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The End of the Pāṇḍavas' Year in Disguise

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Author Autobiography

Simon Brodbeck grew up in the northwest of England. He studied at the universities of Cambridge and London, gaining his PhD under the supervision of Alexander Piatigorsky with a thesis on the philosophy of the *Bhagavadgītā*. He has worked at the universities of Edinburgh, London, and, since 2008, Cardiff. His research has focused on the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, using philological, philosophical, and gender-studies approaches. His most recent book is *Krishna's Lineage: the Harivamsha of Vyāsa's Mahābhārata, Translated from the Sanskrit* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

Abstract

This article discusses an ambiguity in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* concerning whether or not the Pāṇḍavas maintained their disguises for a full year. It argues that the text uses this ambiguity in order to provide a psychologically realistic explanation for the war – the war which is mandated in advance as part of a divine plan to address the Earth's reported afflictions, and which is ensured in real time by the actions of divinities in the form of human beings. The ambiguity at the end of the year in disguise makes a success of the text's strategy of presenting a divine plan simultaneous with the human action. The article shows that both human sides – Duryodhana and Yudhiṣṭhira – adhere closely to the *dharma* of the covenant made at the second dicing match.

Discussion focuses on the recognition of Arjuna by the Kauravas in the *Virāṭaparvan*, and its narrative effects. Various characters' perspectives on this recognition event are presented and examined. Bhīṣma says the year was already over, so the Pāṇḍavas are not accused of breaching the covenant. The second half of the article explores the implications of this as they unfold in the *Udyogaparvan*.

The Second Dicing Match

In the *Mahābhārata*, blind Dhṛtarāṣṭra and pale Pāṇḍu were sons of the Bhārata Kaurava king, in Hāstinapura.¹ Their sons were violent rivals from very early on: Duryodhana and his 99 brothers in the elder branch, versus their cousins the five Pāṇḍavas – Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Arjuna, and the twins – in the junior branch. Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the acting king, partitioned the kingdom, and the Pāṇḍavas built a new capital, Indraprastha, in their half.

In due course, Dhṛtarāṣṭra was prevailed upon to host a dicing match in Hāstinapura with Yudhiṣṭhira as special guest. Dhṛtarāṣṭra's brother-in-law Śakuni beat Yudhiṣṭhira at dice repeatedly and severely on Duryodhana's behalf, and the Pāṇḍavas, and more particularly their wife Draupadī, were insulted and physically humiliated. Dhṛtarāṣṭra was ashamed, intervened, and restored what the Pāṇḍavas had lost.

Afterwards, Duryodhana, Karṇa, and Śakuni requested Dhṛtarāṣṭra's approval for a second dicing match, with a single stake. They said to him:

They or we, whoever it be that is defeated at the dicing, must go into the forest clad in deerskins for twelve years. The thirteenth year they should live disguised among people, and if they are found out, again go into the forest for another twelve years.

(*Mahābhārata* 2.66.18–19, trans. van Buitenen)²

Despite his wife's warnings, Dhṛtarāṣṭra approved. So it was proposed to Yudhiṣṭhira:

Śakuni said:

The old man released your wealth and I praise him for it. But there is one more throw, a great prize, listen to me, bull of the Bharatas! If we are defeated by you at the dicing, we shall go into the great forest for twelve years, clad in skins of the *ruru* deer, and live in disguise among people for a thirteenth year; but if found

¹ This paper was first presented at the 36th annual symposium on the Sanskrit Tradition in the Modern World (STIMW), at Trinity College, Oxford, in May 2019. For comments I am grateful in particular to John Brockington, Jessica Frazier, Zuzana Špicová, Lynn Thomas, and two anonymous reviewers.

² *te vā dvādaśa varṣāṇi vayaṃ vā dyūtanirjitāḥ | praviśema mahāraṇyam ajinaiḥ prativāsītāḥ | 2.66.18 | trayodaśaṃ ca sajane ajñātāḥ parivatsaram | jñātās ca punar anyāni vane varṣāṇi dvādaśa | 19 |*. In this article, unless otherwise stated, references are to the *Mahābhārata*, *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṃśa* references are to the Poona critical edition (Sukthankar et al. 1933–71), and translations of the critically reconstituted *Mahābhārata* are quoted from van Buitenen 1973, 1975, or 1978. For alternative translations of some of the quoted passages, see Smith 2009.

out, return to the forest for another twelve years. Or, if you are defeated by us, you must live in the forest for twelve years, together with Kṛṣṇā [Draupadī], clothed in deerskins. When the thirteenth year is full, either the ones or the others must have their kingdom back, as is proper. With this resolve, Yudhiṣṭhira, roll out the dice and play another game with us, Bhārata!

(2.67.8–13)³

Yudhiṣṭhira accepted. The terms were summarised by Śakuni as ‘our sole throw ... for a stake of exile in the forest ... one roll of the dice, for a life in the forest’.⁴ Yudhiṣṭhira accepted again, played, and lost. As Yudhiṣṭhira later remembers it to Bhīma during the exile, it was not Śakuni but Duryodhana who named the stake he accepted. Duryodhana said:

You will, son of a king, for a twelve-year spell
Live unconcealed as you please in the forest,
And another year you will live in concealment
And under disguise with all your brothers.

If the spies of the Bhāratas hear of you
And discover, my friend, how you live that year,
You shall spend as many more years like that,
You must promise this, Pārtha, decidedly!

If in all that time you are not found out
And you artfully fool my runners, O king,

³ śakunir uvāca | amuñcat sthaviro yad vo dhanam pūjitam eva tat | mahādhanam glahaṃ tv ekaṃ śṛṇu me bharatarṣabha || 2.67.8 || vyaṃ dvādaśa varṣāṇi yuṣmābhir dyūtanirjitāḥ | pravīseṃ mahāraṇyaṃ rauravājīnavāsasaḥ || 9 || trayodaśam ca sajane ajñātāḥ parivatsaram | jñātās ca punar anyāni vane varṣāṇi dvādaśa || 10 || asmābhir vā jītā yūyaṃ vane varṣāṇi dvādaśa | vasadhvaṃ kṛṣṇayā sārddham ajinaiḥ prativāsītāḥ || 11 || trayodaśe ca nirvṛtte punar eva yathocitam | svarājyaṃ pratipattavyam itarair atha vetaraiḥ || 12 || anena vyavasāyena sahāsmābhir yudhiṣṭhira | akṣān uptvā punardyūtam ehi dīvyasva bhārata || 13 ||.

⁴ eṣa no glaha evaiko vanavāsāya pāṇḍavāḥ | yūyaṃ vyaṃ vā vijitā vasema vanam āśritāḥ || 2.67.19 || anena vyavasāyena dīvyāma bharatarṣabha | samutkṣepeṇa caikena vanavāsāya bhārata || 20 ||. In between these two verses, manuscripts K4 V1 B D add a line mentioning the thirteenth year: trayodaśam ca vai varṣam ajñātāḥ sajane tathā || 2.586* ||.

Then I say as truth in the Kurus' assembly
You yourself shall have the Five Rivers back!

(3.35.8–10)⁵

After Yudhiṣṭhira's defeat in the second dicing match, two possible outcomes are thus envisaged, depending on whether or not the Pāṇḍavas manage to stay under cover in the thirteenth year.

Scenario and the Divine Plan

The story of the Pāṇḍavas is told to the brahmin Śaunaka and his guests in Naimiṣa Forest, by Ugraśravas, a travelling storyteller. Ugraśravas is telling the story as he previously heard it told by the brahmin Vaiśampāyana to Arjuna Pāṇḍava's great-grandson, King Janamejaya of Hāstīnāpura, at Janamejaya's snake sacrifice. But in the tellings to Janamejaya and Śaunaka, the story of the Pāṇḍavas has been introduced as the story of a great and terrible war that was perpetrated by the gods. Before the Pāṇḍavas were born, Earth travelled to heaven to complain that she was suffering; and as a result of her complaint, the gods collectively agreed to descend as humans and address her problem via a cull of *kṣatriyas* (1.58–61; cf. 1.189; *Harivaṃśa* 41–45).

This divine plan has been explored in the secondary literature in recent decades.⁶ Hudson has argued that the divine plan is not the text's 'definitive answer to why the war took place', that it is 'only one answer among many ... and the epic in the end defers privileging any one of these answers' (Hudson 2013, pp.138–39 n.132). But the divine plan is

⁵ *vane samā dvādaśa rājaputra yathākāmaṃ viditam ajātaśatro | athāparaṃ cāviditam carethāḥ sarvaiḥ saha bhrātr̥bhiḥ chadmagūḍhaḥ | 3.35.8 | tvāṃ cec chrutvā tāta tathā carantam avabhotsyante bhārātānām carāḥ sma | anyāṃś carethās tāvato 'bdāṃś tatas tvāṃ niścītya tat pratijānīhi pārtha | 9 | caraiś cen no 'viditāḥ kālam etaṃ yukto rājan mohayitvā madīyān | bravīmi satyaṃ kurusaṃsadīha tavaiva tā bhārata pañca nadyaḥ | 10 |* The formulation *pañca nadyaḥ*, 'five rivers', is synonymous with the more common singular name *pañcanada*. These terms sometimes denote the Punjab and/or its people (in which case the five rivers are those named at 8.30.35, with Sindhu as the sixth), and sometimes they denote a more restricted locality further southeast, which is apparently the intention here (as at 3.81.14, and perhaps 3.80.99 and 5.19.29; see Kropman 2019, p.97).

⁶ See, for example, de Jong 1985; Goldman 1995; Sullivan 1999, pp.57–80; Feller 2004, pp.267–77; Fitzgerald 2004, pp.56–59; Viethsen 2009; Brodbeck 2009; Hildebeitel 2011, pp.571–85; Hudson 2013, pp.138–39 n.132; Brodbeck in press. Hudson felt able to support her interpretation with reference to my 2009 article, and Hildebeitel felt able to criticise that article on this same point (2011, p.573).

privileged as the definitive answer insofar as it is a superordinate aspect of the story, supplied for the listeners in advance at 1.58–61 by Vaiśampāyana, who is repeating the text taught to him by its composer Vyāsa, the old brahmin genitor of blind Dhṛtarāṣṭra and pale Pāṇḍu.

The text's basic literary strategy is to present the divine plan as something that frames and stands over various discourses in the Kurukṣetra generation and turns them into discourses of the interestingly ignorant. The difference of knowledge between two levels, the *daiva* ('that of the gods') and the human, opens up space for exquisite narrative art.

A phenomenology of myth ... has, as its *object of knowledge*, the content of a text ... as that which comprises its own *different knowledges* ... [T]he differences in knowledge or the different knowledges are the main plot-generating and situation-determining factor.

(Piatigorsky 1993, pp.6, 7)

So it is in the *Mahābhārata*, where the protagonists can seem unaware of the divine context that the audience is in on.

The instance discussed in this article concerns how the *Mahābhārata*, which the listeners know in advance as the story of a great war, manages to become that from the aforementioned narrative position, where there are apparently two possible outcomes, neither of which is a great war. The Pāṇḍavas should get their half of the kingdom back, or go into exile again.

The standard view of how books 4 and 5 traverse this gap has been put variously:

[W]hen the thirteen years passed, the duties of the Kṣatriyas demanded that he [Yudhiṣṭhira] regain the kingdom ... if Duryodhana was not willing to give up a part of the kingdom.

(Klaes 1975, p.89)

[T]he Pāṇḍavas had a kingdom, and they have every reason to try to regain it since they have completed their term of exile ... If he [Duryodhana] admits their right and gives them back their kingdom, or even a part of it, they will have peace.

(Dev 1989, p.79)

Having served the term of exile, the return of the Pāṇḍavas' kingdom is refused, and they prepare for war.

(Brodbeck and Black 2007, p.4)

The standard view thus blames Duryodhana for the war. This fits with 1.1.65–66, where Duryodhana is the tree made of *manyu* (passion, fury) and Yudhiṣṭhira is the tree made of *dharma*; and it also fits with *Arthaśāstra* 1.6.8, which explains Duryodhana's failure to return territory to the Pāṇḍavas in terms of his sin of pride (*māna*).

This article shows that it is not that simple. Without claiming to settle the matter definitively, the article presents circumstantial evidence suggesting that Duryodhana has good reason to think that the Pāṇḍavas *were* discovered before the thirteenth year was out. The article thus explores how, aided by the undercover divine characters within it, the narrative manages to make the war possible without either party knowingly breaching the *dharma* of the covenant. Whether or not the Pāṇḍavas served the full terms of the covenant might depend on whom you ask.

This article approaches the critically reconstituted *Mahābhārata* as a single literary object, and does not speculate about its possible prehistory of variously motivated interpolations and redactions. Elsewhere it has been suggested that the divine plan is a later introduction into a prior text (e.g. van Buitenen 1973, pp.xix–xxi). Perhaps it is possible to imagine a prior text without the divine plan: the war is set up also by forebodings and warnings before and during the first game of dice, and the terrible oaths that are taken on that occasion could only be fulfilled in a great war. But imagining a text without the divine plan seems unnecessary, and since we do not have such a text it also seems unhelpful, at least as far as understanding the text that we *do* have is concerned.

With regard to the issue discussed in this article, it may be helpful *not* to treat the text as a tangle of redactions. In parts of the *Virāṭaparvan* there is considerable discrepancy between the northern and southern recensions (Raghu Vira 1936, pp.xvi–xx, xxvi), and in the *Udyogaparvan* there is a lot of reported speech and sometimes surprising accounts of who said what; but the reconstituted text seems reliable enough, particularly as it and its apparatus are all we have. In approaching the reconstituted text (including the *Harivaṃśa*) as a single literary object, I do not assume any type of prehistory for it, either long (e.g. Hopkins 1901) or short (e.g. Hildebeitel 2001). That the one-hundred-book text was recast into eighteen-plus-one books at the Naimiṣa Forest telling (1.2.70–71), or that what Ugraśravas performed there

represented what Vaiśampāyana performed to Janamejaya at the snake sacrifice, or that Vaiśampāyana performed to Janamejaya what he had learned from its author Vyāsa (1.1.15–19), or that it included Saṃjaya’s report of the war to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, could all just be literary fictions; they cannot tell us about the actual prehistory of the available text.

***Virāṭaparvan* Passages**

In what follows I first present the primary evidence concerning the end of the Pāṇḍavas’ year in disguise. I number the relevant *Virāṭaparvan* passages from 1 to 4, in approximate order of appearance, according to the four perspectives they reveal on the covenant: those of Vaiśampāyana, Duryodhana, Bhīṣma, and Yudhiṣṭhira. Vaiśampāyana’s and Bhīṣma’s perspectives are presented in one speech each; Duryodhana has two speeches, 2A and 2B; and Yudhiṣṭhira’s perspective is not stated explicitly but is evident from several details collected here. Arjuna’s perspective is presented alongside Yudhiṣṭhira’s. The purpose is to present these passages as principal witnesses, before discussing them in light of each other in the sequel.

All of these perspectives, 1 to 4, are presented by Vaiśampāyana, but the first has a superordinate status in that it is his direct account in his own voice. The story that we have is as Vaiśampāyana tells it; perspectives 2 to 4 are the perspectives of characters that he narrates, who speak in voices that he gives them.

***Virāṭaparvan* Overview**

The Pāṇḍavas and their wife Draupadī live for the thirteenth year in disguise in Upaplavya, as court employees of King Virāṭa of the Matsyas. At some point after the death of Kīcaka, King Suśarman and the Hāstinapura Kauravas make a plan, to raid cattle from Virāṭa’s realm (4.29). As it happens, Suśarman and his party draw Virāṭa and his army out from Upaplavya to defend the cattle they are stealing from one side, and then the Kauravas start stealing cattle from another side, which Virāṭa cannot defend. Four of the Pāṇḍava brothers fight alongside Virāṭa against Suśarman and keep their cover. Arjuna Pāṇḍava, in disguise as a eunuch named Bṛhannaḍā, is in the makeshift army against the Kauravas, and is identified by the Kauravas and reported by Droṇa.

1. Vaiśampāyana’s Perspective

After Suśarman's plan for the cattle raid has been made, Vaiśampāyana seems to tell Janamejaya that the thirteenth year was over:

King Suśarman as agreed marched in a southwesterly direction and on the seventh day of the warm fortnight began to rob cattle. A day later all the Kauravas joined forces and on the eighth day robbed the thousands of cowsheds.

Vaiśampāyana said:

It was then, great king, that for the great-spirited and boundlessly lustrous Pāṇḍavas, who had assumed disguises while they were living in Virāṭa's fine city doing chores for the king, the time of the covenant expired. Then, at the end of the thirteenth year, O Bhārata, Suśarman robbed the ample cattle wealth swiftly.

(4.29.27–28, 30.1–3)⁷

2. Duryodhana's Perspective (2A, 2B)

2A. Without Yudhiṣṭhira's permission – Yudhiṣṭhira is not there to give it – but at the instigation of Draupadī-in-disguise and Princess Uttarā, Arjuna-the-eunuch-Bṛhannaḍā goes out as driver for Prince Uttara, to join the cowherds in defending the cows against the Kaurava attacks. Uttara flees at the sight of the Kauravas, and when Arjuna runs after him the Kauravas begin to recognise Arjuna (4.36.29–36). Arjuna then goes off with Uttara to get his hidden weapons. Droṇa says to Duryodhana and company:

Protect yourselves! Array the army! Expect a bloodbath! Watch the cattle wealth! A hero has come, a great archer, the best of the bearers of arms: it is [Arjuna] the Pārtha no doubt, in the guise of a eunuch. It is the valiant Pārtha, the enemy-killing left-handed archer. He will not turn back without giving battle, were he to fight all the bands of the Maruts. Hardened in the forest and trained by [Indra] Vāsava, the champion has become implacable and is going to do battle, no doubt of that. I don't see a fighter to match him, Kauravas! It is said that even the Great God was satisfied by the Pārtha in a duel!

⁷ *sa sma gatvā yathoddiṣṭāṃ diśaṃ vahner mahīpatiḥ | ādatta gāḥ suśarmātha gharmapakṣasya saptamīm | 4.29.27 | aparaṃ divasaṃ sarve rājan sambhūya kauravāḥ | aṣṭamyāṃ tāny agrhṇanta gokulāni sahasraśaḥ | 28 | vaiśampāyana uvāca | tatas teṣāṃ mahārāja tatraivāmitatejasām | chadmaliṅgapraviṣṭānāṃ pāṇḍavānāṃ mahātmanām | 4.30.1 | vyatītaḥ samayaḥ samyag vasatām vai purottame | kurvatām tasya karmāṇi virāṭasya mahīpateḥ | 2 | tatas trayodaśasyānte tasya varṣasya bhārata | suśarmaṇā grhītaṃ tu godhanaṃ tarasā bahu | 3 |*

Karṇa said:

You always malign us with the virtues of [Arjuna] Phalgunā, but Arjuna isn't worth a fraction of me or Duryodhana!

Duryodhana said:

If he is the Pārtha, Rādheya, my task will be finished. Once recognized, they will have to wander once more for twelve years. Or if that is another human in the guise of a eunuch, I shall cast him to the ground with sharp arrows!

(4.37.8–15)⁸

Here Duryodhana implies that at this point, the thirteenth year is not yet over.

2B. Arjuna and Uttara soon return to the front. Arjuna blows his conch, and Droṇa repeats that it is Arjuna. Duryodhana says the thirteenth year is not over, and asks for Bhīṣma's ruling:

King Duryodhana spoke to Bhīṣma, the tigerlike Droṇa, and the very great warrior Kṛpā, 'I and Karṇa have told the teacher repeatedly, and I'll say it again, and I don't tire of saying it: when they were defeated, they were to live in the forest for twelve years and one year unrecognized in some countryside, for that was our stake. Now, the thirteenth year is not over yet, their year of concealment. And now [Arjuna] the Terrifier has encountered us! So, the Terrifier has arrived before their exile was completed, and the Pāṇḍavas shall have to live for another twelve years in the forest! Either their greed made them forget, or confusion has seized us. Bhīṣma should know whether they are still short of time or past the designated period. However, if matters are in dispute, there is always room for doubt, for a matter may be thought to be one way and turn out to be another ...'

⁸ *rakṣadhvam api cātmānaṃ vyūhadhvaṃ vāhinīm api | vaiśasaṃ ca pratīkṣadhvaṃ rakṣadhvaṃ cāpi godhanam | 4.37.8 | eṣa vīro maheṣvāsaḥ sarvaśāstrabhṛtām varaḥ | āgataḥ klībaveṣeṇa pārtho nāsty atra saṃśayaḥ | 9 | sa eṣa pārtho vikrāntaḥ savyasācī paraṃtapaḥ | nāyuddhena nivarteta sarvair api marudgaṇaiḥ | 10 | kleśitaś ca vane śūro vāsavena ca śikṣitaḥ | amarṣavaśam āpanno yotsyate nātra saṃśayaḥ | 11 | nehāsya pratiyoddhāram ahaṃ paśyāmi kauravāḥ | mahādevo 'pi pārthena śrūyate yudhi toṣitaḥ | 12 | karṇa uvāca | sadā bhavān phalgunasya guṇair asmān vikatthase | na cārjunaḥ kalā pūrṇā mama duryodhanasya vā | 13 | duryodhana uvāca | yady eṣa pārtho rādheya kṛtaṃ kāryaṃ bhaven mama | jñātāḥ punaś cariṣyanti dvādaśānyān hi vatsarān | 14 | athaiśa kaś cid evānyaḥ klībaveṣeṇa mānavaḥ | śarair enaṃ suniśitaiḥ pātayiṣyāmi bhūtale | 15 |* . The variant at 4.37.14d in manuscript G2 (*dvādaśāś cānyavatsarān*) is synonymous.

And Duryodhana rallies his troops.

3. Bhīṣma's Perspective

Before battle begins, Droṇa says to Bhīṣma:

[Arjuna] Dhanamjaya would not have shown himself, if their exile were not over ... Gāṅgeya, remember the question that Duryodhana has raised before, and pray answer truly!

Bhīṣma said:

The instants are joined together, and so are the hours, days, fortnights, months, lunar houses, planets, seasons, and years: thus the wheel of time revolves with the divisions of time. Because of an excess of time and the deviation of the luminaries, there are two additional months every five years. So I calculate that to thirteen years there are five additional months and 12 days. Everything promised has been carried out by them, and knowing this for certain [Arjuna] the Terrifier has now come. They are all great-spirited men, all experts in Law and Profit: why should they whose king is Yudhiṣṭhira offend the Law?

The Kaunteyas are not covetous, and they have accomplished a difficult feat. Also, they do not just want the kingdom back by hook or by crook, for then these joys of the Kauravas would have tried to prevail at that very time. [This option was indeed discussed by the Pāṇḍavas and rejected, at 3.26–37.] No, tied by the noose of the Law, they have not strayed from their baronial vow. If it was necessary to decide whether to be called a liar or to meet their doom, the Pārthas would choose death over being false ...

(4.46.16–18, 47.1–9)¹⁰

⁹ *atha duryodhano rājā samare bhīṣmam abravīt | droṇam ca rathasārdūlam kṛpam ca sumahāratham | 4.42.1 | ukto 'yam artha ācāryo mayā karṇena cāsakṛt | punar eva ca vakṣyāmi na hi tṛpyāmi taṃ bruvan | 2 | parājitair hi vastavyaṃ taiś ca dvādaśa vatsarān | vane janapade 'jñātair eṣa eva paṇo hi naḥ | 3 | teṣāṃ na tāvan nirvṛttam vartate tu trayodaśam | ajñātavāsaṃ bībhatsur athāsmābhiḥ samāgataḥ | 4 | anivṛtte tu nirvāse yadi bībhatsur āgataḥ | punar dvādaśa varṣāṇi vane vatsyanti pāṇḍavāḥ | 5 | lobhād vā te na jānīyur asmān vā moha āviśat | hīnātiriktam eteṣāṃ bhīṣmo veditum arhati | 6 | arthānāṃ tu punar dvaidhe nityaṃ bhavati saṃśayaḥ | anyathā cintito hy arthaḥ punar bhavati cānyathā | 7 |.*

4. Yudhiṣṭhira's Perspective

While Yudhiṣṭhira and most of the other Pāṇḍavas are fighting against Suśarman, Bhīma is about to uproot a tree, but Yudhiṣṭhira tells him not to:

Don't commit violence, Bhīma! Let that tree stand, Bhārata, lest the people, when you do your superhuman feats with a tree, recognize you for Bhīma.

(4.32.18)¹¹

Bhīma restrains himself, and Suśarman is captured and his army beaten, without the tree.

On the other battlefield, as mentioned above, Uttara tries to run away when he sees the Kauravas, and Arjuna runs after him to fetch him back, and the Kauravas begin to recognise Arjuna (4.36.29–36). Arjuna then gets his hidden bow and tells Uttara that he is Arjuna (4.39.5); but he reveals this to Uttara as a secret, and Uttara keeps it secret.

Arjuna fights and beats the Kauravas. Before he does so, he announces 'his name' (*nāma ... ātmanaḥ*, 4.48.18b), as per battlefield protocol.¹² We are not told what the name

¹⁰ *vanavāse hy anirvṛtte darśayen na dhanaṃjayāḥ* | 4.46.16ab | ... | *uktaṃ duryodhanenāpi purastād vākyam īdṛśam | tad anusmṛtya gāṅgeya yathāvad vaktum arhasi* | 18 | *bhīṣma uvāca | kalāṃśās tāta yujyante muhūrtās ca dināni ca | ardhamāsās ca māsās ca nakṣatrāṇi grahās tathā* | 4.47.1 | *ṛtavaś cāpi yujyante tathā saṃvatsarā api | evaṃ kālavibhāgena kālacakraṃ pravartate* | 2 | *teṣāṃ kālātirekeṇa jyotiṣāṃ ca vyatikramāt | pañcame pañcame varṣe dvau māsāv upajāyataḥ* | 3 | *teṣāṃ abhyadhikā māsāḥ pañca dvādaśa ca kṣapāḥ | trayodaśānāṃ varṣānāṃ iti me vartate matiḥ* | 4 | *sarvaṃ yathāvac caritaṃ yad yad ebhiḥ pariśrutam | evam etad dhrumam jñātvā tato bībhatsur āgataḥ* | 5 | *sarve caiva mahātmānaḥ sarve dharmārthakovidāḥ | yeṣāṃ yudhiṣṭhiro rājā kasmād dharme 'parādhnyuḥ* | 6 | *alubdhās caiva kaunteyāḥ kṛtavantaś ca duṣkaram | na cāpi kevalam rājyam iccheyus te 'nupāyataḥ* | 7 | *tadaiva te hi vikrāntum īṣuḥ kauravanandanāḥ | dharmapāśanibaddhās tu na celuḥ kṣatriyavratāt* | 8 | *yac cānrta iti khyāyed yac ca gacchet parābhavam | vṛṇuyur maraṇam pāṛthā nānṛtatvam katham cana* | 9 |. After 4.47.4, manuscripts T G M (the southern recension) add a line in which Bhīṣma states that the thirteenth year expired on the day before Arjuna was recognised: *pūrvedyuḥ eva nirvṛtte tato bībhatsur āgataḥ* | 4.854* |. At the same place, manuscript D7 adds a verse in which Bhīṣma specifies the period of time that requires the addition of one intercalary month: *gate varṣadvaye caiva pañcapakṣe dinadvaye | divasasyāṣṭame bhāge pataty eko 'adhimāsakaḥ* | 4.855* |. After 4.47.6, manuscripts T G2 add a verse emphasising Yudhiṣṭhira's dharmic proclivities: *kāmāt krodhāc ca lobhāc ca kāmakrodhabhayād api | snehād vā yadi vā mohād dharmam nātyeti dharmajāḥ* | 4.856* |.

¹¹ *mā bhīma sāhasaṃ kāṛṣṭis tiṣṭhatv eṣa vanaspatiḥ | mā tvā vṛkṣeṇa karmāṇi kurvāṇam atimānuṣam | janāḥ samavabudhyeran bhīmo 'yam iti bhārata* | 4.32.18 |. The southern-recension passage 4.592*, interpolated after this verse, repeats and underlines the same point.

was that he announced. If it had been Bṛhannaḍā, then Arjuna would be continuing in disguise. The Kauravas knew it was him by then anyway, and I suspect that he told them ‘his own name’. His monkey is on his standard. From a Pāṇḍava perspective, voluntarily revealing his true identity here would be monumentally foolish. From the perspective of the gods, it is imperative for Duryodhana to recognise Arjuna (which, with Droṇa’s help, he already has anyway).

During Arjuna’s battle against the Kauravas, he and Droṇa hug each other (*samāśliṣṭau tadānyonyam*, 4.53.13a) and he tells Droṇa that ‘We have lived our spell in the forest and now seek requital.’¹³ Here Arjuna seems already to know Bhīṣma’s ruling. Arjuna also speaks to Karṇa: Arjuna mentions having been ‘tied by the noose of the Law’ during the first dicing scene (or he would have dealt with Karṇa there and then; *dharmapāśanibaddhena*, 4.55.5a). Karṇa takes the phrase as a hint (4.55.9a) and segues into the covenant made at the second dicing scene:

If so far you have carried out the stay in the forest as promised, now you, self-styled expert on the Law, wretchedly seek to break the covenant.

(4.55.10)¹⁴

Arjuna also speaks to Duryodhana, announcing that he is ‘The third of the Pārthas’ (*pārthas tṛtīyo*, 4.60.17b).

After the Kauravas have been sent packing, Arjuna tells Uttara:

¹² *tathaiva gatvā bībhatsur nāma viśrāvya cātmanaḥ* | 4.48.18ab |.

¹³ *uṣitāḥ sma vane vāsaṃ pratikarma cikīrṣavaḥ* | 4.53.16ab |.

¹⁴ *yadi tāvad vane vāso yathoktaś caritas tvayā | tat tvam dharmārthavit kliṣṭaḥ samayaṃ bhettum icchasi* | 4.55.10 |.

Now you must send cowherds to hurry to the city and tell the good news and proclaim your victory.

At Arjuna's bidding, Uttara then quickly gave orders to messengers: 'Proclaim my triumph!'

(4.62.10–11)¹⁵

When Uttara returns to Virāṭa's court he credits his victory to 'a son of a god' who has since vanished (4.64.19–33), though he says 'I fancy he will reappear tomorrow or the day after'.¹⁶ This speech is apparently made while Yudhiṣṭhira is within earshot – he is certainly there for the preceding events in the same chapter – but we have no access to his thoughts about it. Vaiśampāyana emphasises that the secret between Arjuna and Uttara is a secret also kept from Yudhiṣṭhira:

[Arjuna] Kaunteya had secretly worked out with Uttara a plan concerning their entire task with respect to King Yudhiṣṭhira, and so he [Arjuna] cheerfully carried it out, that bull of the Bhāratas, together with [Uttara] the Matsya's son, O bull among men.

(4.64.36–37)¹⁷

¹⁵ *gacchantu tvaritās caiva gopālāḥ preṣitās tvayā | nagare priyam ākhyātum ghoṣayantu ca te jayam | 4.62.10 | uttaras tvaramāṇo 'tha dūtān ājñāpayat tataḥ | vacanād arjunasyaiva ācakṣadhvaṃ jayaṃ mama | 11* l. In 4.62.11 I have modified van Buitenen's translation to put *vacanād arjunasyaiva* outside Uttara's speech; when the messengers arrive at court they say nothing about Arjuna, they just proclaim Uttara's triumph. Verse 4.62.11 is rare in that the reconstituted text follows just the southern manuscripts (T G M). The northern manuscripts (Ś1 K B D) substitute: *athottaras tvaramāṇaḥ sa dūtān ājñāpayat vacanāt phālgunasya | ācakṣadhvaṃ vijayaṃ pāṛthivasya bhagnāḥ pare vijitās cāpi gāvaḥ | 4.1057** | 'Then, following Phālguna's instructions, Uttara quickly gave orders to messengers: "Proclaim the prince's triumph. The enemies are defeated and the cows won back"' (my translation). The word *pāṛthiva* ('prince' Uttara) can play on Arjuna's name Pārtha (*pāṛthiva* ≈ *pārtha* + *iva*). Normally when the two recensions diverge and there is no compelling reason to prioritise one or the other variant, the reconstituted text follows the northern recension, and has a wavy line printed underneath it (Sukthankar 1933, pp.xci–xcii, cii). Raghu Vira, the critical editor of the *Virāṭaparvan*, said: 'we have uniformly kept the sequence of the North, that being, on the whole, the purer tradition. The wavy line is subjected to the same principle. Only in rare cases have we found reason strong enough to override this principle and put above the wavy line an S reading, e.g. 4. 4. 39^{ab}; 62. 11^{abcd}' (Raghu Vira 1936, p.xxvi, my underlining).

¹⁶ *sa tu śvo vā paraśvo vā manye prādurbhaviṣyati | 4.64.32cd* l.

¹⁷ *mantrayitvā tu kaunteya uttareṇa rahas tadā | itikartavyatām sarvām rājany atha yudhiṣṭhire | 4.64.36 | tatas tathā tad vyadadhād yathāvat puruṣarṣabha | saha putreṇa matsyasya prahrṣto bharatarṣabhaḥ | 37* l. For

Two days later, in approximate accordance with Uttara’s prediction, the Pāṇḍavas reveal themselves to Virāṭa (4.65–66). Uttara confirms that Arjuna was responsible for the victory against the Kauravas, but he does not say that they recognised him.

To sum up regarding the Pāṇḍavas. When Arjuna is recognised, the Pāṇḍavas are still maintaining their disguises. They only drop their disguises some days after the recognition incident. Arjuna being recognised by the Kauravas is contrary to the Pāṇḍava plan, and so is Arjuna revealing himself to Uttara. Arjuna knows this, and so he makes Uttara keep their secret for a few days back at court, before he (Arjuna) then announces his brothers and himself by name to Virāṭa, on Yudhiṣṭhira’s behalf, on the appointed day. For all we know, Yudhiṣṭhira never finds out that Arjuna was recognised before that. The subsequent public story at Upaplavya, as voiced by Kṛṣṇa, is that the Pāṇḍavas have fulfilled the covenant (5.1.12, 20). But as Wulff notes, Kṛṣṇa ‘frequently dissembles in order to move everything towards massacre’ (Wulff 2020, p.47).

Implications of *Virāṭaparvan* Passages

When Duryodhana says the thirteenth year is not yet over (4.37.14 and 4.42.4–5, in passages 2A and 2B), he does not say how much of it he thinks still remains. But Duryodhana and Yudhiṣṭhira, the two relevant parties to the deal made years before, seem to agree on the timing of things, against Bhīṣma (and Droṇa) and Vaiśampāyana. The agreement in principle between Duryodhana (passages 2A and 2B) and Yudhiṣṭhira (passages 4) is the basic premise of the argument advanced below. The recognition incident is apparently withheld from Yudhiṣṭhira by Arjuna and Uttara, and the Pāṇḍavas carry on as per the plan, waiting out the appointed period. Because of Bhīṣma’s ruling (to which they are not party), they are not accused of breaching the covenant.

Bhīṣma’s Ruling and Calculation (Passage 3)

these two verses the southern manuscripts substitute: *itikartavyatām sarve mantrayitvā tu pāṇḍavāḥ | nyavasamś caiva tām rātrīm pāṇḍavā dharmavatsalāḥ | putreṇa saha mātsyas tu samprahṛṣṭo narādhipaḥ | tām rātrīm avasad dhīmān samāśvastena cetasā | 4.1120** | ‘All the Pāṇḍavas consulted about their task, and then the dutiful Pāṇḍavas went to bed for the night. The wise king of the Matsyas rejoiced with his son, and went to bed with his spirits refreshed’ (my translation).

Bhīṣma's ruling has two aspects: the calculation, and the additional support in terms of the Pāṇḍavas' character. At first view, the latter aspect does not inspire confidence in the former. The argument in terms of the Pāṇḍavas' character has been suggested to Bhīṣma by Droṇa ('Dhanaṃjaya would not have shown himself, if their exile were not over', 4.46.16ab), but it begs the question. It is thus curious that immediately after addressing the question directly and decisively by means of his calculation, Bhīṣma repeats at some length the argument in terms of the Pāṇḍavas' character, when in fact if his own calculation were secure, the character of the Pāṇḍavas would be irrelevant.

Bhīṣma invokes the *dharma* of following the covenant. He cannot imagine that the Pāṇḍavas under Yudhiṣṭhira would 'offend the Law' (4.47.6d). In his view, though they are 'tied by the noose of the Law, they have not strayed from their baronial vow' (4.47.8cd, quoted above). *Dharma* here is simply the duty to honour the covenant.

The argument in terms of the Pāṇḍavas' character tends towards the kind of principle that is elsewhere mentioned by Yudhiṣṭhira Son-of-Dharma as self-justification. For example, when discussing the proposed polyandry, Yudhiṣṭhira tells Drupada, 'My voice does not tell a lie, nor does my mind dwell on lawlessness! As my thoughts favour it, it cannot be a breach of Law at all!';¹⁸ and Vyāsa confirms that 'There is no doubt it *is* the Law, as Yudhiṣṭhira has said.'¹⁹ Elsewhere Yudhiṣṭhira tells Draupadī that 'By its nature my mind is beholden to the Law.'²⁰

The idea that the Pāṇḍavas are necessarily dharmic is perhaps crystallised in the maxim 'Where *dharma* is, there is victory.'²¹ The argument in terms of the Pāṇḍavas' character carries some weight, rightly or wrongly, for Droṇa and Bhīṣma, but it is not going to convince Duryodhana. Bhīṣma's ruling can only be narratively effective because it includes the calculation.

As we have seen, Duryodhana is already convinced that the thirteenth year is not yet over. But he seems to be compelled by his own juniority to defer to Bhīṣma on this precise

¹⁸ *na me vāg anṛtaṃ prāha nādharme dhīyate matiḥ* | 1.187.29ab = 188.13ab | *vartate hi mano me 'tra naiṣo 'dharmāḥ kathaṃ cana* | 13cd |.

¹⁹ *yathā ca prāha kaunteyas tathā dharmo na saṃśayaḥ* | 1.188.19cd |.

²⁰ *dharma eva manaḥ kṛṣṇe svabhāvāc caiva me dhṛtam* | 3.32.4ef |.

²¹ The words *yato dharmas tato jayaḥ* appear thirteen times in the *Mahābhārata*, spoken by Dhṛtarāṣṭra (5.39.7d), Saṃjaya (5.141.33d; 6.61.16d), Droṇa (5.146.16d), Vyāsa (6.2.14d; 7.158.62b), Arjuna (6.21.11d), Bhīṣma (6.62.34d; 6.117.33d; 13.153.39d), and Gāndhārī (9.62.58d; 11.13.9d; 11.17.6d).

question, and he presumably mentions the possibility of his own error in order to underline that deference.

It is conceivable that when, in deferring to Bhīṣma, Duryodhana mentions the possibility that ‘confusion has seized us’ (*asmān vā moha āviśat*, 4.42.6b), he does so because he is suddenly doubtful, perhaps reflecting on the cognitive errors he made while visiting the Pāṇḍavas in Indraprastha (2.43.3–10). But this seems unlikely. I think Duryodhana expects Bhīṣma to agree with him that the Pāṇḍavas have been discovered before the end of the year in disguise. Janamejaya might consider Duryodhana’s track record of cognitive errors in assessing how likely Duryodhana is to have got the timings wrong; but if he does, he must still reckon with the fact that if Duryodhana has got the timings wrong, then Yudhiṣṭhira seems to have got them wrong too. Janamejaya might remember that Vaiśampāyana described Bhīṣma as ‘knowledgeable about places and times, alert to the facts’ (*deśakārajñas tattvajñah*, 4.27.1); and if he does, he might raise an eyebrow in retrospect. After hearing Bhīṣma’s ruling, Duryodhana says: ‘I shall not give the kingdom away to the Pāṇḍavas, Grandfather!’²²

Bhīṣma’s calculation is discussed by van Buitenen (1978, pp.3–4), whom I paraphrase here in reporting on it. The year made up of lunar months does not mesh with the year made by the solstices. To bring the two into conformity in a lunisolar calendar, two intercalary months have to be added every five years (4.47.3, in passage 3).²³ Thirteen years is equal to five years times two-and-three-fifths. So two-and-three-fifths times two intercalary months should make, to be added for the thirteen-year period, five-and-one-fifth intercalary months, or five months and six days. Thus thirteen solar years would consist of thirteen times twelve lunar months, plus those intercalary five months and six days. But Bhīṣma says (4.47.4) that the intercalary period to be added for the thirteen years is five months and *twelve* days.

If I understand van Buitenen correctly, this discrepancy arises because if two intercalary months must be added every five years, then one intercalary month must be added every two-and-a-half years.²⁴ And thirteen years is five times two-and-a-half-years, plus half a year; so that would require five intercalary months, plus half-a-year’s-worth of intercalary

²² *nāhaṃ rājyaṃ pradāsyāmi pāṇḍavānām pitāmaha* | 4.47.15ab |.

²³ This is also stated at *Arthaśāstra* 2.20.65–66. For further details, see Kane 1974, pp.662–75; Pingree 1973, pp.6–9.

²⁴ In manuscript D7 Bhīṣma states that one intercalary month is added, at the eighth part of the day, after two years, five fortnights (*pañcapakṣe*), and two days (4.855*; see n.10* above). This is erroneous.

days. But Bhīṣma ‘treats the last half year, beginning after the intercalary months inserted ... after two and a half years, as already requiring the 12 days that the entire year needs’ (van Buitenen 1978, p.4).

So Bhīṣma’s calculation is wrong. The premise that he states at 4.47.3 arithmetically requires a conclusion other than the one he states at 4.47.4. But what would the difference mean in practice? The alleged exile period, as Bhīṣma calculates it in months and days, is six days longer than it should be. So if the Pāṇḍavas had been discovered in the last six days of Bhīṣma’s period, they would nonetheless seem to have served their term successfully, were there a higher court of appeal than Bhīṣma himself. But they were not discovered during Bhīṣma’s period. Bhīṣma says they were discovered after its expiry.

The six-day discrepancy in one direction is interesting in view of the several-day time lag in the other direction – between the identification of Arjuna, and the Pāṇḍavas’ self-revelation to Virāṭa at the end of the covenant period as they understood it. But Bhīṣma’s mistake does not explain why he thinks the thirteenth year is over and Duryodhana does not. Even if Bhīṣma had done his sums right, he would still have concluded that the Pāṇḍavas had not offended.

To explain the discrepancy between Duryodhana and Yudhiṣṭhira’s opinion and Bhīṣma’s ruling, we would need to know what intercalary calculation method Duryodhana and Yudhiṣṭhira had used. We would also need to know what day each of these characters thought it was, and what day they thought it was when the exile began. We know that the Kaurava cattle raid began on the eighth day of the ‘warm fortnight’ (*gharmapakṣa*, 4.29.27–28), but we are not told what month this was in, and it would not help even if we were, since we are not told when the exile began.²⁵ Bhīṣma needs to know these dates, though, in order properly to answer the question he has been asked. So it is odd that he does not mention either of them. Unless the date of the start of the Pāṇḍavas’ exile thirteen years ago is so well known to these assembled Kauravas that it needs no restatement, it rather seems that Bhīṣma’s calculation is not only arithmetically incorrect, but also formally incomplete.²⁶

²⁵ For a list and discussion of the ‘twelve instances in the Poona Edition where a concrete date or season is mentioned in connection with the main story’, see von Simson 1999, pp.52–64 (for discussion of the word *gharmapakṣa*, pp.63–64; the quotation is from p.53).

²⁶ This analysis assumes that the Pāṇḍavas donned their disguises no later than the end of the twelfth year. Since it is only during the period in disguise that the Pāṇḍavas can fail in their attempt, in principle it should be important to check not only that the full thirteen years have been served, but also that the period in disguise did not begin late; for if it did, then the total exile period should presumably be extended in order to compensate. It

But as it happened for Bhīṣma on the ground, Arjuna had been recognised, and Duryodhana and Droṇa were pressing Bhīṣma for an authoritative judgement on the question of whether or not the thirteenth year was over – Duryodhana suggesting that it was not, but without giving any reason, and Droṇa suggesting that it was, because otherwise ‘Dhanamjaya would not have shown himself’. So Bhīṣma produced a calculation, acquitted the Pāṇḍavas without their knowledge, echoed Droṇa by defending his judgement with reference to their character, and moved on.

To what extent we understand Bhīṣma here in terms of his role as Kaurava caretaker and to what extent we understand him in terms of his role in the divine plan is an open question. But as the sequel will show, if Bhīṣma is acting in terms of his role as Kaurava caretaker he is doing a disastrous job, for he underestimates the importance of Duryodhana being convinced that the thirteenth year has been properly completed.

Wulff summarises Bhīṣma’s judgement as follows:

Notwithstanding Duryodhana’s doubts, and although only ten months have passed, Bhīṣma asserts that the Pāṇḍavas’ year (twelve months) in hiding is complete (4.47.1–6). There is a 10:12 ratio in the reduced period of their serfdom.

(Wulff 2018, p.87)²⁷

Wulff’s references to ‘only ten months’ and ‘a 10:12 ratio’ are seemingly derived from Vaiśampāyana’s comment that ten months of the year had passed before Kīcaka saw and desired Draupadī-in-disguise (4.13.1; cf. Wulff 2014, p.388; Wulff 2020, p.104). They thus overlook the period between that event and the recognition of Arjuna. There are not two months but only a matter of days between the recognition of Arjuna and the Pāṇḍavas’ self-revelation to Virāṭa. But more importantly, Wulff implies that Bhīṣma whitewashes the Pāṇḍavas. The calculation is just a gesture, an excuse. The upshot is that as far as

is conceivable that Duryodhana is wrong about when the thirteenth year should end, and that the reason he appears to agree with the Pāṇḍavas about this is because the Pāṇḍavas have extended the total period due to having donned their disguises late, after (rather than at) the end of the twelfth year. There is no mention of this possibility in the text.

²⁷ Comparing this with the story of Heracles’s slavery under Omphale, Wulff notes (2018, pp.87–88) that ‘Omphale frees Heracles not when the allotted time has passed, but after the cattle raid when she learns of his feats and his name ... Compare also the 12:10 ratio in the labours of Heracles: he must perform twelve labours instead of ten because Eurystheus refuses to accept the completion of two previous tasks (*Library* 2.5.11–12).’

Duryodhana is concerned, the elders are trying to trump the covenant made at the second dicing match. It is as if they are trying to assert their authority over and against the *dharmā*.

Vaiśampāyana (Passage 1)

Vaiśampāyana seems to support Bhīṣma's view from the outset (Wulff 2020, p.44). How can Vaiśampāyana do this? Does he think that Duryodhana and Yudhiṣṭhira both got the timings wrong? Another look at Vaiśampāyana's comments is in order.

Vaiśampāyana said:

It was then, great king, that for the great-spirited and boundlessly lustrous Pāṇḍavas, who had assumed disguises while they were living in Virāṭa's fine city doing chores for the king, the time of the covenant expired. Then, at the end of the thirteenth year, O Bhārata, Suśarman robbed the ample cattle wealth swiftly.

(4.30.1–3)²⁸

Does Vaiśampāyana confirm some view contrary to that of Duryodhana and Yudhiṣṭhira? This issue hangs on the interpretation of the repeated word *tatas*, 'then'. On one interpretation (favoured by van Buitenen the translator), Vaiśampāyana's statement coordinates the expiry of the covenant at the end of the thirteenth year with Suśarman's attack, which occurred *before* Arjuna was recognised; and so it would seem that Vaiśampāyana confirms Bhīṣma's basic ruling that the year was already over when Arjuna was recognised. But on another interpretation, it might be suggested that the word *tatas* simply places Suśarman's attack approximately 'at the end of the thirteenth year' (*trayodaśasyānte tasya varṣasya*), which is when the covenant expired while the Pāṇḍavas were in disguise at Virāṭa's court.

To help us assess this latter interpretation, let us explore further the use of the word *anta* ('the end'; locative *ante*, 'at the end'). There are many examples in the various descriptions of 'the end of the Eon' (*yugānta*):

At the end of the Eon (*yugānte*), bull of the Bharatas, when little time remains of the last thousand years, all men in general become speakers of untruth.

²⁸ For the Sanskrit, see n.7* above. For *tatas* at 4.30.3a, manuscripts B4 D4.8 T G2 M2.3 read the synonymous *tatra*.

... The countrysides are largely empty, the land is overrun by game and predators, when the end of the Eon comes (*yugānte*), and the students of the Brahman are false. The serfs will say ‘Hey you!’, the brahmins will say ‘Pray, sir!’

At the end of the Eon (*yugānte*) the population increases, tiger among men, and odor becomes stench, and flavours putrid.

(3.186.24, 33–34)²⁹

These verses describe conditions while the *yuga* is nearing its end but has not yet ended. This is made explicit in the first quoted verse. On the other hand, the word *ante* can also mean ‘after the end’:

At nightfall (*divasānte*, ‘when the day had ended’) the heroic Kuru princes, tired from their games, loved sleeping in their outdoor camp.

(1.119.31)³⁰

The word *ante* itself is thus ambiguous. It can mean ‘after the end’ or ‘towards the end’, depending on the context. On the second interpretation of the repeated *tatas* mentioned above, the context is not enough to resolve the ambiguity, since the words *trayodaśasyānte tasya varṣasya* (‘at the end of the thirteenth year’) are seemingly there in order to disambiguate the *tatas*, which accordingly they cannot do with much precision. On this interpretation, then, the two occurrences of *tatas* at 4.30.1a and 3a assert an approximate chronological correspondence sufficient to orient Janamejaya for the narrative that follows, but not sufficient to comment on the discrepancy that follows between Bhīṣma’s perspective on the one hand, and Duryodhana and Yudhiṣṭhira’s on the other.

We have to take this interpretation seriously, not least because if Vaiśampāyana had wanted to comment unambiguously on the matter, he could certainly have done so. As things stand, he seems to leave the matter open. Apart from anything else, this allows him not to

²⁹ *alpāvaśiṣṭe tu tadā yugānte bharatarṣabha | sahasrānte narāḥ sarve prāyaśo ’nṛtavādinaḥ | 3.186.24 | ... | bahuśūnyā janapadā mrgavyālāvṛtā diśaḥ | yugānte samanuprāpte vṛthā ca brahmacāriṇaḥ | bhovādinas tathā śūdrā brāhmanāś cāryavādinaḥ | 33 | yugānte manujavyāghra bhavanti bahujantavaḥ | na tathā ghrāṇayuktās ca sarvagandhā viśāṃ pate | rasās ca manujavyāghra na tathā svāduyoginaḥ | 34 |.*

³⁰ *divasānte pariśrāntā vihr̥tya ca kurūdvaḥāḥ | vihārāvasatheṣv eva vīrā vāsam arocayan | 1.119.31 |.* For similar examples see 1.2.28; 1.70.44.

address the issue of how Duryodhana and Yudhiṣṭhira could both have made the same kind of mistake about when the covenant would expire.

We might wonder why Janamejaya does not intervene to ask for extra clarity on the matter. If Vaiśampāyana leaves things open or ambiguous at the start, perhaps he anticipates a query or request for details that is not forthcoming from Janamejaya. But by leaving things open in a way that is *not* followed by Janamejaya's request for further clarity, Vaiśampāyana leaves all the weight on Bhīṣma's ruling, and thus allows room for Duryodhana's prior view, which effectively enables the war. During Arjuna's battle against the Kauravas Vaiśampāyana says that Arjuna 'roamed about after having been in check for thirteen years',³¹ but this is no less potentially vague than what he has already said in passage 1.

Implications in the *Udyogaparvan*

The issue is consequential, as will now be shown by additional witnesses from the *Udyogaparvan*. Duryodhana must defer to Bhīṣma the elder (passage 2B); but Duryodhana's view needs to be credited, not just because it matches Yudhiṣṭhira's in its timings, but because it supplies an explanation – other than the typical allusion to his bad character – for Duryodhana's intransigence against the Pāṇḍava claim in book 5, where he famously will not give the Pāṇḍavas so much as a pin-prick of land (5.57.18; 5.125.26).

Karṇa tells Bhīṣma:

What is the point of saying it again and again? On Duryodhana's behalf, Śakuni defeated Pāṇḍu's son Yudhiṣṭhira at the time at dicing, and according to the covenant Yudhiṣṭhira went to live in the forest. Without heeding the covenant the prince now wants the ancestral kingdom, relying on the might of the Matsyas and Pāñcālas. O wise one, Duryodhana will not give up out of fear as much as a foot of land, but if Law were to command it, he would make over the entire earth even to an enemy! If they want their ancestral kingdom back, they will have to live in the forest as covenanted. Thereafter let them dwell in Duryodhana's lap with nothing to fear! Their present notion is against the Law; it is plain foolishness! Or if the Pāṇḍavas want to cast aside the Law and make war, they will remember my words when they encounter these chiefs of the Kurus.

³¹ *avaruddhaś caran pārtho daśavarṣāṇi trīṇi ca* | 4.57.14cd |.

We need not doubt Karṇa’s claim that had the Pāṇḍavas served the thirteenth year successfully, Duryodhana would have returned their half of the kingdom as agreed. Duryodhana’s virtue is famous: see his deathbed speech at 9.63; see Gitomer 1992, esp. pp.227–28 discussing Bhāsa’s play *Pañcarātra*, in which Duryodhana does indeed return Yudhiṣṭhira’s kingdom; and see Nīlakaṇṭha ad his 4.47.7 (crit. edn 4.42.7), speaking for Duryodhana: ‘if they’ve fulfilled the covenant, then when they approach me to regain their own share, because of my good disposition, they’ll get it’ (Kinjawadekar 1931, p.66, my translation).³³

In the quoted passage Karṇa effectively accuses Bhīṣma of having judged falsely in favour of the Pāṇḍavas, who in fact were recognised before the end of their year in disguise. At Karṇa sees it, what *dharma* requires is for Duryodhana not to return their kingdom to the Pāṇḍavas yet, and for the Pāṇḍavas to go into exile for a further twelve years. Bhīṣma does not reply to this point. He does not have to; apart from a heavenly voice, there is no higher court of appeal. Karṇa does not bring it up again, and nor does Duryodhana. Duryodhana prompted Bhīṣma’s ruling, so he himself cannot or will not reopen the issue with Bhīṣma now. But he must feel it, and it is a major factor dividing the Hāstinapura house throughout the *Udyogaparvan* and into the war, where Karṇa refuses to fight alongside Bhīṣma (5.153.25) and sits out the first ten days.

Duryodhana’s deferral to Bhīṣma behind the Kaurava ranks means that the Pāṇḍavas are never confronted on the issue. When Dhṛtarāṣṭra sends Saṃjaya as emissary to the Pāṇḍavas at Upaplavya, he says ‘You must call them all blessed for having completed / That difficult sojourn they did not deserve.’³⁴ Dhṛtarāṣṭra thinks the Pāṇḍavas have done everything they promised to.

³² *punaruktena kiṃ tena bhāṣitena punaḥ punaḥ* | 5.21.9cd | *duryodhanārthe śakunir dyūte nirjītavān purā* | *samayena gato ’raṇyaṃ pāṇḍuputro yudhiṣṭhiraḥ* | 10 | *na taṃ samayam ādr̥tya rājyaṃ icchati paitṛkam* | *balam āsr̥itya matsyānām pāñcālānām ca pāṛthivaḥ* | 11 | *duryodhano bhayād vidvan na dadyāt padam antataḥ* | *dharmatas tu mahīm kṛtsnām pradadyāc chatrave ’pi ca* | 12 | *yadi kāñkṣanti te rājyaṃ pitṛpaitāmahaṃ punaḥ* | *yathāpratijñam kālam taṃ carantu vanam āsr̥itāḥ* | 13 | *tato duryodhanasyāñke vartantām akutobhayāḥ* | *adhārmikām imām buddhiṃ kuryur maurkhyād dhi kevalam* | 14 | *atha te dharmam utsṛjya yuddham icchanti pāṇḍavāḥ* | *āsādyemān kuruśreṣṭhān smarisyanti vaco mama* | 15 |.

³³ *yadi te nistṛṇapratijñās tarhi teṣāṃ svāmśalābhārthaṃ mām upagatānām matprasādatas tat prāptir*

³⁴ *sarvān vadeḥ saṃjaya svastimantaḥ kṛcchraṃ vāsam atadarhā niruṣya* | 5.22.2ab |.

Duryodhana’s deferral to Bhīṣma behind the Kaurava ranks also means that the defeat of the Kauravas near Virāṭa’s city can be marvelled at *as if* they did not recognise that it was Arjuna who was defeating them. This would fit with the version of the incident that is presented to Yudhiṣṭhira. According to Vaiśampāyana’s account they *did* recognise him; but because of Bhīṣma’s ruling, the recognition did not count.

We might wonder about wider perceptions of events, on the various grapevines. Available versions are: that Arjuna was recognised but the year was over (as per Bhīṣma’s ruling); that Arjuna was recognised and the year was not over (as per Duryodhana and Karṇa); or that Arjuna was not recognised and the year was not over (as presented by Arjuna and Uttara to Yudhiṣṭhira). If the timings as apparently agreed by Duryodhana and Yudhiṣṭhira were known more widely, that might encourage the latter interpretation. Could such views be overtaken on the basis of technical alleged facts about intercalary months? Could Bhīṣma’s ruling be plausible, as Vaiśampāyana apparently intends?

Sufficient Proof

When Saṃjaya later returns from Upaplavya, he relays Kṛṣṇa’s message to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Bhīṣma, and Droṇa, which includes the following:

Neither among the Gods, Rākṣasas, or men, nor among Yakṣas, Gandharvas, and Snakes do I see anyone who could counter Arjuna in battle. That great marvel which is recounted, the encounter of the one and the many at the city of Virāṭa, is sufficient proof. It is sufficient proof that the son of Pāṇḍu, all by himself, broke them all at the city of Virāṭa and put them to flight in all directions. In no one but [Arjuna] the Pārtha is found such force, power, might, speed, deftness, perseverance, and fortitude!

(5.58.25–28)³⁵

³⁵ *devāsuramanuṣyeṣu yakṣagandharvabhogiṣu | na taṃ paśyāmy ahaṃ yuddhe pāṇḍavaṃ yo 'bhyayād raṇe* | 5.58.25 | *yat tad virāṭanagare śrūyate mahad adbhutam | ekasya ca bahūnāṃ ca paryāptaṃ tan nidarśanam* | 26 | *ekena pāṇḍuputreṇa virāṭanagare yadā | bhagnāḥ palāyanta diśaḥ paryāptaṃ tan nidarśanam* | 27 | *balam vīryam ca tejaś ca śīghratā laghuhastatā | aviśādaś ca dhairyam ca pārthān nānyatra vidyate* | 28 |. These verses are absent from the southern manuscripts, where also the chapter appears in a different place (see De 1940, pp.xxx, 275–78).

There are two aspects here. One aspect is that no one – certainly not the Kauravas – can prevail against Arjuna in battle; proof of this is that he defeated them at Virāṭa’s city (vv.25–27). The other aspect, in the last verse here, is that the one who defeated the Kauravas at Virāṭa’s city must have been Arjuna; as if he was not recognised at the time, but the penny dropped later with a clang, after the Pāṇḍavas revealed themselves. Indeed, here it is almost as if Saṃjaya is revealing to the blind Dhṛtarāṣṭra that the warrior who frustrated the Kauravas’ cattle raid was in fact Arjuna. Duryodhana, as we have seen, knew this at the time.³⁶

In the quoted passage, Kṛṣṇa and Saṃjaya are mainly telling Dhṛtarāṣṭra that the Kauravas will lose against the Pāṇḍavas. Dhṛtarāṣṭra later says the same thing to Duryodhana:

The fact that your force was shattered along with that of your brothers at the city of Virāṭa, before your very eyes, after they had let go of the cattle in panic – the great marvel that is recounted of the battle of the one and the many at that city, is sufficient proof. Arjuna wrought that alone – how much more will they achieve all together! Recognize your fellow-brethren, and provide them with a living!

(5.63.14–16)³⁷

Here there is no suggestion that Arjuna was not recognised at the time. It must be particularly galling for Duryodhana that the scene held up as proof of Arjuna’s superiority is the one in which Arjuna, in Duryodhana’s view, breached the covenant.

Kṛṣṇa later takes the Pāṇḍavas’ (i.e., Yudhiṣṭhira’s) message to Dhṛtarāṣṭra:

At your honor’s behest we and our followers have suffered misery while we lived in the forest for these twelve years, and also for a thirteenth year living unknown

³⁶ The idea that the Kauravas did not recognise Arjuna reflects the idea that Duryodhana in particular did not or would not recognise Kṛṣṇa’s divinity (Gitomer 1992). But Kṛṣṇa’s divinity and Bṛhannaḍā’s identity are different issues. For the parallel between Viṣṇu (etc.) in hiding as Kṛṣṇa (etc.), and the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī in hiding at Virāṭa’s court, see Goldman 1995. Duryodhana did not identify Arjuna for himself: passages 2A and 2B both follow Droṇa’s identifications of Arjuna, and in passage 2A Duryodhana just says that *if* it is Arjuna then the covenant is breached. By the time Arjuna announces his name (whatever it is) at the start of the battle, Uttara is sworn to secrecy and Bhīṣma has made his ruling.

³⁷ *yat tad virāṭanagare saha bhrāṭṛbhir agrataḥ | utsrjya gāḥ susaṃtrastaṃ balaṃ te samaśṛyata | 5.63.14 | yac caiva tasmin nagare śrūyate mahad adbhutam | ekasya ca bahūnāṃ ca paryāptaṃ tan nidarśanam | 15 | arjunas tat tathākārṣīt kiṃ punaḥ sarva eva te | sabhrāṭṛṇ abhijānīhi vṛṭtyā ca pratipādaya | 16 |.*

among people. We were determined, king, thinking that our father [i.e. you, Dhṛtarāṣṭra] would stand by the covenant. We have not broken the compact: the brahmins know it full well, father. Therefore stand by your covenant with us, bull of the Bharatas! We have suffered enough, king; now we should regain our share of the kingdom. Pray save us, joining Law and Profit correctly.

(5.93.40c–44b)³⁸

Kṛṣṇa is Yudhiṣṭhira’s mouthpiece here. Again *dharma* is connected with doing right by the covenant. Kṛṣṇa’s story is that the final year was properly served, that ‘the brahmins know it full well’, and that Dhṛtarāṣṭra must thus restore the Pāṇḍavas to their old territory.

What is the view of ‘the brahmins’? Is it that Arjuna was not recognised, or that the year had already elapsed when he was? What is Yudhiṣṭhira’s view? What is Arjuna’s? To what extent can Bhīṣma’s ruling give Arjuna and Yudhiṣṭhira an ‘out’, when they thought that the year had not yet ended at that point? These latter questions are academic because by now it has long been far too late for the Kauravas to claim that they recognised Arjuna before the thirteenth year was over. At the end of the *Āraṇyakaparvan* the god Dharma granted the boon, at his son Yudhiṣṭhira’s request, that the Pāṇḍavas would not be recognised during the thirteenth year (3.298.15–19); and this boon has effectively come true, regardless of whether Arjuna was recognised, and regardless of whether this was before or after the end of the thirteenth year.³⁹

³⁸ *bhavataḥ śāsanād duḥkham anubhūtaṃ sahanugaiḥ* | 5.93.40cd | *dvādaśemāni varṣāṇi vane nirvyuṣitāni naḥ* | *trayodaśaṃ tathājñātaiḥ sajana parivatsaram* | 41 | *sthātā naḥ samaye tasmin piteti kṛtaniścayāḥ* | *nāhāśma samayaṃ tāta tac ca no brāhmaṇā viduḥ* | 42 | *tasmin naḥ samaye tiṣṭha sthitānām bharatarṣabha* | *nityaṃ saṃkleśitā rājan svarājyāṃśaṃ labhemahi* | 43 | *tvaṃ dharmam arthaṃ yuñjānaḥ samyaṅ nas trātum arhasi* | 44ab |.

³⁹ At 4.1.7 Arjuna reassures Yudhiṣṭhira that because of the boon, they will not be recognised. Kṛṣṇa/Yudhiṣṭhira’s comment that ‘the brahmins know it full well’ cannot refer to Dhaumya’s words on behalf of the brahmins at 3.299.9–19, because Dhaumya does not explicitly say (as Dharma does) that the Pāṇḍavas will not be recognised during the thirteenth year, but only that after living in hiding they will regain their kingdom. Nonetheless these are perhaps the brahmins that Kṛṣṇa/Yudhiṣṭhira’s comment refers to, since at 4.1.2–3 Yudhiṣṭhira is said to have told them everything about the boons granted by Dharma. These are also potentially some of the same brahmins listed as Pāṇḍava entourage at 3.25–27 at the start of the exile, whose support Baka Dālbhya says Yudhiṣṭhira will need.

Kṛṣṇa later addresses Duryodhana and repeats the nub of his earlier message to Dhṛtarāṣṭra (which Duryodhana has already heard), again holding up the notion of ‘sufficient proof’ to Duryodhana as he tells him Arjuna will beat them all:

What man can fight him who defeated Gods, Gandharvas, Yakṣas, Asuras, and Snakes in the Khāṇḍava Tract? Likewise there is the report of that great miracle near Virāṭa’s city with the one and the many – it is sufficient proof.

(5.122.52–53)⁴⁰

Here Arjuna’s legendary performance in the Khāṇḍava Forest massacre (together with Kṛṣṇa, 1.214–25) is mentioned alongside his recent performance against the Kauravas as sufficient proof that he will defeat them in the war. But is it also as if there is not ‘sufficient proof’ that the Kauravas recognised Arjuna on that occasion (they did not appeal)? In between the lines Kṛṣṇa is crowing about Duryodhana’s submission to Bhīṣma, and/or his failure to recognise Arjuna. And Duryodhana cannot rise to it.

Yet Duryodhana can and does claim to Kṛṣṇa, in front of the assembled Kauravas, that he has done nothing wrong, and asks Kṛṣṇa what exactly the Pāṇḍavas are complaining about (5.125.5–11). And when in his reply Kṛṣṇa lists many of Duryodhana’s ancient misdemeanours, including plotting a dicing match to win the Pāṇḍavas’ kingdom (5.126.4–15), Kṛṣṇa conspicuously does *not* accuse Duryodhana of renegeing on the covenant made at the second dicing match. With regard to the current situation, it seems that the most Kṛṣṇa can claim is that because of his track record, Duryodhana should be guilty now too:

Now, with such a mentality toward the Pāṇḍavas, but always dissembling, are you *not* at fault in regard to the great-spirited Pāṇḍavas?

(5.126.16)⁴¹

Kṛṣṇa seems to know that Duryodhana cannot directly be accused of renegeing on the covenant, which really would be the only proximate justification for the Pāṇḍavas’ complaint

⁴⁰ *yaḥ sa devān sagandharvān sayakṣāsurapannagān | ajayat khāṇḍavaprasthe kas taṃ yudhyeta mānavaḥ | 5.122.52 | tathā virāṭanagare śrūyate mahad adbhutam | ekasya ca bahūnāṃ ca paryāptam tan nidarśanam | 53 |*

⁴¹ *evambuddhiḥ pāṇḍaveṣu mithyāvṛttiḥ sadā bhavān | katham te nāparādho ’sti pāṇḍaveṣu mahātmasu | 5.126.16 |*

against him. Yet at the same time, Duryodhana knows that because of Bhīṣma and the brahmins, the Pāṇḍavas cannot be accused of failing to complete their year in disguise.

In the message later sent via Ulūka, Duryodhana says to Yudhiṣṭhira:

For no less than twelve years you lived in the forest, banished from your hearth,
and you lodged for another year in a state of servitude to Virāṭa. Now be a man!

(5.158.8–9)⁴²

Here Duryodhana is resigned to Bhīṣma's ruling, because by now, regardless of the *dharma* of the covenant, both sides are ready and willing to fight anyway.

The Five Villages Offer

We saw earlier that Uttara kept Arjuna's identity secret for the few days in between the recognition incident and the lifting of the Pāṇḍavas' disguise. Arjuna wanted the victory against the Kauravas to be credited to Uttara in order not to be in the spotlight himself. Yudhiṣṭhira, however, as soon as he hears that Bṛhannaḍā was accompanying Uttara, is sure that the Kauravas will have been defeated, and says so to Virāṭa (4.63.15–16, 21, 37, 41–42). Perhaps he is holding his breath during those intervening days, half-expecting Saṃjaya to arrive with the news that Arjuna was recognised and the Pāṇḍavas must serve another twelve years; or perhaps he trusts in Dharma's boon.

After the Pāṇḍavas have revealed themselves, does Yudhiṣṭhira ever find out that Arjuna was recognised? Not as far as we are explicitly told. But perhaps he might suspect so. And would he then suspect that something has happened behind the scenes to prevent this being publicly announced? It is hard to tell. If he does suspect that Arjuna was recognised, he could just be imagining it. But if he does suspect it, he can presumably anticipate Duryodhana's attitude to the idea that the Pāṇḍavas should receive their kingdom back.

This consideration can cast new light on Yudhiṣṭhira's offer to settle for just five villages. This offer is mentioned by Yudhiṣṭhira at 5.31.18–20, by Duryodhana at 5.54.29, by Yudhiṣṭhira again at 5.70.14–16, by Draupadī at 5.80.6–8, by Vidura at 5.85.9, and by Kṛṣṇa at 5.148.14–16. According to the standard view (whereby the Pāṇḍavas are in the right and served the thirteenth year successfully), this offer is a noble gesture, indicating Yudhiṣṭhira's

⁴² *dvādaśaiva tu varṣāṇi vane dhiṣṇyād vivāsītāḥ | saṃvatsaram virāṭasya dāsyam āsthāya coṣītāḥ | 5.158.8 | ... puruṣo bhava || 9 ||*

desire for peace at almost any price (see e.g. Klaes 1975, pp.94–98). According to Duryodhana, this offer is evidence of Yudhiṣṭhira’s fear of the Kaurava army (5.54.29). But if Yudhiṣṭhira suspects that Arjuna was recognised, and thus that the Pāṇḍavas have not yet discharged the covenant (notwithstanding Dharma’s boon and the absence of an accusation to that effect), and if he suspects that this is also Duryodhana’s view (which it is), then the offer to settle for five villages could potentially be a coded compromise request whereby the Pāṇḍavas, rather than serving a further twelve years in the forest, would be allowed to return to *kṣatriya* operations on an initially infinitesimal scale, against (or softening) the covenant.

We are in a very hypothetical space here. But in terms of *varṇadharmā*, there is a problem with *kṣatriyas* like the Pāṇḍavas living in the woods with no land to rule, as if they were brahmins. Kṛṣṇa states this bluntly when he tells Yudhiṣṭhira that ‘Mendicancy is not a baron’s business, lord of the people.’⁴³ Vidura too, without committing himself on the question of whether the Pāṇḍavas have served their exile according to the covenant, tells Dhṛtarāṣṭra that Yudhiṣṭhira must be restored to his *kṣatriyadharmā* and his *rājadharmā*.⁴⁴

Duryodhana, however, will remember what transpired last time this happened, when Dhṛtarāṣṭra partitioned the kingdom and gave the Pāṇḍavas the poorer half. Before long, they were extremely prosperous and powerful. At the second dicing match Duryodhana promised that he would give ‘the Five Rivers’ back to the Pāṇḍavas if they maintained their disguises successfully (3.35.10, quoted on pp.3–4* above), and Yudhiṣṭhira’s request for five villages may be intended to play on Duryodhana’s earlier choice of words in the complex and unexpected circumstances that have now arisen. But even in these circumstances, Duryodhana would uphold the *dharma* of the covenant: the Pāṇḍavas are not yet entitled to any of their former territories.

⁴³ *na ca tan naiṣṭhikaṃ karma kṣatriyasya viśāṃ pate* || 5.71.3ab ||.

⁴⁴ *kṣātrād dharmād dhīyate pāṇḍuputras taṃ tvam rājan rājadharme niyūṅkṣva* || 5.40.27cd ||. Ganguli translates: ‘Yudhishtira, the son of Pandu, is falling off from the duties of the Kshatriya order. Place him, therefore, O king, in a position to discharge the duties of kings’ (Ganguli 2000, p. 90). Garbutt and Smith give the same impression (Garbutt 2008, p.365; Smith 2009, p.302), but van Buitenen’s translation of this line could potentially suggest, erroneously, that Vidura sides with Duryodhana and Karṇa – that is, that the Pāṇḍavas have breached the covenant and that Dhṛtarāṣṭra should make them serve another twelve years: ‘Pāṇḍu’s son has fallen short of baronial Law; enjoin you upon him, king, the Law of kings.’ (In van Buitenen’s translation this verse, and seventeen previous long-metre verses in the same chapter, should have been printed as indented quatrains.) For *kṣātrād dharmād dhīyate* (i.e. *hīyate*), compare Bhīṣma’s *na celuḥ kṣatriyavratāt* at 4.47.8d (n.10* above; passage 3).

Conclusion

In our survey of *Virāṭaparvan* and *Udyogaparvan* passages, we have generally treated all characters as human characters. But these are not just human characters; most of them are also gods. Arjuna is Indra (1.61.84), Draupadī is Śrī (1.61.95–97), Kṛṣṇa is Viṣṇu (1.61.90), Yudhiṣṭhira is Dharma (1.61.84), Vidura is Dharma too (1.57.81), Bhīṣma is Dyaus the Vasu (1.61.68–70; 1.93), Droṇa is Bṛhaspati (1.61.63), Virāṭa is one of the Maruts (1.61.76), Dhṛtarāṣṭra is a king of the *gandharvas* (15.39.8), Karṇa is Sūrya (1.61.89), Duryodhana is Kali (1.61.80), and Śakuni is Dvāpara (1.61.72). Although these last three human characters are ‘on the wrong side’ in that they oppose the Pāṇḍavas, nonetheless *all* these characters are on the *same* side in that they are, at some level, working in terms of the divine plan, to engineer a great *kṣatriya* massacre. This divine plan and almost all of these divine identities are known to the listeners from 1.58–61 long before the events of the *Virāṭaparvan* and *Udyogaparvan* are narrated.

The general ambiguity between divine and human motivations is one of the beauties of the narrative. Overall, though, the divine plan makes no sense unless, collectively and eventually, the characters bring the war about *because of* their divine identities.

In this article we have seen how, when the story seems set to lead to the Pāṇḍavas either getting their kingdom back or going into exile for a further twelve years, circumstances contrive a situation where, without either Yudhiṣṭhira or Duryodhana behaving dishonourably, both of them are left with incompatible expectations of what should happen, both will be offended in terms of the covenant (that is, in terms of *dharma*) if they do not get their way, and war is the result.

But we can say more than that ‘circumstances contrive’ this situation. We can point in particular to the role of Sairandhrī-Draupadī in suggesting that Bṛhannaḍā-Arjuna should serve as Uttara’s charioteer (4.34.12–17), and to the role of Bhīṣma in ruling that the Pāṇḍavas’ year in disguise had been fully served, when other factors seemed rather to suggest otherwise (4.47.1–9, passage 3). Both of these events are perhaps explicable in terms of the human characters, but nonetheless Draupadī, as well as being Śrī, is the analogue of the suffering Earth (Bowles 2008, pp.xxxii–xl), and was born to lead the *kṣatriyas* to their doom (1.155.44–45); and Bhīṣma is (in Gaṅgā’s account) Dyaus, the god Sky. If we single out these two events we can see the *Virāṭaparvan* and *Udyogaparvan* as the ‘engine room’ of the

divine plan, premised as this is upon collaboration between the Earth below and the gods above, and the hiding of true identities.

Through its presentation of the end of the Pāṇḍavas' year in disguise, the text balances the divine imperative with a psychologically realistic explanation for the war. Both human sides – Duryodhana and Yudhiṣṭhira – adhere closely to the *dharma* of the covenant, and they agree on the timings against Bhīṣma, but though Duryodhana thinks Arjuna was recognised, Yudhiṣṭhira might beg to differ.

If Arjuna were to tell Yudhiṣṭhira that he *was* recognised, the Pāṇḍavas would have to decide whether to go back into the woods for twelve years, or to fight. Best of luck to Yudhiṣṭhira if he thinks he can persuade his family to agree to further exile in that situation! So once Arjuna is recognised it has to be war, and Yudhiṣṭhira can uphold the covenant only by not knowing that Arjuna was recognised, or by accepting Bhīṣma's ruling. In practice, the claim for his former territories is made by his allies on his behalf, on the grounds that the full exile has been completed.

The conclusion regarding Duryodhana is that the view of him being a bad egg is pretty well established (on the basis of, for example, his divine identity as Kali 'Misfortune', the omens at his birth, his attempted drowning of Bhīma, his attempted murder of the Pāṇḍavas in the house of lac, and/or his behaviour at the first dicing match), but that even so, it would be unfair to bring this prejudice into the question of who, if anyone, breached the covenant made at the second dicing match. As Vyāsa explains to Dhṛtarāṣṭra (11.8.20–38), Duryodhana certainly did his bit as far as the divine plan is concerned.

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