Alan Garner's Rāmāyaṇa

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Abstract: This article is a study of Alan Garner's retelling of the Rāmāyaṇa, which was published in short-story collections in 1969 and 2011. The first part of the article compares Garner's version with the version from which he worked, and on that basis discusses and attempts to account for his adaptation strategies. The second part of the article discusses the final paragraph of Garner's Rāmāyaṇa, which is taken directly from his source and promises rewards to whoever receives or disseminates the text. This paragraph had a profound effect upon Garner when he first encountered it, and serves as a key to his retelling and his career.

Keywords: adaptation; autobiography; commentary; Garner, Alan; *Mahābhārata*; Rāmāyaṇa

Introduction[1]

In addition to his well-known novels and novellas, Alan Garner (born 1934) has authored or edited several collections of folk tales or fairy tales. The first of these – initially published as *The Hamish Hamilton Book of Goblins* (Garner 1969), but subsequently also as *A Cavalcade of Goblins* (Garner 1969b) and *A Book of Goblins* (Garner 1972), and referred to below simply as 'the goblins book' – included a 'Ramayana' (134–73).[2] Some forty years later, most of that first collection was reissued, together with more than a dozen additional pieces, as *Collected Folk Tales* (Garner 2011), including the same 'Ramayana' (190–236). The Rāmāyaṇa can certainly pass as a goblin tale: it features a ten-headed villain. The Rāmāyaṇa can also pass as a folk tale, broadly understood. But

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[2] The goblins book was part of a series whose other books focused on princesses, princes, kings, myths and legends, magical beasts, queens, witches, heroes, giants, dragons, sea legends, magicians, wise animals, and other worlds.

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Garner's Rāmāyaṇa is the longest piece in either of these two collections, and the writing style sets it apart from its neighbours.

This article has two purposes. The first is to explore Garner's particular version of the Rāmāyaṇa, which he created by adapting and condensing an existing version that was already adapted and condensed. The Rāmāyaṇa is one of the world's best-known stories and exists in a great variety of versions: adaptation is integral to the Rāmāyaṇa tradition (Raghavan 1980; Iyengar 1983; Richman 1991 and 2000; Bose 2003 and 2004). But by comparing Garner's version with the one he worked from, we can reveal the choices that he made, and ask why he adapted it in the way he did.

The article's second purpose is to explain why Garner included a Rāmāyaṇa in these collections. This has to do with his response, as a child, to certain claims made at the end of the Rāmāyaṇa, about the Rāmāyaṇa's extraordinary properties. My analysis in the second part of the article takes some commentarial statements made by Garner himself, and revisits them in light of the Indian textual tradition.

Narrative Summary

I present here a brief summary of Garner's Rāmāyaṇa, with his textual divisions indicated in square brackets. Just as Garner's version misses out much that is in it source, so this summary misses out much that is in *its* source. It is presented here principally for the benefit of readers unfamiliar with the Rāmāyaṇa.

['1. Rama and Sita.'][3]

[I] King Daśaratha of Ayodhyā performs a ritual in order to obtain sons.

[II] The gods are suffering at the hands of the demon Rāvaṇa, who cannot be killed by any superhuman being. So, in order to kill Rāvaṇa, the great god Viṣṇu takes birth as Daśaratha's four sons. The eldest two, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, are particularly close.

[III] Rāma wins Sītā as his wife.

[IV] Rāma, Sītā, and Lakṣmaṇa go to live in the forest. Rāvaṇa's sister happens upon them. She proposes to Rāma, but Lakṣmaṇa mutilates her. Rāvaṇa's brother attempts to avenge her, but Rāma kills him and his army.

[V] Rāvaṇa is told of all this, and is advised to abduct Sītā. Assisted by his friend Mārīca, he does so. He takes Sītā to the island of Laṅkā, and tries, in vain, to seduce her.

['2. Hanuman.']

[3] Garner does not use diacritic marks on Sanskrit names, but I do, except within quotations.

[VI] Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa meet the deposed monkey-king Sugrīva. They make a deal. Rāma reinstates Sugrīva as king, and Sugrīva summons monkeys to look for Sītā.

[VII] Monkeys are sent in all four directions. Reaching the ocean, the southern party learns that Sītā is on the island of Laṅkā. Hanumān leaps across to Laṅkā, searches the city, and finds Sītā. He watches from a tree as Rāvaṇa tries to seduce her. Then Hanumān speaks with Sītā and leaves, promising to fetch Rāma. He torches the city, then leaps back to the mainland and takes the news to Rāma, who marches south with the monkey army.

['3. The Siege of Lanka.']

[VIII] Rāvaṇa's brother Vibhīṣaṇa advises Rāvaṇa to return Sītā to Rāma. Rāvaṇa insults him. Vibhīṣaṇa flies to the mainland and sides with Rāma. The monkeys build a bridge, and the army crosses over to Laṅkā and besieges the city.

[IX] After many battles, Rāma finally kills Rāvaṇa, and the gods rejoice.

['4. Vishnu.']

[X] Rāma and Sītā are reunited. Rāma rules Ayodhyā. After many years, Sītā enters the earth. Rāma rules for a while longer, then he and his brothers return to heaven as Viṣṇu.

The Adaptation

Garner says that his Rāmāyaṇa is 'Adapted from the Translation of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy' (Garner 1969: 134; 2011: 190). Coomaraswamy's version was published in 1913 – and reprinted thereafter – in *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists*, by Sister Nivedita and Ananda K. Coomaraswamy.[4] This book was completed by Coomaraswamy after Nivedita's death. In its preface, Coomaraswamy claims that the Rāmāyaṇa retelling is his own (Nivedita and Coomaraswamy 1913: v–vi).[5]

In the parts that he retains, Garner reproduces Coomaraswamy's text quite closely. This results in an elevated diction that would have felt even more antique in 1969 and 2011 than it did in 1913, and that sets this story apart

[4] Coomaraswamy's Rāmāyaṇa has illustrations (by K. Venkatappa), and so does the goblins-book version of Garner's Rāmāyaṇa (by Krystyna Turska); but in this article I ignore them.

[5] For another Rāmāyaṇa of the same period aimed at a similar audience and published by the same publisher, see Monro 1911: 43–107. For the intellectual biography of Coomaraswamy (who is best known as a historian of Buddhist art), see Fowler 1947; Leoshko 2024.

from the ones surrounding it in the two collections. In the first few pages, Daśaratha's ministers were 'ever fair spoken'; on hearing that he would have sons 'the king rejoiced exceedingly'; and the gods say of Rāvaṇa that 'his tyranny becomes past endurance'. Examples of this kind of wording are legion. Though this register is lifted from Coomaraswamy (Garner 'does not attempt to alter the stiff, formal, though poetic, style of his source', Philip 1981: 80), Garner's retention of it is remarkable. Elsewhere, Garner writes that one of the ways in which the spiritual is set apart from the secular is 'by a change of style, which is usually slightly out of date in grammar and syntax' (1997: 32). So the chosen style fits the Rāmāyaṇa's status as a holy book. Garner puts it bluntly when introducing the Rāmāyaṇa in the goblins book: 'Ramayana is special' (1969: 134) – and he has made it feel so.

Though Garner is generally very faithful to Coomaraswamy's wording, he does make some adjustments to the sentences he retains. He omits the names of many incidental characters and geographical features, and he also omits most of the references to Hindu deities. Such omissions are appropriate for his shorter text, and they also domesticate the text, making it more accessible to readers unfamiliar with the Indian tradition. It is interesting, then, that Garner retains enough Sanskrit words to make a small prefatory glossary necessary. Most of the glossed words are types of superhuman creature familiar in the Indian context – *gandharva*, *rākṣasa*, *yakṣa*, and *asura* – which might instead have been replaced with approximate English equivalents.[6] Garner's decision to gloss these words instead of translating them indicates the limits of his domestication agenda and demonstrates a sensitivity to the cultural context, even if the Rāmāyaṇa's inclusion in the goblins book implies that Rāvaṇa is a goblin.

Garner cuts out large parts of Coomaraswamy's text. In presenting what he calls 'the main thread of many that run through the story' (1969: 134), Garner presents a particular version of the narrative, adjusting the plot in several places.[7] The opening frame and the character of Vālmīki is cut. There are minor cuts during Rāma's childhood. Then a whole part is cut: the part which would explain why Prince Rāma lived in exile for so many years. Then there are some minor cuts to shorten the great battle. Then most of what follows after the battle is omitted at the end. In what follows I discuss these cuts in turn, as well

[6] For example, in my translation of the *Harivaṃśa* I translated *gandharva*, *rākṣasa*, *yakṣa*, and *asura* as 'light-elf', 'monster', 'dark-elf', and 'demon', respectively (Brodbeck 2019). In the present article, following Garner's practice elsewhere, I render *rākṣasa* as 'demon'.

[7] For this part of the article, I made a copy of Coomaraswamy's version, highlighted what Garner included, and then used the highlighted copy to think about what he did and did not include.

as some cuts that Garner did not make. In the process, I also mention several old Indian Rāmāyaṇas.

Vālmīki and the Opening Frame

The Indian tradition credits Vālmīki as the Rāmāyaṇa's author (Leslie 2003: 4). He invented the Sanskrit metre (four feet of eight syllables each) in which most of his seminal Rāmāyaṇa is composed. In fact he is not the author of *Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa*, but a character within it. He appears at the start and near the end, and his role is to compose, his composition comprising the vast majority of the text (Brodbeck 2022). Coomaraswamy follows *Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa* fairly faithfully.

Garner eliminates the frame, and the character Vālmīki. As Garner's version begins, an unannounced omniscient narrator starts to tell, apropos of nothing, a story about a king of Ayodhyā ('There was once a great and beautiful city called Ayodhya', 1969: 134; 2011: 192). But then at the very end, outside the story, Garner's last paragraph begins, 'Thus ends *Ramayana*, revered by Brahma and made by Valmiki' (1969: 173; 2011: 236). So at that point the narrator is revealed to have been Vālmīki all along, whoever he is.

The Divine Context

Garner retains the divine context whereby the demon Rāvaṇa is tormenting the gods, and so in Garner's version Rāma and his brothers are actually the great god Viṣṇu, born in multiple human form to kill Rāvaṇa (Pollock 1984). Garner also retains the king's son-getting rite and the magic porridge eaten by the queens (Brodbeck 2020). Cutting the divine context would have made the story feel rather different. The old European scholarly view imagines an original heroic-epic Rāmāyaṇa without the first and last books and without the divine context (Jacobi 1960 [1893]; Bulcke 2022 [1950]; Brockington 1985; González-Reimann 2006). Such a version has been speculatively reconstructed and translated as a Penguin Classic, subtitled 'an early form of the Rāmāyaṇa' (Brockington and Brockington 2006). But Garner's is a tale of gods and demons. Elsewhere, Garner has said that 'It is one of the main errors of historical and rational analysis to suppose that the "original form" of a myth can be separated from its miraculous elements' (1997: 28).

Rāma's Childhood

In Vālmīki's version, much of the *Book of Childhood* is taken up with narration of stories that Rāma and his brother Lakṣmaṇa hear from their brahmin teacher Viśvāmitra (Sutherland Goldman 2004). These are largely omitted by Coomaraswamy, and Garner cuts the character Viśvāmitra altogether.

The Reason for the Exile

In Garner's version, after Rāma marries Sītā, they and Lakṣmaṇa go into exile. The explanation is brief, and raises many questions (which are not answered later, when Rāma suddenly becomes king of Ayodhyā after Sītā has been rescued).

After Rāma and Sītā marry, Garner's version says:

> So it passed for a while, until one of Dasharatha's wives grew jealous of the love that all people gave to Rama, and she plotted discord. Then Rama went into exile with his wife Sita and his brother Lakshman, and they dwelt in the forest, for Rama would not allow himself to be a cause of strife.
>
> (Garner 1969: 138; 2011: 197)

This cuts out the whole of the *Book of Ayodhyā*. In that book, Daśaratha's junior queen is prompted by her hunchbacked maidservant to make the king install her own son to the role of heir-apparent in place of the eldest son Rāma, and exile Rāma (Sutherland 1992; Sutherland 1992b: 25–28). Rāma then goes into exile in obedience to the king's word. When the promoted son realises what has happened, he disowns his mother's scheme and goes to try to bring Rāma back, but Rāma insists that their father's word must be honoured and the fourteen-year exile completed. In Vālmīki's version and in Coomaraswamy's, Rāma's fundamentalist attitude to his father's word (and thereby to his royal patriline's reputation) is a crucial aspect of Rāma's character (Matilal 1981). But not in Garner's version. In Garner's version, Daśaratha's alternative heir is not mentioned,[8] and the junior queen is motivated simply by jealousy of Rāma. What she does is unclear, but Rāma feels obliged to undergo exile in order that things go well back in Ayodhyā.

Since Garner 'tried to extract the main thread of many that run through the story' (1969: 134), he presumably considered the succession plot to be a subsidiary thread. Fair enough. Garner is certainly not alone in perceiving the succession plot to be a thread of its own, separate from the thread about Rāvaṇa kidnapping Sītā. Indeed, this succession plot appears as the whole story in the Buddhist *Dasarathajātaka*, a Rāmāyaṇa in which there is no Rāvaṇa and no kidnapping of Sītā (Fausbøll 1871): the exiles serve their term uneventfully and then return to Ayodhyā, and Rāma is crowned. According to one hypothesis, the Rāmāyaṇa originally resembled the *Dasarathajātaka* and was only later expanded to include Rāvaṇa and the kidnapping of Sītā (Ježić 2016).

[8] Since in Garner's version only two of Daśaratha's sons play any role in the story, it is not clear why Viṣṇu would be embodied as all four sons.

The Engineering of Sītā's Kidnapping

I have no view on what 'the original Rāmāyaṇa' might have been like. But when the Rāmāyaṇa is seen as the story of Viṣṇu taking human form to kill Rāvaṇa, then one effect of the succession plot in the *Book of Ayodhyā* is to move Rāma, Sītā, and Lakṣmaṇa into the wilderness, where they can then encounter the demons. Indeed, in the version of the Rāmāyaṇa that is told in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*'s *Book of the Forest*, in addition to Viṣṇu becoming the brothers and other gods siring special monkeys to help him (a detail that Garner retains, 1969: 136; 2011: 194–95), a certain celestial musician becomes the junior queen's hunchbacked maidservant, who sets the intrigue in motion (*Mahābhārata* 3.260.9–10). Thus in this version the succession plot is clearly part of the divine plan – because it results in the exile, which allows the demons to be encountered.

In all versions, the demons are encountered when Rāvaṇa's sister happens upon the exiled trio. This event culminates in Lakṣmaṇa using his sword to 'cut off the foul nose and ears' (Garner 1969: 139; 2011: 198). Rāvaṇa is thus obliged to get involved, which he does by kidnapping Sītā. After the kidnapping, Garner's version says:

> But Brahma, seeing Sita carried away, rejoiced in Heaven, that One Creator of the World, and said, 'Our work is accomplished now,' forseeing Ravana's death. The hermits were glad and sorry at once: sorry for Sita, and glad that Ravana must die.
>
> (Garner 1969: 146; 2011: 205)

Perhaps some hermits were also sorry for Rāvaṇa's sister. The reader might well be. But the reader is certainly reminded of the divine plan: these brothers are on a mission. The version of the Rāmāyaṇa that is told in the Sanskrit *Harivaṃśa* puts it nicely: 'It was at Janasthāna, while he was living in the forest for fourteen years pursuing austerities, that [Rāma] the descendant of Raghu activated his mission for the thirty gods' (*caturdaśa vane taptvā tapo varṣāṇi rāghavaḥ | janasthāne vasan kāryaṃ tridaśānāṃ cakāra saḥ ‖ Harivaṃśa* 31.118, transl. Brodbeck). In this light, the mutilation of Rāvaṇa's sister is a deliberate provocation.

The Search for Sītā

Garner keeps intact the way that Rāma enlists the help of monkeys, and Hanumān finds Sītā imprisoned on the island of Laṅkā, and Rāma and the monkey army go there and fight a huge battle, and Rāma kills Rāvaṇa. The cuts that Garner makes during the battle eliminate some of Hanumān's heroics. During the battle, Garner also achieves a comic effect by departing from his

usual policy of retaining characters' Sanskrit names: the demons killed include Greyeye, Longhand, Manslayer, Noisy-throat, Tall, Bigbelly, Threeheads, Squinteye, and Fatflank (1969: 166–69; 2011: 229–31).

The Ending

As soon as the battle is over, Garner starts cutting quite severely. He describes Sītā's reunion with her husband in a single sentence. His next sentence reads: 'And thereafter Rama sat on his father's throne and governed the city of Ayodhya for ten thousand years, and Sita bore him two sons' (1969: 172; 2011: 234). We are not told what had changed such that Rāma could return to Ayodhyā without being the cause of strife, and so in Garner's version the end of the exile is as mysterious as its beginning. In any case, 'Then one day', the goddess Earth came out of the ground on a throne and took Sītā away with her, never to return. Rāma, bereft, ruled for another thousand years, and then he left Ayodhyā, followed by the citizens. They came to a river, then Brahmā and the gods came to meet them, and Rāma and the other undercover gods went back to heaven.

Omitted here is the drama about Sītā's sexual purity. In many Rāmāyaṇas, Sītā is soiled by having been Rāvaṇa's captive. In Vālmīki's version and in Coomaraswamy's, Rāma rejects Sītā after killing Rāvaṇa, only taking her back after she has proved herself by entering a fire and emerging unharmed (*Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa* 6.102–6; Nivedita and Coomaraswamy 1913: 97–99; Hess 1999). But the problem recurs when Rāma is back in Ayodhyā as king. Vile talk about Sītā arises, and so, at Rāma's orders, she is abandoned pregnant in the wilds.

Here Sītā's story links with the framing story of Vālmīki (which Garner cuts too). Vālmīki takes Sītā in, then he teaches his Rāmāyaṇa to her twin sons, and they perform it to King Rāma at his horse sacrifice, and then Rāma summons Sītā so that she can prove her purity to the assembled citizens. But she asks the Earth to prove her purity by engulfing her (as the fire previously had by not doing so). As Sally Sutherland says, 'Sītā ... now prefers death to life with him' (1989: 78; see also Narayana Rao 2004: 226).

This is where Garner inserts his 'Then one day' and rejoins the story. The goddess comes out of the ground on a throne and takes Sītā away, and Rāma lives out his remaining days without her. In Garner's version, therefore, the appearance of the goddess Earth is unexplained. It is as if Sītā just dies a bit earlier than Rāma. There are no other tremors in the force. Sītā's purity is never questioned.

Many other versions also omit parts of the drama about Sītā's purity. This can allow a happy ending. In the *Mahābhārata*'s version, Sītā proves her purity to Rāma in the fire ordeal after the battle, but the issue does not follow the couple home, and they live happily as king and queen (*Mahābhārata* 3.275).

As mentioned earlier, there is a view that the final book of *Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa* was a later addition. John and Mary Brockington's 'early form of the Rāmāyaṇa' (2006) has no fire ordeal and ends happily. But according to Coomaraswamy, 'This repudiation of Sītā forms the most dramatic and remarkable feature of the whole story' (Nivedita and Coomaraswamy 1913: 12). Without it, the gods may seem to meddle in human affairs without any particular human cost, which is contrary to the general trend; as John Smith says, 'Epic heroes – and by extension we ourselves – are the gods' scapegoats: we take on their ills and suffer on their behalf' (1989: 193).

So, to conclude this section, why did Garner adapt the Rāmāyaṇa in the way he did? He needed to reduce its bulk such that it would not dominate the collections in which it appears; and in deciding which parts to omit,[9] he tried to make it accessible to a general and potentially juvenile audience unfamiliar with the Indian narrative tradition. Thus his principal omissions were the parts of the story that bear upon the mechanics of patrilineal kingship and the associated adult themes of sexual purity. Neil Philip says that with respect to the Rāmāyaṇa, Garner's 'main creative effort seems to have gone into reparagraphing rather than rewording' (1981: 80); but I have shown that his main creative effort was in reshaping the inherited story. In Perry Nodelman's words, the story was thus 'reworked to suit current ideas about what children might enjoy or ought to hear', and became 'a version of the alien that makes it more familiar and less frightening' (1996: 266). But where Nodelman used the quoted phrases as part of an argument against cultural appropriation (particularly of indigenous American stories), the Rāmāyaṇa has been so widely appropriated and redeployed in so many cultures and periods, in South Asia and elsewhere, that it is hard to see how this can be criticised.

The Origin Myth

This part of the article discusses the commentarial material with which Garner has supplemented his Rāmāyaṇa. The subtitular 'origin myth' is Garner's depiction of the origin of his involvement with the Rāmāyaṇa. The principal sources

[9] In various autobiographical fragments recorded in press interviews and in *The Voice that Thunders* and *Powsels and Thrums*, Garner pays tribute to several beloved relatives but is relatively quiet about his father. Perhaps there is a connection between Garner's relationship with his father and his omission of the aspects of the Rāmāyaṇa that describe Rāma's relationship with *his* father. But I will not attempt to make that connection here.

used are the end-matter of the goblins book, the lecture 'Aback of Beyond', and the introductions to the two presentations of Garner's Rāmāyaṇa. Garner's commentary centres upon his childhood experience of the Rāmāyaṇa – and especially of its final paragraph, which will be explained and discussed.

In the goblins book, in the section at the end entitled 'Notes and Sources', Garner says:

> At the age of eight I discovered among my great-grandfather's books twelve volumes of Myths and Legends, published by Harrap between 1915 and 1917. It was an overwhelming experience. ...
>
> Several of the stories in this present book originated for me in the Harrap volumes, although wherever possible I have traced each to its source and used that. The intention has been to convey the spirit rather than the letter, and where a text has appeared to be inferior to its contents I have changed it.
>
> (Garner 1969: 222)

The Rāmāyaṇa is one of the stories that 'originated for me in the Harrap volumes'.[10]

Further details of Garner's encounter with the Rāmāyaṇa are given in Garner's lecture 'Aback of Beyond' (1997: 19–38). Versions of this lecture were presented to gatherings of headteachers in 1991 and 1996. In this piece, Garner reports that while devouring his great-grandfather's books one summer, aged seven, in Tamworth, he read Coomaraswamy's Rāmāyaṇa and was so affected by the final paragraph that he read out this Rāmāyaṇa to the general public.

Garner tells this story to illustrate the point that nurturing creativity – that is, spirituality – in children is challenging in several ways, the first being that 'you [headteachers] will receive children to whom your culture is alien' (1997: 29). This is a reference to immigration. Garner introduces the summer he spent

[10] For details of Harrap's 'Myths and Legends' series, see Spedding 2019, which includes photographs of the volumes, individually and as a set. The twelve volumes are: *Myths of Greece and Rome*; *Myths of the Norsemen from the Eddas and Sagas*; *Myths and Legends of the Middle Ages*; *Hero-Myths and Legends of the British Race*; *Myths and Legends of the Celtic Race*; *Myths and Legends of Japan*; *Myths of Mexico and Peru*; *Myths* [*and Legends*] *of the North American Indians*; *Myths* [*and Legends*] *of Ancient Egypt*; *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists*; *Myths and Legends of Babylonia and Assyria*; and *Hero-Tales and Legends of the Serbians*. Some volumes include 'and Legends' in the title in some editions but not in others. The Harrap volumes follow the internationalising pattern of the 'fairy books' of Andrew Lang and Leonora Blanche Alleyne (beginning with *The Blue Fairy Book*, Lang 1889, and continuing with eleven more colours). On the universalist assumptions behind intercultural retellings, see Stephens and McCallum 1998: 207; Stephens 2009: 94. On the Lang series see Hines 2013, esp. 82–98, 204–44.

in Tamworth after his great-grandfather William Jackson's death, lists some of the latter's books, and continues:

> Then I found myself in the middle of wonders: a Hindu epic poem of some forty-eight thousand lines, called *Ramayana*.[11] Here were demons and gods and magic and talking animals and shape-shifters and mountain movers. Now I did not binge. I read. And, when I came to the final paragraph, I felt my heart stop.
>
> > Thus ends *Ramayana*, revered by Brahma and made by Valmiki. He that hath no sons shall attain a son by reading even a single verse of Rama's lay. All sin is washed from those who read or hear it read. He that recites *Ramayana* should have rich gifts of cows and gold. Long shall he live who reads *Ramayana*, and shall be honoured, with his sons and grandsons, in this world and in Heaven.
>
> So that's how he'd done it. William Jackson had read *Ramayana*. I could live to be ninety-three. ... I could save the world. At least I could save Tamworth. I ran upstairs, opened the front bedroom window onto the street, sat on the sill, and, like some Hindu muezzin, summoned the people of Tamworth to hear Rama's lay. I went on till my voice cracked. ... By repetition, I began to see patterns more than of gods with blue faces, flying monkeys, and many-headed demons. I saw, emotionally, more than one way to market. And so, in our multiracial society, ought you [headteachers].
>
> (Garner 1997: 29–30)

Here Garner marks out the Rāmāyaṇa as a crucial factor in his recognition of the cultural other. The Rāmāyaṇa was marketed as exotically culturally other in the Harrap series; it contained this weird and explosive final paragraph, which prompted Garner's window-sill scene; and many years later it governs his suggestions regarding 'our multiracial society'.

When Garner's Rāmāyaṇa was first printed in the goblins book, it followed a three-sentence introduction and a short glossary. The introduction read:

> Ramayana is special. It is the great Hindu epic, probably three thousand years old, and about forty times the length of the version given here. I have tried to extract the main thread of many that run through the story.
>
> (Garner 1969: 134)

[11] Coomaraswamy's version, which Garner was reading, is less than a hundred pages long, but the traditional length of *Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa* in its vulgate version is 24,000 verses. The critically reconstituted version contains 19,100 verses (Vyas 1992; Brockington 1998: 65).

When Garner's Rāmāyaṇa was reprinted in 2011 in *Collected Folk Tales*, this brief introduction was replaced with a longer one. The new introduction begins with Garner announcing: 'My interest in myth, legend, fairy tale and folk tale has been life-long. And this is where it began' (2011: 190). The Harrap volumes are then mentioned, repurposing – since there is no such section at the end of *Collected Folk Tales* – some of what was said in the 'Notes and Sources' section at the end of the goblins book (but changing 'At the age of eight' to 'At the age of seven'). The new introduction then retells the Tamworth incident, repurposing the aforementioned section from the lecture 'Aback of Beyond', and reproducing the explosive final paragraph from Coomaraswamy's Rāmāyaṇa (which is repeated forty-five pages later, at the end of Garner's Rāmāyaṇa). At the end of the new introduction, after telling how he gifted the Rāmāyaṇa to Tamworth, Garner says 'Now it's your turn'; and the short glossary follows (2011: 192).

Thus Garner changed his commentary on his Rāmāyaṇa for its republication in 2011. In the 2011 book, the Rāmāyaṇa serves as the main story that Garner took from the Harrap series, and also as the source of his interest in traditional narrative. Garner stresses the Rāmāyaṇa's importance in his artistic history by relating the Tamworth incident already mentioned in the lecture 'Aback of Beyond', and by quoting that final paragraph in advance.

Although that final paragraph mentions the Rāmāyaṇa in particular, it is of a type that is generic in the Indian tradition. Such passages often appear at the ends of texts, or at the ends of independently circulating parts of texts. They are known, in Sanskrit, as *phalaśruti* – that is, 'statement of the fruits (results, effects)'. In the Mīmāṃsā discourse on Vedic ritual action, 'fruits' can refer to the individual existential results of various types of ritual, and here at the end of Coomaraswamy's Rāmāyaṇa it explicitly applies to the rituals of reading, hearing, and reciting. In other instances, such passages can also cover thinking about the text, copying it, owning or donating a copy, or paying for it to be recited or copied (Brown 1986: 76–78; Taylor 2012: 103–6). Coomaraswamy's *phalaśruti* was adapted from verses that appear at the end of various versions of *Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa*.[12]

Such verses have been discussed as they appear in the *Mahābhārata* (Hegarty 2012: 58–64; see especially the list on p. 63) and in the Purāṇas (Brown 1986; Taylor 2012). On occasion there is a connection between some of the stated results and the topic of the text – so, for example, in the first book of

[12] Coomaraswamy's *phalaśruti* adapts 7.100.26 and 7.*1522.3–4, 7–10. See Shah 1975: 533–34 (text); Goldman and Sutherland Goldman 2017: 441, 1277 (translation). The passages marked with an asterisk are not attested in all manuscripts, and so are assumed to be later interpolations and are not included in the critically reconstituted text.

the *Mahābhārata*, hearing the story of how Janamejaya responded to his father's death by snakebite acts, among other things, as a prophylactic against snakebite (*Mahābhārata* 1.53.25–26) – but this is not usually the case. All of the results announced in the Rāmāyaṇa *phalaśruti* in Coomaraswamy's (and Garner's) final paragraph are typical fare in such passages.

It is not clear how best to understand *phalaśruti* verses. They can certainly serve as end-markers (Bailey 1995: 9–10). When they appear in this position they signal the end of the story and bring the listener back, enriched, into the world outside the story (but perhaps inside another story).

Such verses can be suspected of facilitating the survival of the texts to which they are appended, even if many texts to which they were similarly appended have not survived. We might take an instrumental view of such passages, whereby they are fully explained by the pragmatics and economics of textual survival and the associated industries: 'the *phalaśruti* valorizes the discourse and effectively demands that a member of the targeted epistemic community will imbibe the discourses, maintain the practices, and endow the exponent in such a way that the tradition will be perpetuated' (Taylor 2012: 106). From this perspective, Garner's presentations of the Rāmāyaṇa to new audiences in Tamworth, and then more widely through the goblins book and the *Collected Folk Tales*, would seem to result from the inclusion of this paragraph at the end of Coomaraswamy's Rāmāyaṇa. It is there to promote such distribution. The ancient authors have used this passage to make Garner (amongst others) spread this text.

But what about the existential effect upon young Garner? Is that effect a mere epiphenomenon of the ancient authors successfully engineering the text's distribution? In Garner's account it cannot be reduced to that. As a child he was deeply inspired by this paragraph at the end of the Rāmāyaṇa, and as an adult he is still inspired enough to say that 'this is where it began' (2011: 190). He does not claim to know better now than he did then. He does not assume a more mature or cynical perspective on those statements about the Rāmāyaṇa's power. He does not deconstruct or discredit them or distance himself from his childhood response to them. It is his considered response to them.

But more is involved here than the ongoing distribution of the text, or Garner's part in that distribution, or even his own self-conscious interaction with the text. Because the *phalaśruti* makes claims about Garner's male progeny, weight of sin, wealth, longevity, and reputation, regardless of Garner's awareness of the Rāmāyaṇa's role in affecting such matters. He says 'this is where it began', but the *phalaśruti* promises that the Rāmāyaṇa will have such effects whether the vehicles of those effects know it or not. And the effects are

presented as effects of the Rāmāyaṇa, not as effects of the *phalaśruti*. The claim is that the text is positively powerful in those ways to everyone.

This claim contains a radical theory of narrative. The narrative changes people in beneficial ways. In this presentation, the role of the narrative is existential, not social, even though it would traditionally be delivered in social settings. In this way of thinking about *phalaśruti* verses, they resemble the lists of learning outcomes in higher-education discourse, which describe how students will be enhanced after successfully completing a certain module or programme. But the Rāmāyaṇa's learning outcomes are specific concrete facts: long human life, sons and grandsons, cows, gold, cleansing of sins, and honour in this world and the next. Who needs employability?

When a story within another story carries a *phalaśruti*, we may see what its effects are upon the lives of the characters who hear it. In the *Mahābhārata*, the exiled king Yudhiṣṭhira listens to many stories that carry *phalaśruti*s – including the story of Rāma – and sure enough, his fortunes turn: he gets back what he had lost, rules for decades, and goes to heaven. In the story of King Janamejaya that frames the story of Yudhiṣṭhira and his Pāṇḍava brothers, Janamejaya is engaged in a war against the snakes; but after hearing the story of the war that his Pāṇḍava ancestors fought – and, by implication, in large measure *because* he hears that story – he makes peace with the snakes and becomes a great king.

The situation is similar in *Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa* and in Coomaraswamy's, although this is obscured in Garner's version because of the elision of the frame. The audience of Vālmīki's composition is King Rāma himself, who hears it at his horse sacrifice; and although he does not reconcile with his wife, one effect of his hearing the story is that he obtains two sons. So with regard to that hearing, the promise (at the end of the Coomaraswamy and Garner versions) that 'He that has no sons shall attain a son'[13] comes true, twice over.

Through these examples, we see that the theory of literature contained in the *phalaśruti* verses is not just theory. We see the text having its promised effects in practice. And the autobiographical commentary that Garner provides for his Rāmāyaṇa has a similar effect. It attributes his successful career to his encounter with this text; and by saying 'Now it's your turn', it invites his readers to replicate that kind of effect in their own lives.

Conclusion

I have explored the changes that Garner made when he adapted Coomaraswamy's Rāmāyaṇa, and on the basis of Garner's own commentary I have explored

[13] Garner, where Coomaraswamy had had 'hath', has 'has'.

the role of the Rāmāyaṇa in his creative life. That role depends upon the claim that the Rāmāyaṇa is powerful and has significant effects upon the lives of those who engage with it. But the *phalaśruti* has remained the same through multiple adaptive retellings. The claims that Garner's Rāmāyaṇa makes about itself are exactly the same as the claims that Coomaraswamy's rather different Rāmāyaṇa made about itself. Likewise, the claims that Coomaraswamy's Rāmāyaṇa made about itself were lifted from the end of *Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa*, even though Coomaraswamy's Rāmāyaṇa was a pale shadow of Vālmīki's. So if one is to take the *phalaśruti* seriously, as Garner clearly did, then one might wonder what exactly it is about the Rāmāyaṇa that gives it such power, and whether it is perhaps possible, by gradual reduction, to lose the source of that power, while nonetheless retaining the name 'Rāmāyaṇa'.[14] Garner's Rāmāyaṇa includes the *phalaśruti* and the assertion 'Now it's your turn', and this fits with his claim to have retained 'the main thread of many that run through the story'. But he did nonetheless omit what Coomaraswamy saw as 'the most dramatic and remarkable feature of the whole story' (Nivedita and Coomaraswamy 1913: 12). I have not attempted to resolve this difference of opinion; but there is nonetheless a paradoxical contrast between the progressive reduction of the retold text and the retention of the *phalaśruti*'s claims for it.

My final point bears on the issue of cultural difference. The Rāmāyaṇa's claims about itself in the Harrap volume blew the young Alan Garner's mind. He had never before seen it stated so boldly that a story can change your life. This bold statement was an import from another culture, and although in that culture it is a claim made about many different stories, for Garner it remained crucially connected to this particular story. Is it inappropriate to take such a claim seriously in relation to one story just because similar claims are elsewhere made about many other stories? I would hesitate to say so. Nonetheless, young Garner had only met such a claim in relation to this story, because when the *phalaśruti* travelled from India to Tamworth, it appeared there out of cultural context. But if there is a misunderstanding here, it is a happy one, because it resulted in a deep respect for the Rāmāyaṇa. Thus Garner learned that there is 'more than one way to market', and set out to share this insight.

[14] The *phalaśruti* may seem to obviate this possibility by specifying that a son is obtained 'by reading even a single verse'. But although Vālmīki's version is in verse, Coomaraswamy's and Garner's versions are in prose, and so no single verse of either of them can ever actually be read. On the general issue of a story's identity, see Brewer 1997: 23–24.

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