of references to this "Dark Lord" in early Tamil literature, see Hardy, Viraha-Bhakti, pp. 119–237.

55. *kaṇṭavarkaḷuṭaiya pāpattaiyum kaḷikkavaṟṟām samudrampōla śyāmaḷāṉa tirumēṉiyaiyuṭaiyavaṉ*. MVP, p. 133. The Sanskrit word *śyāma* ("blue-black") is rich in associations. It can mean, according to Monier-Williams, "black, dark-coloured, dark blue or brown or grey or green, sable, having a dark or swarthy complexion (considered a mark of beauty)"—all of which vividly describe the different colors of an icon at different stages of worship and ornamentation. The immovable sanctum icon body is also often described as the color of "dark emerald," bringing in the spectrum of greens that *śyāma* also implies. Aṇṇaṅkarācārya follows almost verbatim Deśika's phrasing in his own *maṇipravāḷa* gloss (TAT, p. 93).

56. It is interesting to note here that South Indian Christians refer to a bishop as a "tirumēṉi."

57. See Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, p. 202.

58. This is Aṇṇaṅkarācārya's phrase: *tiruvaraṅkap perunakaruḷ teṇṇīrppoṉṉi tiraikaiyāl aṭivaruṭap paḷḷikoḷḷuṉ karumaṇiyākiya raṅkanātaṉai kaṇṇārakkaṇṭu kaḷittu . . .* TAT, p. 87. What is also suggested by this verse is that the river goddess is massaging with her golden waves the shores of Śrīraṅkam like the consort-queens Lakṣmī and Bhū massage the feet of the god (the city and the god are typically metonymns in this literature).

59. *kaṭaliluḷḷa nīrellām vāṅkik kāvērīmatyattilē paṇintōru kāḷamēkampōlē kaṇṭārkkum śramaharamāṇa tirumēṉiyai uṭaiyavaṉ*. MVP, p. 143. For a similar image in Aṇṇaṅkarācārya, see TAT, p. 99. V. K. S. N. Raghavan notes in this context that the early twelfth-century Ācārya Parāśarabhaṭṭar—by tradition a pupil of Rāmānuja—in his *Viṣṇusahasranāmastotra*, uses this image of Vishnu's "lovely dark color like that of a cloud " to explain the name "Kṛṣṇa" (the "black" or "dark" one: in Tamil "Māyoṉ"). See V. K. S. N. Raghavan, p. 101, and Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, pp. 119–237, for a treatment of the history of the term Māyoṉ in Tamil literature.

60. See references in Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, and Freedberg, *The Power of Images*.

61. See Gérard Colas, "Le dévot, le prêtre et l'image vishnouite en Inde méridonale," in *L'image divine: Culte et méditation dans l'hindouisme* (Paris: Éditions CNRS, 1990), pp. 99–114. "Le perception physique de *l'arcāvatāra* et la vision mystique du dieu en tant qu'il est intérieur s'enrichissent mutuellement et définissent un espace 'imaginale' où s'opère la symbiose spiritualle de dieu et de son dévot," p. 103.

62. See ibid., p. 100.

63. Ibid., p. 114: . . . "l'apparition de l'image intérieur, provoquée et contrôlée par le yoga . . ."

64. "La notion de "poupée sacrée" à laquelle nous avons abouti peut s'inscrire dans une problématique plus générale de la relation entre le jeu et le sacré." Ibid.

65. Ibid., p. 109. More work needs to be done on this intriguing form of the deity's *arcāvatāra* in South Indian bhakti. The interface here between street theater and temple *pūjā* is most striking.

66. Ibid., pp. 112–13.

67. See Vasudha Narayanan, "Arcāvatāra: On Earth as He Is in Heaven," in *Gods of Flesh, Gods of Stone: The Embodiment of Divinity in India*, pp. 53–66; here pp. 56–57. Narayanan's source is the Teṉkalai *Guruparampará prabhavam*. The standing *mulabera* of Celva Piḷḷai at Melkote is indeed a lovely image, not as monumental as other major stone images in the Vaiṣṇava *divyadeśas*, such as Varadarāja and Devanāyaka. Its smallness, along with the sweetness of its features (and particularly lovely eyes), is seen as evidence of this image's particular approachability. On both the *mulabera* and the *utsava mūrti* forms of Celva Piḷḷai, there is a small goddess image between the feet, said to be "Bibi " Naicciyār.

68. See Colas, "Le dévot," p. 113: "Il s'agit bien alors d'une poupée sacrée." Much more work needs to be done in this area of "divine dolls" in South Indian bhakti.

69. Narayanan, "Arcāvatāra," p. 57, notes that the *maṇipravāḷa* phrase used to describe the Lord's "delighting in his sport" with the princess (*līlai koṇṭāṭi eḻuntaruḷiyirukkirār*) is "actually a delicate way of saying 'consorting with.'" See also Richard Davis's insightful analysis of this story as humanizing Muslims during a time of interreligious contacts in the late Vijayanagar (*Lives of Indian Images*, pp. 132–35). These stories create Muslims (both the sultan and the girl) who do not destroy images, but who, like Hindus, are sensitive to the allure and grace of an embodied god. At the very least, of course, the sultan is generous and understanding in allowing the devotees to take their precious image back home.

70. See Owen M. Lynch, ed., *Divine Passions: The Social Construction of Emotion in India* (Delhi: Oxford, 1990).

71. The idea of a doll or puppet does not always index the concreteness of divine presence. We need to add to the experiences of the devotee-poet and the priest that of the *śilpin* (artisan; temple sculptor). One of the Tamil words for "doll"—*pommai*—is included in the *śilpin's* lexicon of terms for temple images. The naturalistic plaster relief sculptures (*cutai*), painted in gaudy colors and drawn in bold, exaggerated lines on the outer surfaces of the great temple gate towers and shrines are often called *pommai*, with reference to their lack of divine power (*śakti*). (I am indebted for this reference to Samuel K. Parker's paper, "Aesthetic Categories and Contemporary Image Making in South India," delivered at the American Council for Southern Asian Art IV, Washington D.C., April 1991). In Tamil, as in English, the term "doll" or "puppet" may carry a diminutive connotation unsuitable to describe the icon body of God. When referring to the "tradition" of sacred puppets, we need to specify our indigenous terms and the specific ritual context of which we are speaking. In Colas's words, the Hindu image is a "point of convergence of several perspectives."

72. See his study and anthology of the poems of Nammāḻvār, *Hymns for the Drowning*, pp. 150–52. For an excellent account of the swallowing symbolism in Nammāḻvār and the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition, see chap. 12, "Looking Behind Piḷḷāṉ's Commentary: 'Swallowing' as a Metaphor in the Poem," in John Carman and Vasudha Narayanan, *The Tamil Veda*, pp. 159–79.

73. Ramanujan, *Hymns*, 151.

74. See his *Viraha-Bhakti*, pp. 435–36.

75. See TAT, p. 90: *mutalil emperumāṉ tāṉāka āḻvārai aṭimaikoḷḷa mēlviḻuntapaṭiyum, piṟaku āḻvār rucikaṇṭu tām mēlviḻukiṟapaṭiyum ivaṟṟāl tōṉṟum*.

76. Ibid.: *īṉṟa nākāṉatu taṉkaṉṟukku mutalil mulaiccuvai teriyāmaiyālē tāṉē taṉmulaiyai ataṉ vāyilē koṭukkum; piṉpu cuvaṭaṟintāl nāku kāṟkaṭaikoṇṭālum kaṉṟu tāṉē mēlviḻum. . . .*

77. See his *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 78–79. The entire passage is worth quoting here: "When we recall that the closest analogue to eating the deity's left-over food is a wife's consumption of her husband's, it makes good sense to say that a worshipper stands in relation to a deity as a wife to her husband. Such a comparison is indeed drawn in many contexts, so that priests and devotees are commonly described as wifely servants to the gods and goddesses. That in turn is consistent with the fact *pūjā* is really about honoring a respected guest, for the quality of hospitality in a Hindu home always depends on a wife's work in her kitchen. Thus in a real sense, it is the institutionalized hierarchical inequality between husbands and wives, not between castes, that is most patently reflected in the ritual of *puja*."

78. Ibid., 73. I do not entirely go along with the monistic tendencies of Fuller's notion of divine-human *identity* though the ritual of seeing, smelling, and touching the camphor flame at the end of worship. But I do agree on the importance of this synesthetic experience for the understanding of the visceral nature of Hindu devotion and its unique mingling of difference and identity, hierarchical asymmetry and *momentary* fusion.

79. I do not follow the commentators in my translation of the last line of the stanza, *nīlamēṇi aiyō! niṟaikoṇṭatu eṉṉeñciṉaiyē* ("Ah! [his] lovely dark body has filled my heart!"). Following other such passages in the *Tiviyaprapantam*, I take the verb *koḷ* to be a continuous auxiliary to the verb *niṟai* "fill" (the suggestion here then, literally, is that it fills and will continue to fill my heart") and not as the principle verb "to take" with *niṟai* as a noun meaning "measure," "rectitude." Aṉṉaṅkarācārya glosses the phrase with *mōhikkac ceykai eṉka*—that the body "causes confusion or bewilderment" in the poet's heart. Deśika has a long involved explanation of why one should take the line to mean that the body of God "robbed the heart of its contentment." His theologically significant interpretation has to do with the saint-poet getting too confident in his visionary powers and in the permanence of his experience—believing perhaps that he himself has finally secured for himself the dazzling vision of God. But, in a moment, when he is again confronted with the real majesty of God's form, this confidence is suddenly lost. He is dumbfounded in this stanza before the glory of a transcendent God. This is perhaps an attempt to soft-pedal the powerful experience of union in the line's other interpretation—something familiar in Deśika's careful polemics yet relatively absent in his own poems, as we shall see in the next section. For Deśika's commentary, see MVP, p. 141; see also TAT, p. 98. Hardy has some interesting things to say about this notion of "filling the heart" in other Āḻvār poems in *Viraha-Bhakti*, pp. 278–79.

80. I am indebted here to her paper "Tirupan alvar: Life, Lyrics, and Legacy." The Śrīvaiṣṇava source is the *Āḻvārkaḷ vaipāvam*, 1043–1044, ed. R. Kaṇṇaṉ Cuāmi (Madras, 1987), pp. 262–63 cited in Narayanan's paper. This also happened to the northern bhakti saint-poet Mīrā Bāī. See Hawley and Juergensmeyer, *Songs of the Saints*, pp. 119–33.

81. Colas expresses this quite well: "Du point de vue du dévot idéal, l'Etre et l'Apparaître du dieu ne sont pas séparés. De plus la présence simultanée de Viṣṇu dans les consciences et dans ses multiples sanctuaires témoignant de son universelle ubiquité: les images, intérieures et extérieures, ne sont pas les émanations diverses d'un modèle abstrait qui les transcenderait, mais elles forment l'incarnation multiple d'une divinité unique." ("Le dévot," p. 103)

82. See Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, p. 21.

83. See MVP, p. 114: *pāvaḷarum tamiḻ maṟaiyiṉ payaṉē koṇṭa pāṇperumāḷ pāṭiyatōr pātal pattil/ kāvalaṉum kaṇavaṉumāyk kalantu niṉṟu kāraṇaṇai karuttuṟa nām kaṇṭapiṉpu/kōvalaṉum kōmāṉumāṉa annāḷ kuruvaipuṇar kōviyartam kuṟippē koṇṭu/cēvaluṭaṉ piriyāta peṭaipōl cērntu tīviṇaiyōr taṇimai ellām tīrntōm nāmē.*

84. For examples of the *anubhava* style in the other Āḻvārs, see Periyāḻvār, *Periyāḻvār Tirumoḻi* 1.3 and Toṇṭaraṭippoṭi, *Tirumālai* 16–21. See also analogous poetic genres like the *Tiruppaḷḷiyēḻucci*, or holy "waking poems," where the god is awakened from a long night's sleep for the morning ritual bath, etc.

85. See Nancy Nayar's full-length study of the *stotras* of Kūrattāḻvāṉ and Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, *Poetry as Theology*.

86. This is a vast comparative topic that I can only mention in passing here. The *anubhavas* and the tāntric *dhyānānis* have much in common (there are, most likely, concrete historical connections between them), but there is also much that sets them apart. For an excellent analysis of some important visualization texts in the northern Kashmiri tradition and in the "post-scriptural literature of the Anuttara cult" in the Tamil-speaking south, see Alexis Sanderson, "The Visualization of the Deities of the Trika," in *L'image divine: culte et méditation dans l'hinduisme. Études rassemblées par André Padoux* (Paris: CNRS, 1990), pp. 31–88.

87. This translation and the original text appears in Sanderson, "Visualization of the Deities," p. 61. The parentheses are mine, where I draw attention to the verb used for "visualization, " here a rather awkward (and perhaps corrupt) form of *smṛti*, "to recall," "to remember." This is a common term for visualization (in its form of *anusmṛti*) in the Buddhist and later Hindu bhakti traditions. In private correspondence, Francis X. Clooney has drawn my attention to the fact that Rāmānuja distinguishes between *smṛti* ("remembrance") and *darśana* ("seeing").

88. Ibid., p. 44. Note Deśika's own vigorous description of Sarasvatī as a river in chap. 3.

89. From the *Lalitopākhyāna*, cited and translated in Douglas Renfew Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom: The Texts and Traditions of Śrīvidyā Śākta Tantrism in South India* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 63. For a discussion of Lalitā's power, auspiciousness, royalty, and sensuality, see especially pp. 63–74. On p. 73 Brooks remarks on the bhakti context of this South Indian tāntric goddess: "Śrīvidyā's conception of Lalitā's *sthūlarūpa* ["anthropomorphic form"] and her identification with local goddesses places her squarely within Hindu devotional traditions (*bhakti*) of worship (*pūjā*) based on seeing the deity (*darśana*)."

90. Many of the descriptions of ḍākinīs (some follow the foot-to-head pattern) resemble secular literature in the erotic mode. See Miranda Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment: Women and Tantric Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 156–58. See also David White, "Transformations in the Art of Love: Kāmakalā Practices in Hindu Tantric and Kaula Traditions," *History of Religions*, 38, 2 (November 1998): 172–98, for a detailed discussion of ritual transformations of "erotic" practices, particularly the drinking of female sexual fluids in the ḍākiṇī traditions. White's reading of the Kaula system and the ḍākiṇī texts emphasizes, contra Shaw, the *ritual use* of women (and their precious sexual fluid) rather than a world of mutual "erotic" pleasure. See also older sources such as K. Dowman, *Sky Dancer* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), and K. Dhondup, *Songs of the Sixth Dalai Lama* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1981), for extraordinary examples of Buddhist love songs in the tradition of the tāntric *siddhas*.

91. *yo' sāvādityāmaṇḍalāntarvato, taptakārtasvaragirivaraprabhaḥ, sahasrāṃśuśatasahasrakiraṇaḥ, gambhīrāmbhaḥsamudbhūta-sumṛṣṭanālaravikarasita-puṇḍarīkadalāmalāyatekṣaṇaḥ, subhrulalāṭaḥ, sunāsaḥ, susmitādharavibhrūmaḥ, surucirakomalagaṇḍaḥ, kambugrīvaḥ, samunnatāṃ- savilambicārurūpadivyakarṇakisalayaḥ, pīnavṛttāyatabhujaḥ, cārutarātāmrakaratalānuraktāgulībhiḥ alaṅkṛtaḥ, tanumadhyaḥ, viśālavakṣasthalaḥ, samavibhaktasarvāṅgaḥ, anirdeśyadivyarūpasaṃhananaḥ, snigdhavarṇaḥ, prabuddhapuṇḍarīkacārucaraṇayugalaḥ, svānurū pyapītāmbaradharaḥ.* Text taken from S. S. Raghavachar's text and translation, *Vedārthasaṅgraha of Śrī Rāmānujācārya* (Mysore: Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, 1968), p. 172 (no. 220 in Raghavachar's text). See also J. A. B. van Buitenen's edition, *Rāmānuja's Vedārthsaṃgraha: Introduction, Critical Edition, and Annotated Translation* (Poona: Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute, 1956), pp. 289–90 (no. 134).

92. Hardy, in *Viraha-Bhakti*, p. 245, remarks that "a sophisticated [Śrīvaiṣṇava] *stotra*-literature, which begins already with Yāmuna . . . reaches its greatest heights with Veṅkaṭanātha [Vedāntadeśika]."

93. *śrīraṇkanāthaviṣaye na hārdārcayorbheda iti vyajyate* (lit.: "What is suggested [here] is that, when it comes to Śrīraṇkanātha, the image of God in the heart and his image in the temple are

not different [from one another]"). From Veṅkaṭagopāladāsa's valuable edition of the poem with his own Sanskrit commentary, *Bhagavaddhyānasopānam* (Śrīraṅkam: Śrīvāṇivilās Press, 1927), p. 7 (BDS: Com.).

94. "Napiṇṇai" or "our Piṇṇai," is Vishnu's Tamil consort. In Tamil mythology she is one of Kṛṣṇa's cowgirl (*gopī*) lovers.

95. In DSM, pp. 48–63.

96. *yogārohaparvakramapradarśikeyaṃ stutiḥ* . . . BDS: Com., pp. 2–3.

97. *paṭupratyāhāraprabhṛtiputapākakleśāyāsaṃ vinā* . . . Ibid., p. 5.

98. *alaukikādbhūtasaundaryānubhavena* . . . Ibid.

99. *etadapi bhagavaviṣayakāmasya sopānameva. dhyānaṃ ca nirantarotkaṭakāma eva.* Ibid., p. 3. See also p. 11, where he refers to yoga as *niratiśayānandaḥ*–"unsurpassed bliss." This obviously is related to the Upaniṣadic dictum of Brahman (ultimate reality) as "joy" (*ānanda*) in such texts as *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 3.6.1.

100. *Kumārasaṃbhava* 1.39. Translation from *The Origin of the Young God: Kālidāsa's Kumārasaṃbhava*, trans. Hank Heifetz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 27. Veṅkaṭagopāladāsa quotes only the last two pādas of the verse: *ārohaṇārtham navayauvanena kāmasya sopānamiva prayuktam iti* (p. 3). The entire foot-to-head description is remarkable for its metaphoric energies.

101. See *Viraha-Bhakti*, p. 401: "To provide a definition [of bhakti] in terms of kāma was certainly characteristic of the pronouncedly anthropocentric, sensuous and emotional nature of Āḻvār religion, but in the long run—particularly when the girl frame ceased functioning—bhakti as *kāma* would not be tolerated by Sanskritic ideology, and was altogether abandoned (both as religious experience and as intellectual construct) by Śrīvaiṣṇavism." See also the striking sensuality of Parāśara Bhaṭṭar's description of Lakṣmī (reminiscent of Kālidāsa's *anubhava* of Umā) in his *Śrīguṇaratnākośa* 42–46. For a translation, see Nancy Ann Nayar, *Praise Poems to Viṣṇu and Śrī: The Stotras of Rāmānuja's Immediate Disciples* (Bombay: Ananthacharya Indological Research Institute, 1994), pp. 294–96.

102. See BDS: Com., p. 4.

103. For Hardy's analysis, see "TirupPāṇ-Āḻvār," in *Devotion Divine*, p. 132.

104. For a fascinating parallel verse in the work of a seventh-century Buddhist Madhyamaka philosopher, see Bhāvaviveka's *Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā* 3.16: "When the mind strays like an elephant from the right path, it should be bound to the post of the object [of meditation] with the rope of mindfulness and brought slowly under control with the hook of wisdom." Quoted in M. David Eckel, To *See the Buddha: A Philosopher's Quest for the Meaning of Emptiness* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992), p. 32.

105. See BDS: Com., p. 65: *na kevalaṃ prapattyārohe dṛptā. nididhyāsanārohe'pi dṛptā* ("*dṛptā* not only in the sense of the ascent of spiritual surrender, but also in the sense of deep meditation").

106. For a rich overview of the place of images in the Indian tradition, see Diana L. Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (Chambersburg, Penn.: Anima Books, 1985).

107. *kimapi kimapi mandaṃ mandaṃ āsaktiyogād/aviralitakapolaṃ jalpator akrameṇa/aśithilapariraṃbhavyāpṛtaikaikadoṣnor/aviditagatayāmā rātrir eva vyaraṃsīt.* From Bhavabhūti's play on the later events in the life of Rāma, *Uttararāmacarita*, 1.27, cited in the BDS: Com., p. 71.

108. BDS: Com., pp. 75–76.

109. *agre kimcitbhujagaśayanaḥ svātmanaivātmanaḥ san.* Literally, "[of] he who has the serpent for a couch, becoming his very same self just in front of himself. "

110. *Gāḍām* here covers a rich register of meanings, many of which are associated with liquidity: it describes, according to Monier-Williams, something "dived into," "bathed in," "deeply entered," "plunged into." It also connotes thickness, density, firmness, vehemence. One thinks here of the traditional etymology of the word *āḻvār* to describe the Tamil saints: they are those who are "drowning" in God. See Ramanujan, *Hymns for the Drowning*.

111. There is also a notable *anubhava* of the Lord in Vaikuṇṭha (highest heaven) as seen by liberated souls in Deśika's *maṇipravāḻa* prose *rahasya*, *Paramapatasōpānam*. For a detailed discussion of *anubhavas* from the *Devanāyakapañcāśat* and the Prākrit *Acyutaśatakam*, see chap. 7.

112. See chap. 4.

113. See, for instance, *Devanāyakapañcāśat*, 14, and *Varadarājapañcāśat*, 48.

114. See also Deśika's commentary on verse 9 of Tiruppāṇāḻvār's poem in the *Munivāhanapōkam*, p. 142, where he remarks that the jewels that garland the icon obtain endless beauty (*eḻil*) from God's dark body. D. Ramaswamy Ayyangar, *Amalaṇātipirāṇ*, p. 26, mentions this, too, and also cites a saying among the āraiyars, or singers of the Tamil Veda in temple worship: *āparāṇattukku aḻaku kotukkum perumāḷ* ("The Lord gives beauty to the ornaments").

115. *āruṇyapallavitayauvanapārijātaṃ ābhīrayoṣidanubhūtaṃ amartyanātha/vaṃsena śaṅkhapatinā ca niṣevitaṃ te bimbādharaṃ spṛśati rāgavatī matir me.* In DSM, p. 447. Āṇṭāḷ's similar evocation of the conch-shell and its lucky contact with the "coral lips" (Tamil: *ceyyvāytāṇ*) of Lord Krishna appears in the seventh decade of poems in her *Nacciyār Tirumoḻi*. For a good translation, see Vidya Dehejia, *Āṇṭāḷ and Her Path of Love*, p. 99ff.

116. For examples of such sexual symbolism in the description of icons and *pūjā* as it appears in the early *antātis* of the Āḻvār corpus, see Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, pp. 299–300.

117. For discussion and translations of this *śleṣa*, see chap. 7, "The Anubhava."

118. This is in terms of "accessibility." See the Īṭu, 5. 7. 11 (*Bhagavadviṣayam*, bk.5, p. 321): *arcāvatārampōlē tiruvāymoḻi*. Quoted in K. K. A. Venkatachari, *The Maṇipravāḻa Literature of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas*, p. 21. The Veda is compared to the *para* or transcendental form of God, and *itihāsa* ("history," the epics and purāṇas) to the *avatāra* or incarnational forms of Vishnu.

119. See Cutler, *Songs of Experience*, p. 70.

120. *Varadarājapañcāśat*, 51. See my discussion in chap. 5, sec. 2, "Beauty Untouched by Thought."

121. I have already discussed, using Ramanujan and C. S. Peirce, the "indexical" nature of Deśika's texts, i.e., that they are not outright literal "imitations" (*icons*) of the Āḻvārs, but that they respond to and mirror aspects of the Āḻvār tradition they "imitate" while pointing to (*indexing*) their own local context and set of signifiers. See Ramanujan, "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇas*, pp. 44–45. This indexicality is of course different than what we have viewed as the iconic dimension of the texts themselves, particularly in their *anubhavas*, as "bodies of God."

Chapter 6

1. One example that comes immediately to mind is from Islam. The very rich *shamā'il* and *dalā'il* poetry in honor of the Prophet, as well as the short descriptive *ḥilya* ("ornaments") drawn from early Arabic sources, paints an inestimably richer picture of Muḥammad, and the Prophet's centrality in Muslim piety, than much of the theology would admit. This poetic literature is full of sensuous description of the Prophet's beauty—his face, hair, eyebrows, beard, even sweet odor—a kind of "imaginal" piety that many orthodox *ulamā* over the ages have resisted. Often *ḥilya* are used as talismans, carefully calligraphed and kept in elaborate silver or leather cases. Their words and the Prophet's attributes they catch are thought to possess *baraka*, a spiritual power analogous to Hindu mantras. For a study of such poetic literature, see Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety*, especially chaps. 2 and 4. There is also Michael Sells's recent work on the poetry and poetics of Ibn 'Arabī's mystical texts, and the difference that a focus on the poetry makes in the appreciation of this master poet-philosopher-saint. See his two essays, "Towards a Poetic Translation of the *Fusūs al-Hikam*," in *Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi: A Commemorative Volume*, ed. Stephen Hirtenstein and Michael Tiernan (Shaftesbury: Element, 1993), pp. 124–39; and "Ibn 'Arabi's 'Gentle Now, Doves of the