

Tacit Tirukkural:
Religion, Ethics, and Poetics in a Tamil Literary Tradition

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the *Tirukkuraḷ*, a poem composed in Tamil around the fifth century C.E. that is today attributed to an author named Tiruvaḷḷuvar. The poem consists of 1,330 verses arranged into 133 chapters of ten verses each, which are then divided into three thematic sections on “virtue” (*aṛam*), “wealth” (*poruḷ*), and “pleasure” (*iṇpam* or *kāmam*). This project focuses on two closely related questions about this text. First, what vision of human life does the *Tirukkuraḷ* articulate to its audiences? I argue that the poem imparts a vision of human life as marked by the inward cultivation of virtue accompanied by the outward expansion of human relationships, in which both of these processes mutually enrich and reinforce each other and culminate in the attainment of a complex and fulfilling marital life. This vision of human life is never described explicitly, but there are subtle literary strategies operating throughout the text that tacitly convey this vision to the reader. At the same time, the text constantly destabilizes this vision of human life in order to illustrate that the path to attaining it is anything but simple and invite the reader to grapple with the tension between that ideal and the reality of human life.

Second, how does the *Tirukkuraḷ* convey this vision to its audiences? I argue that the *Tirukkuraḷ* communicates its vision by working upon audiences at three different structural levels inherent to the text: the section (*pāl*), the chapter (*atikāram*), and the verse (*kuraḷ* or *pāṭam*). It is only by attending to all three levels together that we can fully understand what the *Tirukkuraḷ* is

saying and how it operates as a work of literature to engage its audiences in specific modes of reflection on the nature of human life. These structural levels also provide the organizational framework for this dissertation, in which each chapter is dedicated to one of the three levels mentioned above: chapter 2 focuses on the text at the level of its sections, chapter 3 at the level of its chapters, and chapter 4 at the level of its verses.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: A Tacit *Tirukkural*

The *Tirukkural* is a poem composed in Tamil around the fifth century C.E. that is today attributed to an author named Tiruvaḷḷuvar.¹ The poem contains 1,330 poetic couplets arranged into 133 chapters, which form three larger sections on “virtue” (*aṛam*), “wealth” (*poruḷ*), and “pleasure” (*iṇṇam* or *kāmam*). While virtually nothing is known about the circumstances behind the composition of the text or the life of its author, the poem evidently became something of an instant classic in the centuries after its composition, as its verses are quoted frequently in later Tamil texts. The *Tirukkural* received a great deal of attention from commentators as well, with ten commentaries produced between the tenth and fifteenth centuries C.E., more than any other work of Tamil literature during that same period. Even today, the *Tirukkural* remains immensely popular: children memorize verses from the *Tirukkural* in school,² prominent Tamil politicians have published commentaries on the text,³ and a large statue of Tiruvaḷḷuvar is one of two major tourist sites in Kanyakumari, a pilgrimage town on the southernmost coast of India.⁴

The poem has been incredibly influential in Tamil literary history and in shaping modern notions of South Indian identity. If we may borrow a phrase from A. K. Ramanujan, who argued that “in India and in Southeast Asia, no one ever reads the *Rāmāyaṇa* or the *Mahābhārata* for the

¹ The title of the work, *Tirukkural*, is a Tamil compound of the honorific prefix *tiru* (“sacred” or “auspicious”) + *kural* (a reference to the text’s meter, the *kural venṇā*). The title of the text could be translated as “sacred verses” or, more literally, “the sacred text in *kural venṇā* meter.”

² See Stuart Blackburn, “Corruption and Redemption: The Legend of Valluvar and Tamil Literary History,” *Modern Asian Studies* 34, no. 2 (2000): 449-482.

³ For an example of a *Tirukkural* commentary authored by a former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, see Kalaingar M. Karunanidhi, *Kalaiṇar Kaḷaṇciyam: Selections from the Literary Works of Dr. Kalaingar M. Karunanidhi* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

⁴ See Vai. Kaṇapati Stapati, “Vāṇṇukaḷ vaḷḷuvarkku vāṇuyarac cilai,” in *Essays and Tributes on Tirukkural*, ed. A. A. Manavalan (Ceṇṇai: Ulakat Tamiḷārāycci Niṇuvaṇam, 2009), 259-287.

first time,”⁵ we could say that in Tamil Nadu, no one ever reads the *Tirukkuraḷ* for the first time. It is written onto the landscape, often literally, through inscriptional references to the text and through the stray verses that appear on buses and in airports, in addition to the spontaneous recitation of verses that occurs in daily interactions throughout Tamil Nadu. The poem has inspired entire conference proceedings,⁶ and it has been the subject of hundreds of translations and scholarly analyses.⁷ The *Tirukkuraḷ* also cuts across religious boundaries: the text and its author have been claimed by Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains alike, though the text itself offers no definitive evidence to prove its religious affiliation. Indeed, the religious ambiguity surrounding the text and its author made the *Tirukkuraḷ* highly attractive to the earliest European missionaries to South India, and many of the earliest translations of the *Tirukkuraḷ* into European languages were done by Christian missionaries who hailed the text as a source of universal moral wisdom. More recently, throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the *Tirukkuraḷ* became enmeshed in modern political efforts to articulate a distinctly South Indian, Tamil, Dravidian identity in contradistinction to North Indian, Sanskritic, Brahmanical culture.⁸

⁵ A. K. Ramanujan, “Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇas*: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation,” in *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Traditions in South Asia*, ed. Paula Richman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 46.

⁶ See, for example, the many essays included in edited volumes such as *Thirumathi Sornammal Endowment Lectures on Tirukkural, 1959-60 to 1968-69* (Madras: University of Madras, 1971) and *First All-India Tirukkural Research Seminar Papers*, ed. N. Sanjeevi (Madras: University of Madras, 1973).

⁷ There are too many translations and scholarly accounts of the *Tirukkuraḷ* in Tamil today to name them all, but one of the first real attempts to translate the *Tirukkuraḷ* into any European language was made by the Jesuit missionary C. J. Beschi, whose 1730 C.E. Latin translation of the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s first two books set the stage for many of the later translations that followed.

⁸ To name but one example of how modern writers read the *Tirukkuraḷ* through the lens of twentieth-century Dravidian politics, see Pulavar Kuḷantai, *Tirukkuraḷum parimēlaḷakarum* (Madras: Pāri Nilaiyam, 1952). For further reference, see Norman Cutler’s analysis of Pulavar Kuḷantai’s commentaries on the *Tirukkuraḷ* in Norman Cutler, “Interpreting *Tirukkuraḷ*: The Role of Commentary in the Creation of a Text,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 112, no. 4 (1992): 561-565.

The following dissertation is focused around two closely related questions. First, in light of the many different interpretations that have accrued over the centuries, what is the vision of human life that the *Tirukkuraḷ* articulates to its audiences? Although we are without evidence about what the author may have intended, I argue through a close reading that the poem imparts a vision of human life as marked by the inward cultivation of personal virtue accompanied by the outward expansion of human relationships, in which both of these processes mutually enrich and reinforce each other. This vision of human life is never described in explicit terms; the poetic structure of the text does not allow for such outward declarations of intent. However, there are subtle literary strategies operating throughout the text that nevertheless reflect a coherent vision that is tacitly woven throughout. At the same time, this vision is continually destabilized by those very same literary strategies in order to illustrate that accomplishing this vision of human life is anything but straightforward. Second, how does the *Tirukkuraḷ* actually convey this vision to its audiences, and how does the *Tirukkuraḷ* want to be read? Although we again have almost no information about how the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s premodern audiences engaged with it, I argue that the *Tirukkuraḷ* communicates its vision by working upon audiences at three different structural levels inherent to the text: the section (*pāl*), the chapter (*atikāram*), and the verse (*kuraḷ* or *pāṭam*). It is only by attending to all three structural levels together that we can fully understand how the *Tirukkuraḷ* operates as a work of literature by using the possibilities inherent in its poetic form to engage audiences in specific modes of reflection on the nature of human life.

In order to answer these questions and to provide some justification for these arguments, I will first summarize some of the major approaches that scholars have taken in the study of the *Tirukkuraḷ*. I describe the poem's textual structure and how that structure may have changed over time; what we know of the historical authorship of the poem and the various audiences that have

engaged with it over time; the question of whether any discernible Sanskrit literary influence can be found upon text; and the persistent debate over the religious worldview that animates the text as a whole. Following these discussions, I discuss the theoretical interlocutors that I assemble to help me refine and begin to answer the research questions outlined above and my methodological approach to reading the *Tirukkuraḷ* and how that approach differs from previous scholarship. Then, I describe the various contributions that I hope this project will make to scholarship, not only in South Asian religions but also in the broader field of religious studies and in the study of religious ethics. Finally, I conclude with a summary of the chapters that follow in the rest of the dissertation, situating them in the context of my larger argument about how the *Tirukkuraḷ* should be read and how it shapes its audiences.

Textual Structure and Variation

As it is read and published today, the *Tirukkuraḷ* consists of three sections: the *Aṟattuppāl* (“Section on Virtue”), the *Poruṭpāl* (“Section on Prosperity”), and the *Kāmattuppāl* (“Section on Pleasure”). There is, of course, a striking parallel between these three sections and the *trivarga*, the first three *puruṣārthas* or “goals of human life,” more commonly known by their Sanskrit referents as *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*. The *Tirukkuraḷ* does not include a section dedicated to the fourth goal, *mokṣa* or liberation, and commentators have explained this absence by arguing that the path of *mokṣa* cannot be described in words and thus is not addressed in texts.⁹ Most modern editions of the *Tirukkuraḷ* further divide each section into smaller thematic sub-sections (*iyaḷ*). The *Aṟattuppāl*, for example, is divided into three sub-sections consisting of a preface (*pāyiram*),

⁹ For example, we find this argument in Parimēlaḷakar’s introduction to the *Aṟattuppāl*; see *Tirukkuraḷ uraikkottu: Aṟattuppāl* (Tiruppaṇantāl: Śrī Kācimaṭam, 1969), 1. See, also, Cutler, 554-555.

a sub-section on domestic virtue (*illaram*), and a sub-section on ascetic virtue (*turavaram*).¹⁰ Each of the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s 133 chapters has a title that indicates something of its theme and content, and the ten verses within each chapter generally cohere around that theme. All of these organizational features remain remarkably consistent across the many published editions and translations of the *Tirukkuraḷ* that circulate today, to such an extent that they have been taken as presumed original features of the text.

Yet what, if anything, can we say about the original *Tirukkuraḷ* composed sometime around the fifth century C.E.? Do the many published editions available today correspond in any way to how the text would have been read and circulated in the centuries immediately after its composition? It is impossible to know what the original version of the *Tirukkuraḷ* would have looked like given the length of time between the original composition of the text and the oldest manuscript witnesses available to us today, a period that probably spans at least a thousand years. The harsh climate of South India makes manuscript preservation notoriously difficult, and most of the manuscripts that survive today are no more than two or three hundred years old.¹¹ Thus, even the oldest extant *Tirukkuraḷ* manuscripts are still many centuries removed from the time of the text's original composition. The situation is further complicated by the fact that many of the earliest references to the *Tirukkuraḷ* in later Tamil texts cite individual verses without any

¹⁰ All of the medieval commentaries agree on this division of the *Arattuppāl*, though they disagree over how to divide the *Poruṭpāl* and *Kāmatuppāl* into sub-sections. Most modern editions of the *Tirukkuraḷ* follow the sub-sections that were included in Parimēlaḷakar's late thirteenth-century commentary. Additionally, there is some discrepancy about whether or not the final chapter of the *Arattuppāl* on "Fate" (*ūḷ*) constitutes a unique sub-section of its own; some editions include it as a separate sub-section while other editions consider it part of the larger sub-section on ascetic virtue.

¹¹ For further reference on the issue of manuscript preservation, see M. Arunachalam, *An Introduction to the History of Tamil Literature* (Tiruchitrāmbalam: Gandhi Vidyālayam, 1974) and Eva Wilden, *Manuscript, Print and Memory: Relics of the Caṅkam in Tamilnadu* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

indication of the broader context in which they appear.¹² While such references to the *Tirukkuraḷ* provide ample evidence that the text circulated widely in the centuries immediately following its composition, there is nevertheless very little evidence at hand to reconstruct what an original version of the *Tirukkuraḷ* would have looked like.

Despite the impossibility of recovering an original version of the *Tirukkuraḷ*, there seems to have been some agreement on the overall structure of the text that developed over time. For example, the five extant medieval commentaries produced between the tenth and fifteenth centuries C.E. agree upon the division of the text into three thematic sections (*pāl*), suggesting that this structure is not simply a recent invention.¹³ Similarly, the medieval commentaries all include 133 total chapters, which are distributed across the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s three sections with remarkable consistency: the *Arattuppāl* includes the first thirty-eight chapters, the *Poruṭpāl* contains the following seventy chapters, and the *Kāmatuppāl* consists of the final twenty-five chapters. The sequence of the chapters remains consistent across all of the commentaries, and there is nearly unanimous agreement over the set of ten verses that appears within each chapter.¹⁴

Despite the agreement of the medieval commentaries on the division of the text into three sections and 133 chapters arranged in sequence, there are two structural elements over which the medieval commentaries differ. First, the commentaries often disagree over how to divide each section into sub-sections (*iyal*), and this disagreement is particularly evident when we see the

¹² See, for example, the reference to the *Tirukkuraḷ* in the *Maṇimēkalai*, discussed in further detail below, in which a verse from the *Tirukkuraḷ* is quoted directly and attributed to “the poet who does not lie” (*poyyil pulavaṇ*).

¹³ For a brief yet thorough comparative account of the major aspects of the extant *Tirukkuraḷ* commentaries, see E. Sundaramoorthy, “Commentaries of Tirukkuraḷ: Some Aspects,” *Annals of Oriental Research* 29, no. 1 (1980): 1-8.

¹⁴ The one exception can be found in the commentary of Kāliṅkar, in which three verses in the *Kāmatuppāl* are distributed into different chapters when compared to the other four extant commentaries. For further reference, see Mu. Caṇmukam Piḷḷai, *Tirukkuraḷ amaippum muraikum* (Cennai: Cennai Palkalaik Kaḷakam, 1972); P. S. Sundaram, “Introduction,” in *The Kural*, trans. P. S. Sundaram (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1990), 10.

disparate choices made by the commentators for the *Poruṭpāl* and the *Kāmattuppāl*. In the case of the *Poruṭpāl*, different commentators have divided it into three, six, and seven sub-sections respectively.¹⁵ In the case of the *Kāmattuppāl*, there is less of a marked discrepancy, but some commentators opt for two sub-sections while others opt for three.¹⁶ Second, the commentators differ in terms of how they arrange the verses within each chapter. Though the same ten verses may be grouped together, each commentator alters the sequence of verses according to his own view of how they ought to proceed.¹⁷ Indeed, one of the goals of each commentator is to identify the narrative logic of each chapter and arrange the verses to conform with that logic. While this significant variation in the verse arrangement sheds light on the interpretive assumptions of each commentator, it nevertheless makes it difficult to attain a more concrete sense of what an original version of the *Tirukkuraḷ* would have looked like, whether the division of each section into sub-sections was an original feature of the text or a later imposition, and whether the verses were composed in a specific sequence that was later tampered with by commentators or the sequence of verses was highly variable from the very beginning of the text's reception history.

Nevertheless, modern editions of *Tirukkuraḷ* tend to elide the fact that the choice of sub-sections and sequence of verses were highly variable throughout much of history. Nearly every edition of the *Tirukkuraḷ* published today follows the structural choices of Parimēlaḷakar, the

¹⁵ Sundaramoorthy, 4.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ One can see this discrepancy clearly in modern published editions of the medieval commentaries, which follow Parimēlaḷakar's arrangement of the verses overall but include a parenthetical number next to the name of each of the other commentators indicating where he positioned the verse within the sequence of the chapter. For example, in *Arattuppāl*, chapter 1, the commentators all agree on the arrangement of the first three verses. However, what Parimēlaḷakar lists as the fourth verse, Maṇakkuṭavar lists as the sixth, Paritīyār as the fifth, and Kāliṅkar as the seventh verse, respectively. See *Tirukkuraḷ uraikkottu: Arattuppāl*, 3-14. This variation in the arrangement of the verses can be seen throughout the rest of the opening chapter and indeed in almost every chapter of the *Tirukkuraḷ*.

celebrated thirteenth-century commentator, creating the illusion that his organizational schema is an original feature of the text.¹⁸ While the precise reasons for why Parimēlaḷakar's interpretive choices have been given precedence over all others requires a longer historical analysis than can be provided here, a key moment in this history seems to have occurred with the publication of the first print edition of the *Tirukkuraḷ* in 1812 C.E.¹⁹ Since that edition, almost every single print edition of the *Tirukkuraḷ* has followed suit and used Parimēlaḷakar's organizational schema. And yet, the fact that these published editions reflect the choices of a single medieval commentator is rarely mentioned or discussed. As a result, many readers, if not *most* readers, encounter the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a fixed and stable entity without any sense of the remarkable latitude with which the sub-sections were chosen and the verses were arranged throughout history. As François Gros has argued, "it continues to be surprising that in a text so much studied that the arrangement has not sparked off more interest among critics."²⁰

How, then, should we read the *Tirukkuraḷ* in light of this complicated history? I argue that the *Tirukkuraḷ* should be read as a unified whole, and that we can best attend to how it works upon its audiences by treating it as such. In light of the lack of evidence about what an original version of the *Tirukkuraḷ* would have looked like and given that the *Tirukkuraḷ* today circulates

¹⁸ This is true both in the division of the text into sub-sections and in the sequence of the verses within each chapter. One can find evidence of the use of Parimēlaḷakar's sub-sections and verse order in modern editions of the medieval commentaries, where Parimēlaḷakar's divisions are used for the *Poruṭpāl* and *Kāmattuppāl* in spite of the fact that the other commentators almost unanimously disagree with his choices. Modern translations of the *Tirukkuraḷ* also typically follow Parimēlaḷakar's paradigm; to name but one recent example, see *The Kural*, trans. P. S. Sundaram (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1990).

¹⁹ See Sascha Ebeling, "The College of Fort St George and the Transformation of Tamil Philology during the Nineteenth Century," in *The Madras School of Orientalism: Producing Knowledge in Colonial South India*, ed. Thomas R. Trautmann (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 239-240; Wilden, 359.

²⁰ François Gros, "Five Times Five is Twenty-Five: Around the Commentaries on *The Book of Love* of Tiruvaḷḷuvar," in *Deep Rivers: Selected Writings on Tamil Literature*, ed. Kannan M. and Jennifer Clare (Pondicherry: French Institute of Pondicherry, 2009), 162.

in a rather fixed and stable form, the most productive way to read the text is to treat it as a singular, unified, coherent literary unit. We can better understand what the *Tirukkuraḷ* actually is as a work of literature, I suggest, by reading across the text and examining how all of the three major structural components of the section (*pāl*), chapter (*atikāram*), and verse (*pāṭam*) work together to communicate a specific literary vision to the reader and to impact how that reader then engages with the world. In advocating for such an approach to reading the *Tirukkuraḷ*, I build upon the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s medieval commentators who, despite their disagreements over various structural aspects of the text, are unanimous in their understanding that the *Tirukkuraḷ* is the work of a single author and is thus reflective of a singular, coherent authorial vision. The medieval commentators all read the text as horizontally coherent, in that the progression from one section to the next, from one chapter to the next, and even from one verse to the next reflects an ordered pattern inherent to the text. They also read the text as vertically coherent, such that the smaller structures of individual verses build upward toward larger and larger structural units so that the whole is reflective of, and coherent with, each individual component of the text. My approach to reading the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a unified whole thus builds upon a long line of historical readers of the text who have looked for ways to make sense of how it works upon the reader.

Historical Authorship

Very little is known about who composed the *Tirukkuraḷ* and the circumstances behind its original production. The *Tirukkuraḷ*'s preface (*pāyiram*), where one might expect to find information about the poem's author, does not provide any biographical information.²¹ The earliest reference to the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s author is found in the *Maṇimēkalai*, a Tamil Buddhist text

²¹ Ranganayaki Mahapatra, P. Bhanumathi, and Sukla Chakrabarti, *Studies in Tirukkural* (Calcutta: Tamil Department, Calcutta University, 1996), 9.

composed around the sixth century C.E. The *Maṇimēkalai* directly quotes a *Tirukkuraḷ* verse and attributes it to “the poet who does not lie” (*poyyil pulavaṇ*).²² This reference suggests that the *Tirukkuraḷ* was regarded as the work of a single author from very early on in its reception history and was well known by the time of the *Maṇimēkalai*’s composition, perhaps only a century or two after that of the *Tirukkuraḷ*. The assumption that the *Tirukkuraḷ* is a single-authored text seems to have remained consistent over time, as Tamil treatises such as the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*, composed around the twelfth century C.E., include the *Tirukkuraḷ* as an example of a work with one author.²³ Most scholars and audiences today continue to assume that the text is the work of a single author, though even this assumption has been questioned at times.²⁴

At some point in history, the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s author began to be known as “Tiruvalluvar,” though nothing is known about his life or even whether such a historical person ever existed. Even the name itself is not a proper name but an honorific title perhaps meant to indicate his caste identity, as a combination of *tiru* (“sacred” or “holy”) and *valluvar*, a possible reference to a group of a low-caste drummers that historically were assigned to proclaim the orders of a king from the back of elephants.²⁵ Most notably, the author is praised in an anthology of verses known

²² The quoted verse appears in the sixth chapter of the *Arattuppāl* on “The Value of Wives” (*vāḷkkaittuṇainalam*), and it is usually listed as verse 55 in modern printed editions. The verse can be translated as follows: “Rain will fall because she tells it to rain; she will cause it to appear by worshipping her husband before worshipping the gods.” For a thorough analysis of the *Maṇimēkalai*’s reference to the *Tirukkuraḷ*, see Paula Richman, *Women, Branch Stories, and Religious Rhetoric in a Tamil Buddhist Text* (Syracuse: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1988), 109-119; Anne E. Monius, *Imagining a Place for Buddhism: Literary Culture and Religious Community in Tamil-Speaking South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 74-75.

²³ See Wilden, 346.

²⁴ See, for example, Va. U. Cītamparam Piḷḷai, “Tiruvalluvar tirukkuraḷ—pāyira āṛāycci,” *Tamiḷ polil* 5, no. 6 (1930): 232-237, which argues that the first three chapters were added by later commentators; Tuḷaci Irāmacāmi, *Caṁaṇa muṇivarkaḷ eḷutiyatu tirukkuraḷ* (Ceṇṇai: Viḷikaḷ, 2008), which argues that Jain sages authored the *Tirukkuraḷ* as an anthology of verses and that the notion of the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a single-authored text is a modern Śaiva invention; and David Shulman, *Tamil: A Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), which expresses skepticism about the unitary nature of the book overall and views the text as a collection of verses.

²⁵ For further reference, see V. V. S. Aiyar, *The Kural or the Maxims of Tiruvalluvar* (Madras: Subrahmanya Shiva, 1916), x; M. S. Purnalingam Pillai, *Critical Studies in Kural* (Munnirpallam: The Bibliotheca, 1929), 1; M. S.

as the *Tiruvalluvamālai* (“Garland of Verses on Tiruvalluvar”), often included at the end of modern editions of the *Tirukkuraḷ*. The dating of this anthology, like many Tamil texts, is uncertain; the verses are said to have been composed spontaneously by the members of the third Tamil Caṅkam academy upon recognizing the greatness of Tiruvalluvar’s poem, though most scholars assign it to the tenth or eleventh century C.E.²⁶ A variety of legends surround the life of Tiruvalluvar and circulate with great popularity in Tamil Nadu today, though most seem to have developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²⁷ One such legend declares that Tiruvalluvar was born into a caste of weavers in Mylapore.²⁸ Another legend, evidently building upon the *Tiruvalluvamālai*, associates him with the Tamil Caṅkam academy in Madurai. In this legend, Tiruvalluvar famously competes against the poets of the Tamil academy, who first reject his composition due to his low-caste birth, but ultimately accept him when he places the poem on the bench upon which the scholars are seated and it miraculously shrinks in size until only the

Purnalingam Pillai, *Tamil Literature: Revised and Enlarged* (Munnirpallam: The Bibliotheca, 1929), 75; Ca. Cōmacuntara Pāratīyār, *Tiruvalluvar* (Maturai: Nāvalar Puttaka Nilaiyam, 1971), 35-39; Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 124-125; N. Subrahmanian, *An Introduction to Tamil Literature* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1981), 25; Es. Vaiyāpurip Pillai, *Tamiḷc cūṭar maṇikaḷ: āṭṛām tokuti* (Ceṇṇai: Vaiyāpurippillai Niṇaiṇu Maṇṇam, 1995), 33-76; Tā. Māskō, *Tiruvalluvar kulamum matamum* (Neyvēli: Cintāṇai Velīyittakam, 1996).

²⁶ See Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (1975), 129; Arunachalam, 287.

²⁷ See Blackburn, 449-482, in which Blackburn summarizes the unique discursive confluence between Europeans and Tamils during the nineteenth century that led to a heightened interest in the *Tirukkuraḷ* and its author among Europeans and facilitated the circulation of a variety of legends about Tiruvalluvar. See also Wilden, 274-277, for a history of the earliest textual references to legends about the life of Tiruvalluvar.

²⁸ Aiyar, x-xi; Purnalingam Pillai, *Tamil Literature*, 75; S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, *History of Tamil Language and Literature* (Madras: New Century Book House, 1956), 80; C. Jesudasan and Hephzibah Jesudasan, *A History of Tamil Literature* (Calcutta: Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, 1961), 42; T. P. Meenakshisundaran, *A History of Tamil Literature* (Annamalainagar: Annamalai University, 1965), 47-48; Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (1975), 124-125; T. S. Srinivasan, “Thiruvalluvar—As I See Him,” *The Year Book of Legal Studies* 12-13 (1976-1977): 1-11; Subrahmanian, 25; K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Tirukkural: Lights of the Righteous Life* (Calcutta: The M. P. Birla Foundation, 1988), ix; Norman Cutler, “Three Moments in the Genealogy of Tamil Literary Culture,” in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 292-293.

Tirukkuraḷ remains, proving him to be a poet of great worth.²⁹ Despite some significant variation in these legends, several common threads cut across them all: Tiruvaḷḷuvar is almost always said to have been born to a high-caste father and a low-caste mother, to have remained a householder throughout his life, and to have been married happily to a woman named Vācuki.³⁰

Regardless of the many popular stories told about Tiruvaḷḷuvar today, we know nothing about him aside from what can be inferred through a close reading of the *Tirukkuraḷ*, and even then we cannot say much. This has not prevented many scholars from embarking on a quest for what we might call the “historical Tiruvaḷḷuvar,” particularly when it comes to ascertaining his religious identity. While the *Tirukkuraḷ* does not contain any references that indicate a clear-cut affiliation with one religious group over another, as will be discussed further below, Tiruvaḷḷuvar has been claimed by nearly every religious community in South India as one of their own.

²⁹ See Ki. Cu. Vi. Ilaṭcumi Ammaṇi, *Tirukkuraḷ tīpālaṅkāram* (Ceṇṇai: Cātu Accukkūṭam, 1929), 21; Vaiyapuri Pillai, 80; Avvai S. Duraiswamy Pillai, *An Introduction to the Study of Tiruvalluvar* (Madurai: Visalakshi Pathipagam, 1961), 2; Jesudasan and Jesudasan, 42; Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (1975), 124-125; Blackburn, 449-482; Wilden, 274-279.

³⁰ Aiyar, x-xi; Jesudasan and Jesudasan, 229-230; Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (1975), 124-125; Vaiyāpurip Pillai, 33-76; Blackburn, 449-482; R. Umamaheshwari, “Identities in Conflict: Jainism in Early Tamiḷakam” (PhD diss., Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2007), 69-70.

Arguments have been made that he was Jain,³¹ Buddhist,³² Śaiva,³³ Christian,³⁴ and an eclectic religious thinker who sought to fuse the best elements of every religious tradition into a single text.³⁵ Similarly, many scholars have read the *Tirukkuraḷ* with an eye toward uncovering the author's intentions.³⁶ Such readings of the text build, of course, on the commentarial tradition

³¹ Tiru. Vi. Kaliyāṇacuntaraṇ, “Aṇinturai,” in *Tirukkuraḷ āṛāycciyum jaiṇacamaya cittānta viḷakkamum*, ācīriyar Tiru. Aṇantanāta Nayiṇār (Cennai: Śrī Ātimūlam, 1932), 5-12; A. Chakravarti, *Tirukkural* (Madras: Diocesan Press, 1953), li-liv; K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India from Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar* (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1955), 332; Vaiyapuri Pillai, 81; Maṇaimalaiyaṭikaḷ, *Tirukkuraḷ āṛāycci* (Cennai: Pāri Nilaiyam, 1977), 93-103; A. Cakkaravartti Nayiṇār, *Tirukkuraḷ vaḷaṅkum ceyti* (Cennai: Kuṇiṇcip Patippakam, 1959), 80-112; T. S. Śrīpāl, *Tiruvalluvar vāḷttum ātipakavaṇ* (Cennai: Tiruttakka Tēvar Ilakkiya Maṇṇam, 1959); Mayilai Cīṇi Vēṇkaṭacāmi, *Camayaṅkaḷ vaḷartta tamīl: kaṭṭurait tokuppu* (Citamparam: Maṇivācakar Nūlakam, 1966), 172-176; Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (1975), 125; Ka. Naa. Subramanyam, *Tiruvalluvar and His Tirukkural* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith Publication, 1987), 4, 15, 156, 187; Vaiyāpurip Pillai, 33-76; Mayilai Cīṇi Vēṇkaṭacāmi, *Camāṇamum tamīlum* (Cennai: Vacantā Patippakam, 2003); T. S. Śrīpāl, *Tamīlakattil jaiṇam* (Cennai: Jaiṇa Ilaiṇar Maṇṇam, 2007), 10-16; Irāmacāmi; R. Umamaheshwari, *Reading History with the Tamil Jaiṇas: A Study on Identity, Memory and Marginalisation* (New Delhi: Springer, 2017).

³² Cēviyar Es. Taṇiṇāyaka Aṭikaḷ, *Tiruvalluvar* (Aṇṇāmalai: Aṇṇāmalaip Palkalaikkaḷakam, 1967), 45-60.

³³ Civattiru Vālaiyāṇanta Aṭikaḷ, *Tiruvalluvar cittānta caivar* (Cennai: Tirunelvēli Teṇṇintiya Caivacittānta Nūṛpatippuk Kaḷakam, 1976).

³⁴ R. Arulappa, *Thirukkural, A Christian Book?* (Madras: Meipporul Publishers, 1974); R. Arulappa, *God in Thirukkural* (Madras: Meipporul Publishers, 1976).

³⁵ Ilaṭcumi Ammaṇi, 21; Purnalingam Pillai, *Critical Studies in Kural*, 9; Purnalingam Pillai, *Tamil Literature*, 75; P. T. Srinivas Iyengar, *History of the Tamils from the Earliest Times to 600 A. D.* (Madras: C. Coomarasawmy Naidu & Sons, 1929), 585-590; V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, *Studies in Tamil Literature and History* (Madras: University of Madras, 1936), 135, 138; Vai. Mu. Kōpālakruṣṇamācāryar, *Tirukkuraḷ arattuppāl mūlamum parimēḷaḷakaruraiyum* (Madras: Muthukumaran Prees, 1949); Meenakshisundaran, *A History of Tamil Literature*, 47-48; T. P. Meenakshisundaran, “Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar,” in *Thirumathi Sornammal Endowment Lectures on Tirukkural, 1959-60 to 1968-69* (Madras: University of Madras, 1971), 215; Subrahmanian, 21; S. Maharajan, *Tiruvalluvar* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982); N. Subrahmanian and R. Rajalakshmi, *The Concordance of Tirukkural: With a Critical Introduction* (Madurai: Ennes Publications, 1984), xi-xiv; Srinivasa Iyengar, ix; Mu. Varadarajan, *A History of Tamil Literature*, trans. E. Sa. Visswanathan (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1988), 61; V. C. Kulandai Swamy, *The Immortal Kural* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994), 48, 55-56, 64-65, 109; Subramania Gopalan, “*Dhammapada* and *Tirukkuraḷ*: A Comparative Study,” in *Pāli Buddhism*, ed. Frank J. Hoffman and Mahinda Deegalle (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1996), 59-60; Māskō; Subramania Gopalan, “The Personal and Social Dimensions of *Tirukkuraḷ* Spirituality,” in *Hindu Spirituality: Postclassical and Modern*, ed. K. R. Sundararajan and Bithika Mukerji (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 112.

³⁶ For some representative examples, see B. Natarajan, “Economic Ideas of Thiruvalluvar,” in *Thirumathi Sornammal Endowment Lectures on Tirukkural, 1959-60 to 1968-69* (Madras: University of Madras, 1971), 55; Rao Sahib K. Kothandapani Pillai, “Thirukkural—Kamathuppal,” in *Thirumathi Sornammal Endowment Lectures on Tirukkural, 1959-60 to 1968-69* (Madras: University of Madras, 1971), 108, 196-198; M. Aram, “Thirukkural: Its Relevance for the Modern World,” in *Thirumathi Sornammal Endowment Lectures on Tirukkural, 1959-60 to 1968-69* (Madras: University of Madras, 1971), 411; Sri Shanmuga Subramaniam, “Concepts of Law in Thirukkural,” in *Thirumathi Sornammal Endowment Lectures on Tirukkural, 1959-60 to 1968-69* (Madras: University of Madras, 1971), 454, 457; N. Murugesu Mudaliar, “Polity in Tirukkuraḷ,” in *Thirumathi Sornammal Endowment Lectures on*

around the *Tirukkural*, in which commentators portrayed themselves as recovering and thus communicating the original author's intended meaning.³⁷

This project departs from such efforts to recover the historical Tiruvalluvar. On the one hand, as suggested above, the *Tirukkural* does not clearly indicate the sectarian affiliation of its author; even the various epithets for the divine in the opening chapter, "The Praise of God," are vague enough that they could apply equally to a number of religious traditions. On the other hand, given the lack of historical evidence available to us about the circumstances behind the composition of the *Tirukkural*, any effort to recover the intentions of the original author would be conjectural at best. There is, furthermore, a long history of scholarship that has moved away from hermeneutic strategies that rely upon claims about an author's intentions.³⁸ Not only is it impossible to ever fully recover what an author intended to convey historically, even in cases where an author is still living and able to comment upon his own literary work, it has long been argued that whatever his original intentions may have been, they are largely irrelevant when it comes to interpreting the text itself.³⁹ Even more, when we read texts in search of an author's

Tirukkural, 1959-60 to 1968-69 (Madras: University of Madras, 1971), 523-524, 608; Ravinder Kumar Seth, "Truth as Depicted in Tiruvalluvar and Kabir," in *First All-India Tirukkural Research Seminar Papers*, ed. N. Sanjeevi (Madras: University of Madras, 1973), 18-19; Harnam Singh Shan, "Didactic Teachings of Tiruvalluvar and Guru Nanak," in *First All-India Tirukkural Research Seminar Papers*, ed. N. Sanjeevi (Madras: University of Madras, 1973), 73-74; Maharajan; N. Subbu Reddiar, *Collected Papers* (Madras: Paari Nilayam, 1985), 106.

³⁷ See, for example, Cutler, "Interpreting *Tirukkural*," 557, in which he observes that Parimēlaḷakar "at least maintains the fiction that commentary is essentially a tool for recovering the meaning an author 'puts into' a text."

³⁸ The turn away from reading texts against the author's intentions is perhaps best exemplified by W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and M. C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," *The Sewanee Review* 54, no. 3 (1946): 468-488.

³⁹ For some representative examples, see Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 49-55; Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 66-78.

intentions, we often end up seeing only what we want to see and discovering more about our own proclivities and desires in the process than anything we might learn about the text's author.⁴⁰

Rather than reading the *Tirukkural* in search of the intentions of the historical author, I argue that we can read instead for the "intention of the text."⁴¹ Such an interpretive strategy is guided by a set of instructions that exist within the text itself, waiting to be activated by a reader who must make a conjecture about what the text wants to communicate to its audiences. In the context of the *Tirukkural*, this set of instructions manifests through what I have described as its inherent "literary strategies." For the purpose of this project, I define literary strategies as a set of instructions that is revealed through the dynamic interaction between the content of the text and the form in which it is presented that shapes the *Tirukkural*'s audience in ethically significant ways.⁴² Such an approach to reading the *Tirukkural* can help us overcome the limitations of previous scholarship, which focused heavily on the identity of the historical author, and turn our attention back toward the *Tirukkural* itself and how it functions as a work of literature.

Historical Audiences

If little can be said of the *Tirukkural*'s author, just as little can be said of the *Tirukkural*'s original audience. We have no historical information that would tell us for whom the text was

⁴⁰ See, for example, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 129-148.

⁴¹ I borrow this phrase from Umberto Eco, who uses it to describe how texts reach out to their audiences to instruct them on how to read and shape them into becoming a "model reader" able to make conjectures about it. See Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 58-59; Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, 73.

⁴² Here, I build upon Emily T. Hudson's reading of the *Mahābhārata* on the basis of its narrative strategies, which she defines as both "a set of instructions that a text deploys to guide its audiences" and "the dynamic interaction between the form and the content of the text, and its impact on the sensitive reader." Here, I use a slightly modified concept of "literary strategies" to account for the fact that the *Tirukkural* is not a narrative. See Emily T. Hudson, *Disorienting Dharma: Ethics and the Aesthetics of Suffering in the Mahābhārata* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 28-29.

first composed or how its earliest audiences would have read, heard, or otherwise engaged with its content. Despite this paucity of historical evidence, we nevertheless might read the *Tirukkuraḷ* for clues about the audience that is anticipated by the text. For example, many aspects of the text suggest that it anticipates an audience that is highly familiar with the conventions of earlier Tamil poetry, now generally referred to as “Caṅkam literature.”⁴³ In the *Poruṭpāl*, the emphasis on the role of the king and the virtues he must embody to govern successfully builds upon prior *puṛam* (“exterior”) conventions.⁴⁴ In the *Kāmatuppāl*, many of the verses cannot be understood without some knowledge of the paradigms of *akam* (“interior”) poetry. To cite but one example, in a chapter entitled “Describing the Abandonment of Modesty,”⁴⁵ there are multiple references to the practice of riding a horse of palmyra stems (*maṭal*), without any definition or elaboration of the concept. The practice, in which the male lover mounts a horse sculpture made of sharp and painful palmyra leaves while carrying a portrait of his lover in order to proclaim his love to the village and hasten his reunion with the heroine, is found throughout much of *akam* poetry.⁴⁶ This practice is also described in the *Tolkāppiyam*, the oldest extant treatise on Tamil poetics.⁴⁷ These references point to an anticipated original audience that was well versed in Tamil poetics and the literary conventions circulating at the time. Even if we can say little else historically, we can infer something about the audience that was envisioned by the text through such literary details.

⁴³ That the Caṅkam poetic conventions of *akam* (“interior”) and *puṛam* (“exterior”) were well established by the time of the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s composition is fairly certain, and the *Tirukkuraḷ* builds upon these conventions in interesting ways.

⁴⁴ See, for example, George L. Hart, *The Poems of Ancient Tamil: Their Milieu and Their Sanskrit Counterparts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 13-20.

⁴⁵ See *Kāmatuppāl*, chapter 114.

⁴⁶ See Takanobu Takahashi, *Tamil Love Poetry and Poetics* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 103-117.

⁴⁷ *Tolkāppiyam in English*, trans. V. Murugan (Chennai: Institute of Asian Studies, 2000), 384-385 (*Tolkāppiyam*, *Poruḷ*, *Akattiṇai Iyal*, verse 984).

In addition to an audience that was highly sophisticated and learned, the *Tirukkuraḷ* also reflects the contours of a literary culture that was likely dominated by male poets writing for largely male audiences. While an exclusively male audience is not demanded by the text itself, we can infer something about the historical and literary context in which it was produced through the many places where a male perspective is taken for granted. For example, in the *Arattuppāl* we find a chapter on “The Value of Wives” but no similar chapter on the value of husbands.⁴⁸ Additionally, in discussions of sexual desire and behavior throughout the text, such as in chapters on “Not Desiring Another’s Wife” and “Prostitutes,” the *Tirukkuraḷ* often defaults to the male perspective.⁴⁹ The presumed male perspective is complicated somewhat in the *Kāmatuppāl*, in which the verses shift back and forth between the perspective of the hero and heroine throughout. At the same time, the heroine’s appearance and actions are often rendered through the hero’s gaze, which shapes the audience’s understanding of her in various ways.⁵⁰ We thus have to contend with the fact that the *Tirukkuraḷ* assumes a largely male audience and that its content is naturally shaped by that assumption. In order to acknowledge the largely male perspective from which the *Tirukkuraḷ* operates, throughout the project I will often refer to the reader of the text using male pronouns. This is not to deny that a female reader has the potential to be shaped by the literary strategies described above; indeed, as they have been defined here, these literary strategies do not limit themselves to any one type of reader, but reach out universally to shape any person’s engagement with the text. Nevertheless, I believe it is important to grapple with the

⁴⁸ See *Arattuppāl*, chapter 6.

⁴⁹ See *Arattuppāl*, chapter 15 and *Poruṭpāl*, chapter 92.

⁵⁰ Consider, for example, the opening chapter, “Encountering a Beautiful Woman” (*takaiyaṇaṅkuruttal*), in which the hero encounters the heroine for the very first time. We learn much about the heroine’s appearance, her adornments, and her various actions, but the verses are all rendered from the perspective of the hero.

issue of male perspective head on and bring it into focus throughout this project rather than to neglect this significant historical aspect of the context in which the *Tirukkuraḷ* was produced.

Beyond what we can infer about the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s anticipated audience, the *Maṇimēkalai* provides us with our earliest definitive sense of how historical audiences actually engaged with the text. As mentioned above, the Buddhist narrative cites a verse from the *Tirukkuraḷ* directly and attributes it to “the poet who does not lie” (*poyyil pulavaṇ*).⁵¹ From this evidence, it is clear that the *Tirukkuraḷ* was already well known to audiences in Tamil literary culture by the time of the *Maṇimēkalai*'s composition around the sixth century. It would not make sense for an author to cite a verse verbatim and attribute it to a specific author unless the text had already circulated widely and would have been recognizable to his audiences. From very early on, it seems that authors of various religious stripes claimed allegiance with the *Tirukkuraḷ* in order to establish the legitimacy of their own views.⁵² While the religious perspective of the *Tirukkuraḷ* continues to be much discussed and debated, the fact that it shows up in a Tamil Buddhist narrative suggests that it began crossing religious boundaries soon after its composition. While the *Maṇimēkalai* does not explicitly claim the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a Buddhist text, it does seek to affiliate itself with the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s teachings and author, recasting them as needed within the context of its Buddhist outlook.⁵³ Indeed, the *Maṇimēkalai* seems to have inaugurated a long tradition of claiming affiliation with the *Tirukkuraḷ*. We find many such references to the text in later literary compositions and their commentaries, including Camayativākaravāmaṇar's fourteenth-century

⁵¹ See, again, Richman, 109-119; Monius, 74-75.

⁵² See, for example, Anne E. Monius's observation that the *Maṇimēkalai* “clearly seeks to present itself as thoroughly compatible with other important Tamil literary works, as a full and legitimate member of the literary culture in which it participates.” Monius, 75.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 81.

Jain commentary on the *Nīlakēci*, which refers to the *Tirukkuraḷ* as “our text” or “our authority” (*em oṭtu*), thus affiliating itself with the *Tirukkuraḷ* much as the *Maṇimēkalai* did many centuries before and perhaps also attempting to claim the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a Jain text.⁵⁴

In addition to these references, we also find verses from the text—often numbering in the hundreds—scattered throughout commentaries on grammatical treatises. Ḥampūraṇar’s eleventh-century commentary on the *Tolkāppiyam* cites 189 verses from the *Tirukkuraḷ*, while Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar’s fourteenth-century commentary includes 167 verses.⁵⁵ And these are just two examples from a long list of grammatical commentaries that quote the *Tirukkuraḷ*. Clearly, at some point in Tamil literary history, the theoretical tradition began to regard the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a literary exemplum par excellence; it shows up again and again in commentaries on grammatical treatises. Yet, these commentaries cite individual verses without any indication of the broader context from which they emerge; we thus have little information about how these commentators would have accessed the text. They may have drawn from the storehouse of their own memory or copied from the work of earlier commentators or manuscripts of the text that were circulating at the time.

Our first real sense of how audiences engaged with the text as a whole comes from the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s extant medieval commentaries. Ten commentaries are said to have been produced between the tenth and fifteenth centuries C.E., more than any other work of Tamil literature

⁵⁴ See A. Chakravarti, *Neelakesi* (Taṇcāvūr: Tamiḷ Palkalaik Kaḷakam, 1936), 5; Chakravarti, *Tirukkuraḷ*, lxviii; Cīṇi Vēṇkaṭacāmi, *Camayaṇkaḷ vaḷartta tamiḷ*, 172-176; Meenakshisundaran, “Philosophy of Tiruvaḷḷuvar,” 214, 289-290; Monius, 75; Umamaheshwari, “Identities in Conflict,” 76-77; Muṇaivar Ce. Irācu, “Tiruvaḷḷuvar: cila varalārūruk kuṟippukaḷ,” in *Tirukkuraḷ tēciya nūl: paṇmuka āyvup pārvai*, ed. Muṇaivar Kō. Vicayarākavaṇ (Ceṇṇai: Ulakat Tamiḷārāycci Niṟuvaṇam, 2014), 41-44.

⁵⁵ See Wilden, 278.

received during that time.⁵⁶ Of those ten, only the commentaries of Parimēlaḷakar, Maṇakkuṭavar, Paripperumāl, Kāliṅkar, and Paritiyār have come down to us in nearly complete form, while the other five commentaries exist in extremely partial form, if they survive at all. The legacy of these medieval commentaries is codified in a *tanippāṭal* (“stray verse”), which lists the names of all ten commentators followed by a note that says, “these people produced commentaries on Vaḷḷuvar’s text” (*vaḷḷuvar nuṛku ellaiyurai ceytār ivar*).⁵⁷

While the dating of the extant medieval commentaries has been much debated,⁵⁸ there is a general scholarly consensus that Maṇakkuṭavar produced what at the time would have been one

⁵⁶ See U. Vē. Cāminātaiyar, *Tiruvaḷḷuvarum tirukkuraḷum* (Ceṇṇai: Kalaimakaḷ Vēḷiyīṭu, 1936); J. M. Somasundaram Pillai, *A History of Tamil Literature: With Texts and Translations: From the Earliest Times to 600 A. D.* (Annamalainagar: J. M. Somasundaram Pillai, 1968), 65; K. C. Kamaliah, *Preface in the Kuraḷ* (Madras: M. Seshachalam & Co., 1973), 4-5; Arunachalam, 194; S. M. Diaz, *Aphorisms of Valluvar: Commentary and Comparative Study* (Madras: International Society for the Investigation of Ancient Civilizations, 1982), xii; Mu. A. Mukammatu Ucēṇ, *Tamiḷ uraiṇūḷ uraiyāciriyaṛ nūḷaṭaivu* (Kumpakōṇam: Arputā Patippakam, 1988); Varadarajan, 189; Cutler, “Interpreting *Tirukkuraḷ*,” 551; Anand Pandian, “Tradition in Fragments: Inherited Forms and Fractures in the Ethics of South India,” *American Ethnologist* 35, no. 3 (2008): 471; François Gros, “Introducing Tiruvaḷḷuvar: *The Book of Love*,” in *Deep Rivers: Selected Writings on Tamil Literature*, ed. Kannan M. and Jennifer Clare (Pondicherry: French Institute of Pondicherry, 2009), 127-128; Gros, “Five Times Five is Twenty-Five,” 159; Thomas Lehmann, “A Survey of Classical Tamil Commentary Literature,” in *Between Preservation and Recreation: Tamil Traditions of Commentary: Proceedings of a Workshop in Honour of T. V. Gopal Iyer*, ed. Eva Wilden (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondicherry/École française D’Extrême-Orient, 2009), 63, 68; Śrī Pirēm̄kumār, “*Tirukkuraḷ uraikaḷ*,” in *Tirukkuraḷ paṇmuka vācippu*, ed. Ve. Pirakāṣ (Ceṇṇai: Mārru, 2009), 187-203; Will Sweetman and R. Ilakkuvan, *Bibliotheca Malabarica: Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg’s Tamil Library* (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondicherry/École française d’Extrême-Orient, 2012), 54; Wilden, 274, 278, 311, 346.

⁵⁷ The full verse is as follows: *tarumar maṇakkuṭavar tāmattar naccar / pariti parimē laḷakar—tirumalaiyar / mallar paripperumāl kāliṅkar vaḷḷuvanūr / kellaḷiyurai ceytār ivar* (“Tarumar, Maṇakkuṭavar, Tāmattar, Naccar / Pariti, Parimēlaḷakar—Tirumalaiyar / Mallar, Paripperumāl, Kāliṅkar; on Vaḷḷuvar’s text / These people produced commentaries”). For further reference on this *tanippāṭal* verse, see Purnalingam Pillai, *Tamil Literature*, 76; Somasundaram Pillai, 65; Vaiyāpurip Piḷḷai, 93-101; Mu. Aruṇācalam, *Tamiḷ ilakkiya varalāru: paṭiṇōrām nūrrāṇṭu* (Ceṇṇai: The Parkar, 2005), 57.

⁵⁸ See, in particular, the discussion around dating these commentators in Mu. Aruṇācalam, *Tamiḷ ilakkiya varalāru: paṭtām nūrrāṇṭu* (Ceṇṇai: The Parkar, 2005), 94-95; Aruṇācalam, *Tamiḷ ilakkiya varalāru: paṭiṇōrām nūrrāṇṭu*, 60-61; Mu. Aruṇācalam, *Tamiḷ ilakkiya varalāru: paṭiṇmūnṛām nūrrāṇṭu* (Ceṇṇai: The Parkar, 2005), 50. He assigns the commentators to the following dates: Maṇakkuṭavar (c. 950-1000), Paripperumāl (c. 1025-1050), Kāliṅkar (c. 1200-1300), Parimēlaḷakar (1250-1300), and Paritiyār (c. 1450). These estimates are roughly recapitulated in Gros, “Five Times Five is Twenty-Five,” 159-160, while Lehmann, 68, assigns Maṇakkuṭavar and Paritiyār to the twelfth century and Kāliṅkar, Paripperumāl, and Parimēlaḷakar to the thirteenth century.

of the first written commentaries on the *Tirukkuraḷ* around the late tenth century.⁵⁹ If this dating is correct, then Maṇakkuṭavar is not only the first Tamil intellectual to have written a *Tirukkuraḷ* commentary, but also the first to have written a commentary devoted exclusively to a literary text as opposed to a grammatical treatise.⁶⁰ While Maṇakkuṭavar may have been the first in a long line of Tamil intellectuals who wrote commentaries on the *Tirukkuraḷ*, it is Parimēlaḷakar's late thirteenth-century commentary that has received the majority of scholarly attention to date and is frequently held up as the pinnacle of the Tamil commentarial tradition.⁶¹ Parimēlaḷakar is unique among the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s medieval commentators in that his commentary alone has been the subject of sub-commentaries, starting with T. K. Irattiṇa Kavirāyar's *Nuṇporuḷ mālai* around the sixteenth or seventeenth century.⁶² The commentaries of Paripperumāl, Kāliṅkar, and Paritiyār continue to be published and sold today, but they are scarcely mentioned, and few have engaged with them in any robust way.⁶³

⁵⁹ As Aruṇācalam discusses, several places in Maṇakkuṭavar's commentary indicate that there were other commentators before him. In his comments on verse 16, he says that "some will also explain the meaning" (*poruḷ uraiippārum uḷar*) of the verse in a different way, while in verse 390, he says "some will also say" (*eṇpārum uḷar*) the verse differently. However, none of these earlier commentaries, if they ever existed in manuscript form, survive today; there may have been an oral commentarial tradition that was passed down through Maṇakkuṭavar, who began the tradition of written commentaries. See Aruṇācalam, *Tamiḷ ilakkiya varalāru: pattām nūrrāṇṭu*, 100-101.

⁶⁰ See, again, Aruṇācalam, *Tamiḷ ilakkiya varalāru: pattām nūrrāṇṭu*, 100; Aruṇācalam, *Tamiḷ ilakkiya varalāru: patinṇōrām nūrrāṇṭu*, 62-63; and Gros, "Five Times Five is Twenty-Five," 160.

⁶¹ See, for example, Aiyar, xxxix; Kōpālakuṣṇamācāryar; Aruṇācalam, *Tamiḷ ilakkiya varalāru: patinṇmūṇrām nūrrāṇṭu*, 42-43; Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974), 233; Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (1975), 126, 195-96; Cutler, "Interpreting *Tirukkuraḷ*," 551; Gros, "Five Times Five is Twenty-Five," 158; Vaiyāpurip Piḷḷai, 93-101; Ki. Vā. Jakannāṭaṇ, *Tirukkuraḷ: ārayccip patippu* (Kōyamputtūr: Rāmakirūṣṇa Miṣaṇ Vityālayam, 2004); Lehmann, 68; Shulman, 94.

⁶² Kamil Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan: On Tamil Literature of South India* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 250; Varadarajan, 190; Cutler, "Interpreting *Tirukkuraḷ*," 563; Pirēmkuṁār, 196-203.

⁶³ The few exceptions include Aruṇācalam's multi-volume *Tamiḷ ilakkiya varalāru*, especially the volumes on the eleventh, thirteenth, and fifteenth centuries; Caṇmukam Piḷḷai; Kamaliah; and Sundaramoorthy.

The extant commentaries illustrate several important aspects of how audiences at the time engaged with the *Tirukkuraḷ*. First, the commentators all share the assumption that the poem is a unified, coherent, deliberately-authored whole. As discussed above, this assumption is evident in how they read the text horizontally, working to extract a continuous discourse running through it from beginning to end, and vertically, building up from the smallest structural component of the verses to the larger structures of chapter, sub-section, and section. As will be further discussed in chapter 2, their efforts to establish a sense of overall coherence to the text often manifests under the guise of articulating the original intentions of the author; regardless of whether or not each commentator actually thought he was recovering the author's intended meaning, at the very least we can say that the commentators are unanimous in treating the *Tirukkuraḷ* as the unified work of a single author. Second, they played an important role historically as organizers of the text.⁶⁴ As mentioned above, the commentators all agree on an overall three-part structure of 1,330 verses distributed into groups of ten across 133 chapters, while they differ in terms of how they organize the text at the level of the sub-section and how they arrange the order of the ten verses within each chapter.⁶⁵ Third, the commentators were all driven by a certain set of interpretive ideologies. For example, Parimēlaḷakar is widely believed to have been a Vaiṣṇava Brahmin,⁶⁶ and inscriptional evidence suggests that he was born into a lineage of temple priests at the Śrī

⁶⁴ See, for example, Ka. Naṭēca Uṭaiyār, *Tirukkuraḷ tīravu: poruṭpāl iraimāṭci* (Cēlam: Cēlam Tiruvaḷḷuvar Kaḷakattār, 1953); Meenakshisundaran, "Philosophy of Tiruvaḷḷuvar," 313; Caṇmukam Piḷḷai; Kamaliah, 66-67; Sundaramoorthy, 1-8; Gros, "Introducing Tiruvaḷḷuvar," 138; Gros, "Five Times Five is Twenty-Five," 163-164; Shulman, 96.

⁶⁵ See, again, Sundaramoorthy, 1-8; see also Kā. Kōvintaṇ, *Kāviri: Kaṭṭuraip tokuppu* (Tiruvattipuram: Eḷilakam, 1990), 29-44, which offers a brief comparative study of Maṇakkuṭavar and Parimēlaḷakar.

⁶⁶ Aiyar, xxxix; Vaiyapuri Pillai, 81; Jesudasan and Jesudasan, 216; Jakannāṭaṇ; Aruṇācalam, *Tamiḷ ilakkiya varalāru: paṭiṇmūṇrām nūrrāṇṭu*, 42-50; Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (1974), 233; Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (1975), 126, 195-96; Irā. Mōkaṇ and Na. Cokkaliṇkam, *Urai maraṇpukaḷ* (Citamparam: Maṇivācakar Patippakam, 1985), 223-261; Cutler, "Interpreting *Tirukkuraḷ*," 556, 562, 564, 565; Cutler, "Three Moments," 294; Shulman, 96.

Ulakaṇṭantapperumāl temple in Kāñcīpuram.⁶⁷ His commentary is often said to be driven by his “unmistakable leanings toward a Brahmanical ideology,”⁶⁸ which manifests in his adherence to certain cultural values “represented by concepts such as the *puruṣārthas*, *varṇāśramadharma*, the *trimūrti*, and the three *guṇas*.”⁶⁹ His commentary shows a deep mastery of both the Sanskrit and Tamil literary traditions, and he frequently cites from Sanskrit and Tamil texts alike to illuminate the meaning of the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s verses.⁷⁰ Regardless of whatever the historical details about Parimēlaḷakar’s life may be, it is clear that he wrote his commentary with a particular intellectual project in mind. Thus, by at least the late thirteenth century, the *Tirukkuraḷ* was used by commentators to promote certain interpretive frameworks and to negotiate the boundaries of the wider literary culture in which they wrote and participated.

Soon after the composition of the last medieval commentary around the fifteenth century, the *Tirukkuraḷ* began to draw the attention of European missionaries as they arrived on the subcontinent. Quite possibly the earliest non-Indian reference to the text is found in Fernao de Queyroz’s *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, in which a Franciscan missionary is said to have cited the *Tirukkuraḷ* in support of his teachings in a religious debate in the court of Buvanaika Bahu of Kotte.⁷¹ Another early reference can be found in Roberto de Nobili’s *Report*

⁶⁷ See Kōpālakruṣṇamācāryar; Jakannāṭaṇ; Aruṇācalam, *Tamiḷ ilakkiya varalāru: paṭiṇmūṇrām nūrrāṇṭu*, 44; Mōkaṇ and Cokkaliṇkam, 223-261.

⁶⁸ Cutler, “Interpreting *Tirukkuraḷ*,” 562.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 556.

⁷⁰ See Sundaramoorthy, 5-8, for a summary of Parimēlaḷakar’s acquaintance with Sanskrit and Tamil literary works.

⁷¹ See Xavier S. Thani Nayagam, “The Tirukkural and Greek Ethical Thought,” in *Dr. R. P. Sethu Pillai Silver Jubilee Commemoration Volume* (Madras: Palaniappa Bros., 1961), 73; Maharajan, 22.

on *Indian Customs*, which mentions an author, Vaḷḷuvar, famous for his Tamil composition.⁷²

Less than a century later, the German Protestant missionary Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg published an annotated catalog of Tamil texts, which he collected over the course of two years in India from 1706 to 1708, known as the *Bibliotheca Malabarica*.⁷³ Ziegenbalg mentions that he had a copy of the *Tirukkural* and a commentary on the text that he attributes to Naccinārkkiniyar; however, no such commentary is known to have existed. As Will Sweetman and R. Ilakkuvan speculate, it is possible that Ziegenbalg mixed up the names of various commentators in his catalog.⁷⁴ Even so, the *Bibliotheca Malabarica* provides us with evidence that the *Tirukkural* was very much in circulation during the early eighteenth century and that it was one of the first texts that was presented to missionaries by the Tamil scholars with whom they were in contact.

As missionaries began to learn Tamil and study the *Tirukkural*, they were “comforted by its non-idolatrous teachings”⁷⁵ and frequently held it up as a source of natural wisdom. The first known translation of the *Tirukkural* into a European language was produced by C. J. Beschi,⁷⁶ whose 1730 Latin rendering of the first two sections ushered in a flurry of missionary interest in the text, which was considered a valuable source of moral teachings that could pave the way for common ground with Christian theology.⁷⁷ Beschi’s Latin translation became highly influential

⁷² See Roberto de Nobili, *Preaching Wisdom to the Wise: Three Treatises*, trans. Anand Amaladass and Francis X. Clooney (Saint Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2000), 155.

⁷³ Kamil Zvelebil, *Companion Studies to the History of Tamil Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 1-2; Sweetman and Ilakkuvan; Wilden, 25.

⁷⁴ Sweetman and Ilakkuvan, 54.

⁷⁵ Blackburn, 452.

⁷⁶ Aiyar, i-iii; Meenakshisundaran, *A History of Tamil Literature*, 2-3; V. Rajesh, *Manuscripts, Memory and History: Classical Tamil Literature in Colonial India* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press India, 2014), 200.

⁷⁷ Blackburn, 452; Wilden, 274.

throughout the rest of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as selections from the *Tirukkural* were translated into English, French, and German.⁷⁸ Francis Whyte Ellis, for example, a British civil servant who served as Collector of Madras and founded the College of Fort St. George and its press, produced a partial English translation of selected excerpts from the *Tirukkural* that was published around the time of his death in 1819.⁷⁹ A complete English translation of the entire text did not appear until the publication of G. U. Pope's translation in 1886, which reproduced both Beschi's Latin translation and Ellis's partial English translation in the notes.⁸⁰ In the *Tirukkural*, Pope found echoes of the Sermon on the Mount that he attributed to the teachings of St. Thomas, said to have preached and later died in Mylapore, speculating that the poem's author may have had something of those teachings in mind when he composed the text.⁸¹

Over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, countless commentaries were produced on the *Tirukkural*, particularly as the text became enmeshed in efforts to articulate a distinctly Dravidian identity in the Tamil-speaking region in opposition to a perceived history of Aryan, Sanskritic, and Brahmanical oppression. In the early part of the twentieth century, socio-

⁷⁸ Just a few of those who translated the *Tirukkural* during this time include Nathaniel Edward Kindersley, Francis Whyte Ellis, W. H. Drew, Edouard-Simon Ariel, Karl Graul, E. Lamairesse, John Lazarus, and G. U. Pope. For further reference, see Aiyar, i-iii; Purnalingam Pillai, *Tamil Literature*, 358; Arunachalam, 278; Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (1974), 238; Subrahmanian and Rajalakshmi, xiii; Zvelebil, *Companion Studies*, 4, 149; Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Blackburn; Thomas R. Trautmann, *Languages and Nations: The Dravidian Proof in Colonial Madras* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Ve. Pirakāṣ, "Tirukkural moliṭeyarppukaḷ," in *Tirukkural paṇmuka vācippu*, ed. Ve. Pirakāṣ (Ceṇṇai: Māṇru, 2009), 149-162; Rajesh; Wilden, 31, 274; N. Kōvintarājan, *Atikāramum tamīḷ pulamaiyum: Tamīḷiliruntu mutal āṇkila moliṭeyarppukaḷ* (Chennai: Crea Publishers, 2016); Cu. Tiyaṭōr Pāskaraṇ, *Kal mēl naṭanta kālam: varalāru cārnta kaṭṭuraikaḷ* (Ceṇṇai: New Century Book House, 2016).

⁷⁹ See Francis Whyte Ellis, *Tirukkural: Ellis' Commentary*, ed. R. P. Sethu Pillai (Madras: University of Madras, 1955). For further reference, see Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*; Trautmann, *Languages and Nations*; Rajesh, 95, 100, 161.

⁸⁰ See G. U. Pope, *The Sacred Kural of Tiruvalluva Nayanar* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2011).

⁸¹ Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan*, 157; Subrahmanian and Rajalakshmi, xii; Kulandai Swamy, 48-49; Gros, "Introducing Tiruvalḷuvar," 132.

political activist and Buddhist convert Ayōttitācar published a series of essays arguing that the story of Tiruvaḷḷuvar's birth to an upper-caste father and a low-caste mother is false and that he was actually part of an educated lineage of Buddhist kings who were overtaken by an influx of Brahmins into the Tamil region.⁸² He claims the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a Buddhist text, altering the title to "Tirikkuraḷ" to conform with the Buddhist scriptures known as the *Tripitaka*.⁸³ A few decades later, social activists like Periyār (E. V. Ramasamy) and Pulavar Kuḷantai praised the *Tirukkuraḷ* as the unique product of Tamil genius and a symbol of the purity of ancient Tamil culture. Periyār, for example, in a 1948 speech delivered at the third annual Tiruvaḷḷuvar conference, discusses how he first rejected the *Tirukkuraḷ* as upholding the Brahmanical ideology of texts like the *Manusmṛti*, but later came to see it as the foundation of Dravidian culture, arguing that it in fact *refutes* Aryan ideologies.⁸⁴ Around the same time, Pulavar Kuḷantai published a series of commentaries on the *Tirukkuraḷ* emphasizing the Tamil origins of the author and rejecting the view, which he attributed to the later influence of the *Tiruvaḷḷuvamālai* and Parimēlaḷakar, that the text contains the same basic ideas as the Sanskrit Vedas.⁸⁵ More recently, the former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, M. Karunanidhi, published an extensive commentary on the *Tirukkuraḷ*

⁸² Ayōttitācar, *Ayōttitācar cintanaikaḷ* (*camayam, ilakkiyam*) (Pāḷaiyaṅkōṭṭai: Nāṭṭār Vaḷakkāriyal Āyvu Maiyam, 1999), 455-462.

⁸³ For further reference, see V. Geetha and S. V. Rajadurai, *Towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium: From Iyothee Thass to Periyar* (Calcutta: Samya, 1998); Kannan M. and François Gros, "Tamil Dalits in Search of a Literature," *South Asia Research* 22, no. 1 (2002): 21-65; G. Aloysius, *Dalit-Subaltern Emergence in Religio-Cultural Subjectivity: Iyothee Thassar and Emancipatory Buddhism* (New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2004); Rāj Kautamaṇ, *Ka. Ayōttitācar āyvuḷ* (Nārkarkōvil: Kāḷaccuvaṭu Patippakam, 2004), 160-177.

⁸⁴ Ī. Ve. Rā. Periyār, *Tirukkuraḷum periyārum* (Pavāni: Vaḷḷuvar Patippakam, 1948); Ī. Ve. Rā. Periyār, *Periyār inṟum enṟum* (Kōvai: Viṭiyal Patippakam, 2017).

⁸⁵ Pulavar Kuḷantai, *Tirukkuraḷum parimēlaḷakarum*; Pulavar Kuḷantai, *Tirukkuraḷum kuḷantaiyurai* (Īrōṭu: Iḷaṅkō Puttakacālai, 1961).

and sponsored a number of projects to memorialize the text before his death in 2018, including the construction of large statues of Tiruvaḷḷuvar in Chennai and Kanyakumari.⁸⁶

This project builds upon the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s many historical audiences, contributing another perspective on a much-studied and often-translated text. In particular, the extant commentaries have guided much of my reading and interpretation of the text in the years since I began working on this project. These commentaries provide a window onto how the *Tirukkuraḷ* was read and interpreted by Tamil intellectuals historically, to say nothing of the many resources available to think about how the *Tirukkuraḷ* is read, studied, and interpreted today. In one sense, this project is but the latest in a long line of efforts to understand how the *Tirukkuraḷ* operates as a work of literature going back at least as far as Maṇakkuṭavar in the tenth century and even further still if we consider the evidence of how audiences engaged with the text available in works such as the *Maṇimēkalai*. At the same time, as this project developed I decided that it should focus less on the perspective of any one historical reader or set of readers and more on how the text works upon *any* reader. Even as I acknowledge how the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s historical audiences have shaped my own reading, I look for ways in which the *Tirukkuraḷ* itself tries to create and shape a certain kind of reader. I seek to go beyond the interpretation of any one historical person in order to look for clues about what kind of interpretation the text itself wants the reader to create.

Sanskrit Literary Influence

The *Tirukkuraḷ* has given rise to an enormous amount of debate about the influence of Sanskrit literary culture over its structure and content. Of particular note is the fact that its three thematic sections align closely with three of the four *puruṣārthas*—*dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*—each of which has generated its own body of literature in Sanskrit. Throughout much of the

⁸⁶ See Karunanidhi; Kaṇapati Stapati.

Tirukkuraḷ’s history, there has been a strong impulse to read the content of the *Arattuppāl* through the lens of *Dharmaśāstra* texts, especially *Manusmṛti*; the *Poruṭpāl* through Kauṭilya’s *Arthaśāstra*; and the *Kāmattuppāl* through Vātsyāyana’s *Kāmasūtra*. Indeed, this impulse seems to have been shared by some of the medieval commentators: Parimēlaḷakar, in his introduction to the *Arattuppāl*, defines *aṛam* (“virtue”) as “doing the things that were commanded in texts such as Manu and avoiding the things that were prohibited.”⁸⁷ Paripperumāl, in his introduction to the *Kāmattuppāl*, points his reader specifically to a chapter in Vātsyāyana’s *Kāmasūtra* in order to explain his approach to organizing the text.⁸⁸ Thus, at least some of the commentators felt little anxiety about bringing Sanskrit frameworks to bear upon the *Tirukkuraḷ* and were comfortable with pointing out possible Sanskrit analogs within the text.

In contemporary scholarship, two major sides have emerged. On one side, scholars assume the *Tirukkuraḷ* is largely indebted to prior Sanskrit texts like *Manusmṛti*, *Arthaśāstra*, and *Kāmasūtra*. Some scholars argue that the *Tirukkuraḷ* borrows heavily from Sanskrit literature while adapting its content in distinctively Tamil ways,⁸⁹ while other scholars assert that the

⁸⁷ *aṛamāvatu maṇu mutaliya nūlkaḷil vitittāṇa ceytalum, vilakkiyaṇa oḷitalum ām* (“Virtue is doing the things that were commanded in texts such as Manu and avoiding the things that were prohibited”). See *Tirukkuraḷ uraikkottu: Arattuppāl*, 1.

⁸⁸ *avvāru kūṛātu, aṛam poruḷ iṇṇam eṇa vaṭanūḷ vaḷiyē kūṛiṇārātaliṇ, itaṛku ilakkaṇam vātsyāyaṇam eṇṇum kāmāntirattuc curatavikaṛṇam eṇṇum atikaraṇattuḷ kaṇṇukoḷka* (“It (the *Kāmattuppāl*) is not described in that way (i.e., according to the frameworks of the Tamil literary tradition) because the author wrote according to the tradition of Sanskrit texts on virtue, wealth, and pleasure; you can see for yourself the explanation for this (mode of organizing the text) in the *Kāmasūtra*’s chapter on ‘The Misunderstanding of Sexual Union’ by Vātsyāyana”). See *Tirukkuraḷ uraikkottu: Kāmattuppāl* (Tiruppaṇantāl: Śrī Kācimaṭam, 1970), 3.

⁸⁹ H. A. Popley, *The Sacred Kural or The Tamil Veda of Tiruvaḷḷuvar* (Calcutta: Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, 1931), 26; Cāminātaiyar; Kōpālakruṣṇamācāryar; Naṭēca Uṭaiyār; H. A. Popley, “Social Ethics in the ‘Tirukkuraḷ,’” *Tamil Culture* 2, no. 3 & 4 (September 1953): 262; Nilakanta Sastri, 332; Vaiyapuri Pillai, 82-84; Jesudasan and Jesudasan, 43-44; Vedam Venkataraya Sastry, “Tirukkural and Its Unique Place in Indian Literature,” in *First All-India Tirukkural Research Seminar Papers*, ed. N. Sanjeevi (Madras: University of Madras, 1973), 83-84; Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murgan*, 155; Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (1974), 119; Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (1975), 124-125; Ka. Ta. Tirunāvukkaracu, *Tirukkuraḷum intiya aṛanūlkaḷum* (Cennai: Pāri Nilaiyam, 1978); N. Veezhinathan, “The Mahabharata and the Thirukkural,” *Annals of Oriental Research* 32, no. 1 (1986): 35-44; Subramanyam, 10;

Tirukkuraḷ is merely a “copy” or “imitation” of Sanskrit literature.⁹⁰ The latter perspective is perhaps best exemplified in a recent publication by R. Nagaswamy, *Tirukkural: An Abridgement of Sastras*. Nagaswamy argues that the *Tirukkuraḷ* is an “adoption” or “abridgement” of Sanskrit *śāstra* literature, in his view particularly indebted to *Dharmaśāstra* texts, the *Arthaśāstra*, and the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.⁹¹ In Nagaswamy’s account, the *Tirukkuraḷ* merely recapitulates ideas that were originally shaped by the Sanskrit tradition. At one point, he offers the following piece of advice: “Those who are not well versed in Tamil and who have a great desire to study *Tirukkuraḷ*, need not worry. If you read what is in your *Dharma śāstra* in your own language or in Sanskrit, you have read the Tamil *Tirukkuraḷ* as it contains the same concepts.”⁹² Nagaswamy thus exemplifies one mode of discussing the *Tirukkuraḷ* vis-à-vis the Sanskrit literary tradition.

On the other side, scholars take the opposing view, arguing that the *Tirukkuraḷ* represents something totally distinct from Sanskrit literature. Some scholars argue that the *Tirukkuraḷ* is a completely new and original composition even if it may be indebted in small ways to Sanskrit

Sundaram, 9-12; Mahapatra, Bhanumathi, and Chakrabarti, 2, 4, 29; Gopalan, “The Personal and Social Dimensions,” 114; Wilden, 274.

⁹⁰ Srinivas Iyengar, 584-590; Ramachandra Dikshitar, 125, 139; Cāmi Citamparaṇār, *Vaḷḷuvar kāṭṭiya vaiṭikam* (Cenṇai: Cantirā Ejeṇci, 1949); Kō. Vaṭivēlu Ceṭṭiyār Avarkaḷ, *Tirukkuraḷ mūlamum parimēlaḷakaruraiyum* (Maturai: Maturaip Palkalaik Kaḷakam, 1972); Pi. Ṭi. Cīṇivāca Ayyaṅkār, *Tamiḷar varalāru: pākam 1* (Cenṇai: Ulakat Tamiḷārāycci Niruvaṇam, 2014); Pi. Ṭi. Cīṇivāca Ayyaṅkār, *Tamiḷar varalāru: pākam 2* (Cenṇai: Ulakat Tamiḷārāycci Niruvaṇam, 2014); R. Nagaswamy, *Tirukkural: An Abridgement of Sastras* (Mumbai: Tamil Arts Academy & Giri Trading Agency Private Limited, 2018).

⁹¹ Nagaswamy, 36.

⁹² Ibid., 12.

precedents,⁹³ while others reject the idea of any Sanskrit influence at all.⁹⁴ As discussed above, social activists like Periyār and Pulavar Kuḷantai interpret the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a deliberate rejection and refutation of Sanskrit culture.⁹⁵ However, such views can also be found in the work of other scholars. S. Maharajan, for example, emphasizes the radical difference between the Tamil concept of *aram* and the Sanskrit concept of *dharma*, arguing that the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s author "does not, like the Dharmashastras, prescribe different Arams for different castes. His concept of Aram is universal in character."⁹⁶ Similarly, B. Natarajan disputes the similarities that some have found between the *Poruṭpāl* and *Arthaśāstra*, noting that the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s vision of the economic life of a harmonious society is completely absent in the latter work: "There is no resemblance whatever between the basic economic ideas of Valluvar and Chanakya [Kauṭilya]. Valluvar invests agriculture and agriculturists with a primacy that is denied totally in the *Arthaśāstra*."⁹⁷ Additionally, Avvai S. Duraiswamy Pillai emphasizes the total originality of the *Kāmattuppāl*, which he sees as completely devoid of "the vulgar and indecent sexualities such as found in other

⁹³ Purnalingam Pillai, *Critical Studies in Kural*, 90; Purnalingam Pillai, *Tamil Literature*, 76, 79; Meenakshisundaran, *A History of Tamil Literature*, 49, 58; Meenakshisundaran, "Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar," 218, 236, 285-292, 294-295, 305; Subrahmanian, 9; Subrahmanian and Rajalakshmi, xix, lxxviii-lxxix; Subbu Reddiar, 103-104, 134; Srinivasa Iyengar, 141-142; Cutler, "Interpreting *Tirukkuraḷ*," 550; George L. Hart, "The Relation Between Tamil and Classical Sanskrit Literature," in *Passages: Relationships Between Tamil and Sanskrit*, ed. Kannan M. and Jennifer Clare (Pondicherry: French Institute of Pondicherry, 2009), 43-45.

⁹⁴ Pulavar Kuḷantai, *Tirukkuraḷum parimēlaḷakarum*, 15-19; Chakravarti, *Tirukkuraḷ*, lxi, lxxv; Duraiswamy Pillai, 111-115; Natarajan, 102; Kothandapani Pillai, 172, 191; Mudaliar, 505-508, 527, 536, 568; Kamaliah, 9-10, 14, 112-113; Arunachalam, 182; Maharajan, 44-46; K. V. Nagarajan, "Thiruvalluvar's Vision: Polity and Economy in *Thirukkural*," *History of Political Economy* 37, no. 1 (2005): 123, 131-132; Vi. Aracu, "Tirukkuraḷum tamīḷ camūkamum," in *Tirukkuraḷ paṇmuka vācippu*, ed. Ve. Pirakāṣ (Ceṇṇai: Mārru, 2009), 142-148.

⁹⁵ See, again, Periyār, *Tirukkuraḷum periyārum*; Periyār, *Periyār inṇum enṇum*; Pulavar Kuḷantai, *Tirukkuraḷum parimēlaḷakarum*; Pulavar Kuḷantai, *Tirukkuraḷum kuḷantaiyurai*.

⁹⁶ Maharajan, 44-45.

⁹⁷ Natarajan, 102.

books dealing with sex.”⁹⁸ He argues that even “a cursory reading of the topics and the contents” of the *Kāmasūtra* and “a superficial comparison” with the contents of the *Kāmattuppāl* would disprove the argument that the *Kāmattuppāl* is merely a translation of the *Kāmasūtra*.⁹⁹

The *Tirukkuraḷ* itself does not provide information about its sources or the preexisting paradigms from which it borrows. Of course, no text is composed in a vacuum apart from the wider literary culture in which it participates. As discussed above, a close reading of the text indicates that it borrows and creatively incorporates conventions from Tamil Caṅkam literature. And in many cases, the parallels that exist between the *Tirukkuraḷ* and its Sanskrit counterparts are hard to deny. To name but one example, the seven elements of the kingdom articulated in the opening verse of the *Poruṭpāl* overlap entirely with the seven elements described in the opening verse of Book VI of the *Arthaśāstra*.¹⁰⁰ At the same time, given the lack of historical information available to us about the literary context in which the *Tirukkuraḷ* was composed, it is important to recognize that the precise scope of Sanskrit literary influence upon the text may never be fully known. Furthermore, I think that such debates have resulted in a tendency to read the *Tirukkuraḷ* in an aggressively comparative mode, one that treats the text as a mere data point in service of a larger project to uncover historical information about the relationship and the exchange of ideas that took place between Sanskrit and Tamil literary cultures over time.

This project seeks to move beyond the relative scholarly impasse over the relationship of the *Tirukkuraḷ* to its Sanskrit forebears by reading the text on its own terms, as a work of

⁹⁸ Duraiswamy Pillai, 114-115.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ The opening verse of the *Poruṭpāl* states: “An army, subjects, supplies, ministers, allies, and a defense—he who possesses all six is a lion among kings” (*paṭaikuṭi kūḷamaiccu naṭparaṇ ārum / uṭaiyān aracarū ēru*). See *Tirukkuraḷ uraikkottu: Poruṭpāl* (Tiruppaṇantāl: Śrī Kācimaṭam, 2011), 3. Compare to *The Arthashastra*, trans. L. N. Rangarajan (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1992).

literature in its own right. In doing so, I set aside questions about the historical influence that Sanskrit texts may have had in shaping the *Tirukkuraḷ* and instead focus on how the *Tirukkuraḷ* itself works as a complete and integral whole. Throughout this project, I avoid questions of source criticism, or the identification of possible source texts that may have been used in the composition and redaction of the *Tirukkuraḷ*, since it is impossible to know fully what sources the author would have had available to him at the time in which he was writing—whether he would have read and studied Sanskrit texts at length or merely had some general familiarity with their ideas. I also avoid questions of redaction criticism, or the theorization of how the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s possible sources were combined to form the text as it exists today. Instead, I want to shift our focus to how the *Tirukkuraḷ* functions as a work of literature in its own right in the form we have it. As I have suggested above, one way this can be done is by reading the *Tirukkuraḷ* with careful attention to its inherent literary strategies, or the set of instructions that the text provides to the reader through the dynamic interaction between its content and its form. In taking this approach, I build upon the work of other scholars who have begun to rethink how we read and engage premodern literature in the South Asian context, moving away from methods of criticism and interpretation that in effect “disembowel” texts and focusing instead upon their inherent rhetorical devices and how those devices guide readers interpretively.¹⁰¹ Such an approach represents one possible way out of the long scholarly impasse over the question of Sanskrit influence upon the *Tirukkuraḷ*.

Religious Influences

¹⁰¹ See, for example, Richman; Greg Bailey, “Introduction: Towards a Description of the Purāṇic Genre,” in *Gaṇeśapurāṇa: Part I: Upāsanākhaṇḍa*, trans. Greg Bailey (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995); Monius; Hudson, 20.

The *Tirukkuraḷ* has also given rise to an enormous amount of debate about the religious affiliation of the text. As discussed above, in many cases this debate centers around the question of the identity of the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s historical author, who has been claimed by multiple religious communities over time. Yet, even aside from the question of the author's identity, an enormous amount of energy has been spent trying to discern a supposedly latent religious bias animating the text as a whole. The majority of scholars seem to fall into one of two camps. On the one hand are scholars who view the *Tirukkuraḷ* as an eclectic religious work, deliberately non-sectarian in ethos and reflective of a natural wisdom that can be found throughout every religious tradition.¹⁰² This view is expressed in the work of H. A. Popley, who says of the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s author that "the likelihood is that he belonged to no particular sect, but worked out from his own experience . . . a synthesis of the best he could find in all of them."¹⁰³ On the other hand are scholars who view the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a Jain work, or, at the very least, as a work that was influenced by Jain religious ideas.¹⁰⁴ One of the most famous proponents of this view is the Jain scholar A. Chakravarti, who

¹⁰² J. M. Nallaswamy Pillai, "The Ethics of Kural," *The Light of Truth or Siddhanta Deepika* 2 (July 1897): 42; Aiyar, xxxiv-xxxvii; Ilaṭcumi Ammaṇi, 21; Purnalingam Pillai, *Critical Studies in Kural*, 9-10, 89; Purnalingam Pillai, *Tamil Literature*, 75; Srinivas Iyengar, 588; Popley, *The Sacred Kural*, 10, 18, 22-25, 27, 39-40; Ramachandra Dikshitar, 135-138; Kōpālakruṣṇamācāryar; Popley, "Social Ethics in the 'Tirukkuraḷ,'" 262; Duraiswamy Pillai, 3; Meenakshisundaran, *A History of Tamil Literature*, 47-48, 59; Meenakshisundaran, "Philosophy of Tiruvaḷḷuvar," 214-215, 233-236, 289-290; Aram, 406-407, 423-429; Mudaliar, 505-506, 527; Kamaliah, 37, 47-49, 104-106, 139; Tirunāvukkaracu; Kō. Vaṇmikanāṭaṇ, *Potumaṇai* (Tiruppaṇantāḷ: Śrī Kācimaṭam, 1980); Diaz, ix-xi; Maharajan, 14-15; Srinivasa Iyengar, ix; Mahapatra, Bhanumathi, and Chakrabarti, vi, 1-2, 4; Gopalan, "Dhammapada and Tirukkuraḷ," 58; Māskō; Gopalan, "The Personal and Social Dimensions," 112; Shulman, 95.

¹⁰³ Popley, *The Sacred Kural*, 22. A similar view was held by many of the first Jesuits who encountered the text.

¹⁰⁴ Kaliyāṇacuntaraṇ, "Aṇinturai," 5-12; Tiru. Vi. Kaliyāṇacuntaraṇ, *Tamiḷ nūḷkaḷil paṭṭam* (Ceṇṇai: Cātu Accukkūṭam, 1952); Chakravarti, *Tirukkuraḷ*, li-iii, lxvii; Nilakanta Sastri, 332; Vaiyapuri Pillai, 79, 81, 87-88; Maṇaimalaiyaṭikaḷ, 93-103; Cakkaravartti Nayiṇār, 80-112; Śrīpāl, *Tiruvaḷḷuvar vāḷttum ātipakavaṇ*; Jesudasan and Jesudasan, 43-46, 50-51, 137; Cīṇi Vēṇkaṭacāmi, *Camayaṇkaḷ vaḷaritta tamiḷ*, 172-176; Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murgan*, 155-157; Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (1974), 119; Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (1975), 124-125; Śrīpāl, *Tamiḷakattiḷ jaiṇam*, 10-16; Subramanyam, 4, 15, 156, 187; Vaiyāpurip Pillai, 33-76; Daud Ali, "Regimes of Pleasure in Early India: A Genealogy of Practices at the Cola Court" (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 1996), 110; Umamaheshwari, "Identities in Conflict," 69-84; Irāmacāmi; Vijaya Ramaswamy, "Chaste Widows, Cunning Wives, and Amazonian Warriors: Imaging of Women in Tamil Oral Traditions," *Asian Ethnology* 69, no. 1 (2010): 133; Tiyaṭōr Pāskaraṇ; Blake Wentworth, "Insiders, Outsiders, and the Tamil Tongue," in *South Asian Texts in*

argues that the *Tirukkuraḷ* is “an exposition of the fundamental principles of Jainism.”¹⁰⁵ While these two camps represent the majority opinion among most scholars today, there is a range of other views that can be found as well. Some have argued, for instance, that the *Tirukkuraḷ* cannot be a Jain text given the content of the *Kāmatuppāl*, which “belies the very foundations” of Jainism, which “considered woman as a snare, a hindrance to spiritual advancement,”¹⁰⁶ while others have claimed the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a Buddhist text,¹⁰⁷ as generally Hindu in orientation,¹⁰⁸ as a work of Śaiva Siddhānta philosophy,¹⁰⁹ and even as a work of Christian literature.¹¹⁰

One of the biggest challenges that scholars searching for a latent religious worldview in the text face is the fact that the *Tirukkuraḷ* itself offers little by way of any indisputable evidence that would confirm or deny its affiliation with any one religious community. For example, the most promising source of evidence for most scholars has been the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s opening chapter, “The Praise of God,” which contains a number of epithets for the divine, including “he who dwelled upon a lotus” (*malarmicai ēkiṇāṇ*) and “he who has eight qualities” (*eṇḡuṇattāṇ*).¹¹¹ Yet, while these epithets have often been read as vaguely Jain in character, they cannot be said to

History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pollock, ed. Yigal Bronner, Whitney Cox, and Lawrence McCrea (Ann Arbor: Association of Asian Studies, 2011), 164; Umamaheshwari, *Reading History*, 6-7, 94, 104, 206, 271-272.

¹⁰⁵ Chakravarti, *Tirukkuraḷ*, li.

¹⁰⁶ Arunachalam, 74-75.

¹⁰⁷ Ayōttitācar, 455-462; Taṇināyaka Aṭikaḷ, 45-60.

¹⁰⁸ Vaṭivēlu Ceṭṭiyār Avarkaḷ; Subrahmanian, 21; Subrahmanian and Rajalakshmi, xii, xxii-xxiv, xxxi; Nagaswamy, 6, 38-39.

¹⁰⁹ Ka. Vacciravēl Mutaliyār, *Tirukkuraḷ tulakkum oḷukkaneri* (Kāñcipuram: Muttamiḷ Accakam, 1971); Vālaiyāṇanta Aṭikaḷ; Ka. Vacciravēl Mutaliyār, *Tirukkuraḷiṇ uṭṭiṭai caivacittāntamē* (Maturai: Carvōtaya Ilakkiyap Paṇṇai, 1979); Ulrike Schröder, “Being Saivite, the South African Way: Questioning Authenticity and Canon from the Margins of the Saiva World,” *The Journal of Hindu Studies* 10, no. 2 (2017): 230-231.

¹¹⁰ Arulappa, *Thirukkural, A Christian Book?*; Arulappa, *God in Thirukkural*, 20-26.

¹¹¹ See verses 3 and 9.

apply to the Jain tradition alone. Scholars have also looked to the scattered references to gods throughout the text for additional pieces of evidence. For example, a verse in the *Kāmatuppāl* refers to “the lotus-eyed god” (*tāmaraiikkaṇṇāṇ*), a common epithet for Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa.¹¹² Yet, as François Gros observes, the term is nevertheless ambiguous since the Tamil word *kaṇ* can mean both “eye” and “in” or “on,” thus expanding the range of meanings that could be given to the verse.¹¹³ Gros aptly summarizes the problems that scholars face when trying to use such verses as pieces of evidence about the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s religious orientation, noting that while “one with the lotus eyes” is quite frequently used for Viṣṇu, Indra was once hidden *in* a lotus flower, while Brahmā is the god *on* the lotus, the feet of the twenty-four Jain *tīrthaṅkaras* are said to rest on lotus flowers, and the Buddha is said to possess the lotus of the law.¹¹⁴ Clearly, efforts to establish a precise religious affiliation for the *Tirukkuraḷ* can quickly spiral out of control.

One of the lingering effects of scholarly efforts to identify the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s religious orientation has been a tendency to read the text through a hermeneutics of suspicion that assumes that the text is trying to hide something from the reader. In this light, scholars have treated the text as a kind of crime scene, in which every little detail becomes a clue toward solving a larger mystery. As Rita Felski argues in *The Limits of Critique*, an overly suspicious mode of reading requires readers to assume the stance of an archaeologist, in which the text becomes “an object to be plundered, a puzzle to be solved, a hieroglyph to be deciphered,”¹¹⁵ or that of a detective in search of clues, looking to uncover hidden information and intent on tracking down a guilty

¹¹² See verse 1103.

¹¹³ Gros, “Introducing Tiruvalluvar,” 133.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 53-54.

party. In this project, I want to think about what modes of reading are left out of the picture and remain unexplored when the *Tirukkuraḷ* is treated as a site of omission and obfuscation. In contrast to the approach of the reader-as-archaeologist or the reader-as-detective, throughout this project I try to assume the stance of the reader-as-listener. In other words, instead of asking what the text is *hiding* from the reader, I suggest that we ask what the text is actually *saying* to the reader. This approach seeks to decenter the “hermeneutics of suspicion” as one of the primary modes of engaging with the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s content and reorient scholars toward a “hermeneutics of respect” that seeks to listen to what the *Tirukkuraḷ* actually has to say for and about itself.¹¹⁶

Much like the question of the possible Sanskrit influences upon the text, throughout this project I set aside the question of the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s religious affiliation. I make this choice on the basis of the historical evidence, which makes it difficult to confirm with any certainty what the precise religious “goals” of the text might be. Additionally, we know that various religious audiences have read and engaged with the text over time, and thus, even if we could solve the mystery of its religious affiliation once and for all, the *Tirukkuraḷ* has time and again shown that it transcends religious boundaries. I also make this choice on the basis of what I believe studying the text through a religious studies framework uniquely has to offer. The fact that I set aside the question of the text’s religious affiliation requires us to think more broadly about what it means to study the *Tirukkuraḷ* within the context of religious studies. I am less interested in proving any one claim about whether the text is Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, or Christian; as indicated above, such efforts have already been made by a number of scholars, and I need not replicate their work here. I am, rather, more interested in how the *Tirukkuraḷ* guides its audience toward a particular vision of human life, how it illustrates the complex and ambiguous nature of ethical decision-making,

¹¹⁶ See Hudson, 20, for a similar discussion of the productive possibilities of a “hermeneutics of respect.”

and how it raises moral questions in deliberately open-ended ways. In short, I want to examine how the *Tirukkuraḷ* impacts readers who attend fully to both its aesthetic and ethical dimensions. This project is relevant to the study of religion not *because* the text is *about* religion, nor even because the text can be identified with any one religious community, but because the central concerns animating the text have implications for how a person chooses to live and act in the world and how a person makes meaning out of life. These are some of the central concerns that animate the study of religion as a field, and they shape this project in various ways, even though I believe the question of the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s religious worldview is best left unanswered here.

Theory and Method

Throughout this project, I assemble a number of different theoretical interlocutors and conversation partners to help shape my theorization of the *Tirukkuraḷ* and guide my method of reading and interpreting the text. First, this is a project on a premodern Tamil poem, and I draw upon the Tamil literary tradition to help orient my reading of the text. Throughout the project, I turn at various points to the *Tolkāppiyam*, the oldest extant treatise on Tamil grammar and poetics. While the precise relationship between the *Tolkāppiyam* and *Tirukkuraḷ* is unknown historically, I believe that the *Tolkāppiyam* can provide us with an important foundation from within the Tamil literary tradition to help us understand some of the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s literary aspects. For example, I use the *Tolkāppiyam* to guide my reading of the *Kāmattuppāl*, which in many cases cannot be fully understood outside of the framework of the Tamil literary tradition that preceded it. In that case, the distinction between premarital love (*kaḷavu*) and marital love (*karpu*), the two broad stages of romantic union, is described at length in the *Tolkāppiyam* and can be used as a lens for interpreting the *Kāmattuppāl*.¹¹⁷ While I do not read the *Kāmattuppāl*

¹¹⁷ See *Tolkāppiyam in English*, 600-605 (*Tolkāppiyam*, *Poruḷ*, *Ceyyul Iyal*, verses 1434-1447).

entirely through this framework, it does provide some of the necessary rhetorical context for understanding the *Kāmattuppāl*'s content and overall structure. I also use the *Tolkāppiyam* to guide my reading of the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s verses, which often contain metaphors. The *Tolkāppiyam* elaborates a complex framework on the use of metaphor (*uvamam*) in classical Tamil poetry that can be used as a guide to make sense of how the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s verses are operating within a wider literary culture that sought to theorize those literary structures at length.¹¹⁸

This dissertation also draws on the work of Umberto Eco, who distinguishes between “open” and “closed” texts and articulates a concept of “model reader” that is particularly useful for thinking about how we might approach the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a work of literature. While Eco works primarily within the Euro-American literary tradition without any reference to Tamil literature, I argue that his work can nevertheless be usefully applied to reading the *Tirukkuraḷ*. First, in contrast to closed texts, which “aim at arousing a precise response on the part of more or less precise empirical readers,”¹¹⁹ Eco argues that open texts do not lend themselves to an easy or simple explanation, and they must be carefully read in order to discern their true meaning. In this project, I argue that the *Tirukkuraḷ* is a prime example of an open text given that it is structurally complex, it often does not convey information to the reader explicitly, and the presentation of its content is terse and in many cases ambiguous. Second, Eco uses the concept of “model reader” to describe what he sees as “a sort of ideal type whom the text not only foresees as a collaborator but also tries to create.”¹²⁰ In other words, the model reader is someone who cooperates with a text and who makes a series of interpretive choices that are grounded in the process of reading.

¹¹⁸ See *Tolkāppiyam in English*, 528-541 (*Tolkāppiyam, Poruḷ, Uvama Iyal*, verses 1218-1256).

¹¹⁹ Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 8.

¹²⁰ Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 8-9.

In this dissertation, I use the concept of the model reader to think about how, in the absence of historical information about the text's composition, we can nevertheless read the *Tirukkural* in a way that attends to the specific interpretive boundaries that it sets up, which demand a certain kind of model reader.

Additionally, in thinking about the role of metaphor within the *Tirukkural*'s verses, this project draws upon the work of Paul Ricoeur. In *The Rule of Metaphor*, Ricoeur argues that all metaphors operate within the domain of hermeneutics in that they require the reader to engage in the complex process of interpreting them. Contrary to the idea that metaphor consists merely of the juxtaposition of two different things for the sake of comparison, Ricoeur emphasizes that metaphors actually have the power to redescribe reality by setting an object or idea before the mind of the reader in a new way.¹²¹ In Ricoeur's view, the key to metaphor lies in the verb "to be," for "the metaphorical 'is' at once signifies both 'is not' and 'is like.'"¹²² When readers encounter a metaphor, they have to recognize the fact that the "is" signifies both similarity and difference at the same time; in other words, there is metaphorical truth indicated by the statement that, at the same time, requires readers to suspend their judgment about the literal meaning of the proposition. For Ricoeur, metaphors are valuable precisely because they ask the reader to do the work of interpreting them, and in this way, they have the power to set an object before the reader in ever new meaningful ways. Likewise, I argue that the *Tirukkural*'s verses use metaphor to engage their reader in very similar ways by presenting objects and ideas in increasingly new and more complex ways. By thinking with Ricoeur, we can better understand how the *Tirukkural*'s

¹²¹ Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies in the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello, S. J. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 6-7.

¹²² Ibid., 7.

use of metaphorical language in its individual verses trains readers to “think” metaphorically by learning to see the world *as* something else, and learning to see things in ever new ways.

Finally, in thinking about how the *Tirukkural*’s verses engage readers in modes of ethical reflection even when, on the surface, their content seems to have very little to do with ethics, I draw upon Geoffrey Galt Harpham’s notion of the “sub-ethical” dimensions of language. For Harpham, all language use has ethical dimensions insofar as it provides us with a framework for thinking ethically. In his words, language “provides us with model, program, map—our best *example* of ethical thinking, and our point of entry into an ethical world.”¹²³ In Harpham’s view, ethics is not a “set of concepts, rules, or principles,”¹²⁴ but rather a process of raising ethical questions and framing ethical choices. Language is “sub-ethical” in that it provides the very conditions for ethical thinking. The concept of “sub-ethics” is helpful, I argue, for describing how the *Tirukkural*’s verses perform ethical work upon the reader even when they do not convey a “moral rule” in the form of an imperative (“one *must*”) or optative (“one *should*”) statement. Harpham’s framework thus gives us a language for thinking about how *all* of the *Tirukkural*’s verses participate in the text’s larger ethical project, even in cases where an ethical idea is only implied or difficult to identify at all.

Contribution to Scholarship

This dissertation contributes to scholarship in three specific ways. First, my dissertation contributes to the study of South Asian religions by building upon the work of scholars who have furthered our understanding of the relationship between literary culture and religious identity in

¹²³ Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *Getting It Right: Language, Literature, and Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 100.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

premodern South Asia and begun to rethink how we should approach the study of premodern literature. In the Tamil-speaking context, I am drawn to the work of scholars who have examined how the literary qualities of a text shed light on its anticipated audiences and reach out to shape those very audiences. For example, in her work on the *Maṇimēkalai*, Paula Richman advocates on behalf of a careful attention to what she calls the “rhetorical strategies” of the text.¹²⁵ Rather than trying to recover or speculate on the intentions of the historical author who composed the text, Richman focuses on the “authorial presence” behind the text that wants to persuade the audience that a Buddhist worldview is reasonable and attractive.¹²⁶ Anne E. Monius, in her work on the same text, argues that the highly technical discussions of Buddhist philosophy throughout the *Maṇimēkalai* point to an anticipated audience that is thoroughly versed in Tamil poetics and familiar with Buddhist thought and literature.¹²⁷ In the absence of any concrete historical evidence about the composition of much of the extant Tamil literary corpus, Richman and Monius show how scholars can nevertheless read texts in ways that are attentive to their literary dimensions to better understand the literary aims of a text and how those aims impinge upon the text’s audience.

Beyond the Tamil-speaking context, a number of scholars have engaged in similarly productive work to rethink the study of premodern literature in South Asia and reorient scholars toward new modes of engaging with such materials. In her work on the *Mahābhārata*, Emily T. Hudson argues that the Sanskrit epic operates through a distinct set of narrative strategies, which she defines as “the dynamic interaction between the form and the content of the text, and its

¹²⁵ See Richman, 4-5.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ See Monius, 13-18.

impact on the sensitive reader.”¹²⁸ Moving beyond scholarly debates about whether the epic developed in discernible stages, Hudson reads the *Mahābhārata* as a unified and sophisticated literary whole, calling for a “hermeneutics of respect” that “seeks to listen to rather than disembowel the text.”¹²⁹ Additionally, Greg Bailey’s work on the *purāṇic* genre has also shown the value of treating texts as unified literary wholes. One of Bailey’s primary assumptions is that one can “find coherence across the entire text” of any *purāṇa* and that an analysis of the *purāṇic* genre “should begin from the integrity of the text as a complete literary unit.”¹³⁰ While Hudson and Bailey both examine works of narrative literature composed in Sanskrit, I nevertheless build upon their interpretive ideas by reading the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a unified, coherent literary whole.

My dissertation also contributes to the study of South Asian religions by using the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s commentaries in part as a model for how to read and engage the text. While scholars often consult with commentaries when reading or translating a source text, very rarely do they engage with the question of how the commentaries inflect and affect scholarly readings of primary sources. While some work has been done to think about the purpose of commentaries and how to engage them,¹³¹ more work needs to be done in this area to think about the historical role that commentaries have played in shaping ideas about literature and to theorize the larger commentarial genre. In the Tamil context, Norman Cutler has shown how commentaries reflect the particular religious, cultural, and historical context in which the commentator was

¹²⁸ Hudson, 29.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 5.

¹³⁰ Bailey, 9.

¹³¹ See, for example, Gary A. Tubb and Emery R. Boose, *Scholastic Sanskrit: A Handbook for Students* (New York: The American Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2007).

working,¹³² while François Gros has emphasized the role of commentators in influencing lasting ideas about how to organize and interpret a text.¹³³ Eva Wilden's recent edited volume on Tamil traditions of commentary has made productive strides toward filling the gaps in knowledge that still remain in this area of Tamil studies.¹³⁴ Additionally, Jennifer Clare has examined shifting attitudes toward the Tamil literary tradition through a comparative study of poetic treatises and commentaries composed between the eighth and seventeenth centuries C.E.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, much work remains to be done in the study of commentaries, both vis-à-vis their source texts and as a genre in their own right, and my dissertation aims to fill a small part of this gap.

Second, my dissertation contributes to the comparative study of "wisdom literature" in religious studies. The *Tirukkural* is often classified as a work of wisdom literature or a collection of proverbial sayings; yet, few of those engaged in the study of wisdom literature in other sectors of religious studies are familiar with this important text. At the same time, many more scholarly resources exist for the study of wisdom literature outside the Tamil context than within it. Thus, there is an active scholarly conversation from which I can draw to help theorize my approach to reading and interpreting the *Tirukkural* and to which I can contribute by introducing the *Tirukkural* to a range of scholars working on similar genres across the field of religious studies.

For example, a number of scholars have studied wisdom literature in the context of the Hebrew Bible, which includes the books of Proverbs, Job, Qoheleth, and sometimes the Song of

¹³² Cutler, "Interpreting *Tirukkural*," 549-566.

¹³³ See Gros, "Introducing Tiruvaḷḷuvar," 123-152; Gros, "Five Times Five is Twenty-Five," 153-174.

¹³⁴ See the many essays in *Between Preservation and Recreation: Tamil Traditions of Commentary: Proceedings of a Workshop in Honour of T. V. Gopal Iyer*, ed. Eva Wilden (Pondichéry: Institut Français de Pondichéry/École Française D'Extrême-Orient, 2009).

¹³⁵ Jennifer Steele Clare, "Canons, Conventions and Creativity: Defining Literary Tradition in Premodern Tamil South India" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011).

Songs. On the book of Proverbs, which offers a particularly compelling point of comparison with the *Tirukkural*, scholars have examined the formal properties of the text, from the basic use of parallelisms to more complex quadripartite architectural structures.¹³⁶ More recently, scholars have begun to pay closer attention to the relationship between the content and form of the text, and how ideas are communicated through those formal properties.¹³⁷ While some scholars have emphasized how these structures would have worked upon their original audience,¹³⁸ others have focused on how these structures play a fundamental role in the ethical and pedagogical aims of the text.¹³⁹ William P. Brown, for example, has shown how the “meta-narrative” structure of the book forms the moral character of the reader.¹⁴⁰ More recently, Anne W. Stewart has argued that the didactic poetry of Proverbs is intimately connected to its pedagogical function, such that “neglecting the poetic form causes one to miss the effect of the text’s literary artistry upon the formation of the student.”¹⁴¹ The work of these scholars provides us with a helpful foundation for thinking through the important relationship between ethics and poetry in the *Tirukkural*, even as it is located within a vastly different historical, cultural, and linguistic context.

¹³⁶ See, for example, Bruce K. Waltke, “The Book of Proverbs and Ancient Wisdom Literature,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 543 (1979): 221-238; T. A. Perry, *Wisdom Literature and the Structure of Proverbs* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

¹³⁷ See, for example, James G. Williams, *Those Who Ponder Proverbs: Aphoristic Thinking and Biblical Literature* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1981), who argues that the only way to understand aphoristic language is to view it as both literary and conceptual, both poetic and philosophical.

¹³⁸ See Richard J. Clifford, *The Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

¹³⁹ See William P. Brown, *Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996); William P. Brown, *Wisdom’s Wonder: Character, Creation, and Crisis in the Bible’s Wisdom Literature* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014); Anne W. Stewart, *Poetic Ethics in Proverbs: Wisdom Literature and the Shaping of the Moral Self* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

¹⁴⁰ See Brown, *Character in Crisis*, 22-49; Brown, *Wisdom’s Wonder*, 29-66.

¹⁴¹ Stewart, 26.

Similarly, many scholars have contributed to the study of wisdom literature in a number of other classical literary traditions. For example, Hesiod's *Works and Days* represents one of the earliest examples of didactic poetry in the history of Greek literature.¹⁴² Like the *Tirukkural*, the *Works and Days* has been regarded as the work of a single author and the articulation of a unified ethical vision, and, despite the difficulty that some have had in grasping the unity of the poem, or the impression that it is a collection of loosely associated aphorisms, a number of scholars have shown that the *Works and Days* reflects the underlying theme that the will of Zeus informs all of human experience.¹⁴³ Beyond the Hebrew Bible and Greek ethical thought, there are, of course, many other traditions of didactic teaching, proverbial sayings, and wisdom literature throughout the world in Sumerian, Akkadian, Egyptian, Aramaic, and Hebrew, though many survive only in fragments.¹⁴⁴ Yet, as discussed above, few of those who study these genres have read or are even aware of the existence of the *Tirukkural*. Thus, I hope that my project will not only draw from the many theoretical resources that exist for the study of this popular genre of literature, but also introduce the *Tirukkural* to a broader audience of readers than it has thus far received.

Finally, this dissertation will contribute to the study of religious ethics. Specifically, I aim to contribute to ongoing scholarly conversations in the field of “narrative ethics.” This school of thought developed as a response to and reaction against rule-driven moral philosophy that seeks to universalize ethics. Narrative ethicists share the view that ethical thinking is primarily shaped

¹⁴² I am grateful to Kimberley C. Patton for pointing this out to me.

¹⁴³ See, for example, Stephanie A. Nelson, *God and the Land: The Metaphysics of Farming in Hesiod and Vergil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 31-58; *Hesiod: Theogony, Works and Days, Shield*, trans. Apostolos N. Athanassakis (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 59-64; *Hesiod: Theogony and Works and Days*, trans. Stephanie Nelson and Richard Caldwell (Newburyport: Focus Publishing, 2009), 63-69; *The Poems of Hesiod: Theogony, Works and Days, and The Shield of Herakles*, trans. Barry B. Powell (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 97-107.

¹⁴⁴ See *The Poems of Hesiod*, 104.

through narrative. Wayne Booth, Martha Nussbaum, and Adam Newton focus on how the very act of reading literature is ethically transformative,¹⁴⁵ while Alasdair MacIntyre, Paul Ricoeur, and Brian Treanor build upon Aristotelian notions of virtue to explore the relationship between narrativity and identity.¹⁴⁶ While these scholars have established a robust theoretical conversation from which I can draw, I can envision at least two major contributions that my work on the *Tirukkural* can make to push this scholarly conversation forward. First, as the very name of the field implies, much of the work in narrative ethics focuses largely on works of narrative literature at the expense of other genres like poetry. Thus, my work on the *Tirukkural* can emphasize the similar role that poetry and other non-narrative literary genres can play in the ethical formation of their readers. Second, much of the scholarly work in the field focuses on the development of character through the emplotment of certain patterns of thinking and action, and less attention has been paid to the sheer aesthetic beauty of certain literary texts. As such, I hope my emphasis on the *Tirukkural*'s poetic form in addition to its ethical content will encourage scholars to pay as much attention to the aesthetic beauty of texts as to the elements of character and plot development that make up their content.

Chapter Outline

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Wayne Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Adam Zachary Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

¹⁴⁶ See, for example, Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Vol. 1*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Vol. 2*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Vol. 3*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Brian Treanor, *Emplotting Virtue: A Narrative Approach to Environmental Virtue Ethics* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2014).

This dissertation consists of three chapters, each of which corresponds to one of the three different structural levels at which I read the *Tirukkuraḷ* to understand how its literary strategies work upon the audience as a whole. In chapter 2, I focus on the text at the level of its three major sections (*pāl*), examining how they work together to impart a vision of human life that consists of the inward cultivation of virtue accompanied by the expansion of human relationships, both of which mutually reinforce each other and culminate in the attainment of a complex and fulfilling marital life. Here, I introduce the concept of “literary strategies” to guide my reading of the text, focusing on the set of instructions that is revealed through the dynamic interaction between the content of the text and the form in which it is presented that guides the audience toward specific interpretive choices throughout the text as a whole.

In chapter 3, I focus on how the text works upon its audiences at the level of its chapters (*atikāram*), each of which contains a consistent group of ten verses. Building upon my reading of the text as a whole, I argue that the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s chapters actually destabilize its vision of human life by illustrating the reality of a world in which our ability to think and act is often hindered by the limits of our perception and undermined by our inability to control our emotions. To examine how this process unfolds, I use three different methods of reading to explore the interplay of the ten verses within each chapter. First, I read the verses “out of order,” imagining how readers might have engaged with the text before the arrangement of the verses was standardized. Second, I read the verses “in order,” considering how readers would encounter the verses today as part of a fixed and stable arrangement. Finally, I zoom in to focus on the juxtaposition of two or three seemingly contradictory verses within a chapter that create moments of paradox and tension.

In chapter 4, I examine how the text works at the level of its individual verses (*kuraḷ* or *pāṭam*). Here, I am particularly interested in the verses that do not make explicit moral claims

and require the reader to engage in the process of interpreting ethical ideas that are conveyed only implicitly. Building upon the work of the previous chapters, I argue that the *Tirukkural*'s verses further destabilize the vision of human life operating at the level of the text as a whole by engaging the reader in modes of "sub-ethical" reflection that highlight the fundamentally complex nature of ethical decision-making and action, both of which require nuanced skills of reasoning and interpretation. In particular, I focus on three different literary strategies within the *Tirukkural*'s verses that I refer to as metaphor, inference, and suspense. Throughout this chapter, I show how the *Tirukkural*'s verses generate ethical thinking not only by *what* they say but also by *how* they say it.

My hope is that the project as a whole represents one productive way forward in terms of how future scholars might read, interpret, or otherwise engage with the *Tirukkural*. I hope to convince the reader that the *Tirukkural* is indeed a complex work of literature, with multiple ideas it wants to convey to its audiences, and of the value of engaging with texts as unified and coherent literary wholes. I also hope to convince the reader that studying texts with careful attention to both their content and their form can guide us toward an interpretation that grows out of the texts themselves and prevents us from merely projecting our own views onto them. I believe the *Tirukkural* has something to say to its audience, as does any work of literature, and when we pay attention to what it has to say, we can find ourselves transformed in the process. Whether one reads the *Tirukkural* for the first time or the thousandth time, there is always something new to discover in this subtle, and indeed *tacit*, text.

Chapter 2

Reading the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a Whole

In the middle of the twentieth century, the Tamil scholar A. Chakravarti published a well-known study of the *Tirukkuraḷ* that treats the text as a coherent whole, showing how the ethical and political themes of the *Arattuppāl* and *Poruṭpāl* work alongside themes of love and pleasure in the *Kāmatuppāl*.¹ He argues that the entire *Tirukkuraḷ* is “an exposition of the fundamental principles of Jainism,”² and that the author “must have been a staunch believer in the *ahimsa* faith as accepted by Jainism.”³ Two decades later, the Catholic Archbishop of Madras R. Arulappa published his own study of the *Tirukkuraḷ*, entitled *Thirukkural, A Christian Book?*⁴ The question mark in the title belies Arulappa’s steadfast belief that the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s author was a Christian and that the poem’s references to the divine apply ultimately to the Christian God, and to Jesus Christ in particular. As for why the *Tirukkuraḷ* does not contain more explicit references to Christianity, Arulappa speculates that the author “intended to write in such a way as to induce everyone to take and read. If it had been too openly ‘Christian’ there would be some prejudice. He may have intended to give just the most essential elements of the Christian way of life and a great deal of general morality. And that is what the work appears to be.”⁵

How do these authors reach such different conclusions about the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s religious worldview? What kinds of reading practices are they using? Do they model certain modes of reading the *Tirukkuraḷ* that we might build upon here? Both authors make assumptions about the

¹ A. Chakravarti, *Tirukkural* (Madras: Diocesan Press, 1953).

² Ibid., li.

³ Ibid., lxvii.

⁴ R. Arulappa, *Thirukkural, A Christian Book?* (Madras: Meipporul Publishers, 1974).

⁵ Ibid., 17-18.

text and set up certain reading strategies based on those assumptions. They assume, for example, that the text can be read as a coherent whole, as the unified product of a single authorial vision; both authors are giving an account of the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a whole by thinking about how all three sections (*pāl*) of the text are working together to build toward that vision. At the same time, they read the *Tirukkuraḷ* with an eye toward uncovering information about the supposedly hidden religious orientation animating the text as a whole. In doing so, they engage in a suspicious mode of reading that assumes that the *Tirukkuraḷ* contains some kind of key information that needs to be uncovered by the reader, who must read the text like a detective in search of clues.⁶

This chapter follows the lead of Chakravarti and Arulappa in its effort to give an account of the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a unified, coherent work of literature. In the absence of any historical data about the original composition, treating the text as a unified whole represents what I argue is the best way forward in terms of thinking about how it functions as a work of literature. At the same time, I depart from Chakravarti and Arulappa by eschewing their detective-like mode of reading the text. Instead of asking what the *Tirukkuraḷ* is *hiding* from the reader, we can ask what the text wants to *communicate* to the reader, for the *Tirukkuraḷ* actually does have something to say, as we will soon see. Here, I focus on the relationship between the form and content of the text—*what* the *Tirukkuraḷ* says and *how* it says it. Ultimately, I argue that the *Tirukkuraḷ* imparts a vision of human life as constituted by the inward cultivation of personal virtue accompanied by the outward expansion of human relationships, both of which mutually enrich and reinforce each other and culminate in the attainment of a complex, fulfilling marital life.

Theorizing the Whole

⁶ I borrow this image of the reader as detective from Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

Why should we think about reading the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a unified whole? On what grounds can we defend Chakravarti, Arulappa, or any reader who attempts to give a singular account of the text's literary vision? We know from its earliest reception history that stray verses from the *Tirukkuraḷ* often appeared in other works of literature, grammatical treatises, and commentaries. Indeed, this continues to be the way in which the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s verses are often encountered by audiences today, with discrete verses displayed in public spaces, studied in school, or recited from memory. Thus, we are attempting to give an account of a text that is more often than not engaged in terms of isolated quotations removed from the broader context of their original composition. Complicating matters further is the fact that we do not know anything about the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s historical author, or indeed whether a single person even composed all 1,330 verses of which the text is comprised, prompting one recent scholarly account to express skepticism about the unitary nature of the work as a whole.⁷ How, then, can we defend an interpretive approach that reads the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a single, coherent whole?

There are good historical reasons for engaging the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a whole. The five extant medieval commentaries on the *Tirukkuraḷ*, which provide our earliest evidence for how the entire text was read and engaged by audiences, all read the text as a coherent, deliberately-authored unit. These commentaries, all composed between the tenth and fifteenth centuries C.E., thus indicate that engaging with texts as unified, singular entities is not simply a modern invention but a major part of how medieval audiences read and interpreted the text. As scholars have noted, one of the tasks of the commentarial genre—and one of the goals of each commentator—was to offer a framework for reading the text as a whole and to illustrate the underlying logic operative in the organization of the text at the level of the section (*pāl*), sub-section (*iyaḷ*), chapter

⁷ See David Shulman, *Tamil: A Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 94.

(*atikāram*), and verse (*kuraḷ* or *pāṭam*).⁸ The commentaries can thus teach us how to become better readers of the *Tirukkuraḷ* today when we allow their interpretive assumptions to guide our own treatment of the text. Regardless of whether or not we agree with all of the specific interpretive choices made by an individual commentator on this or that verse, we can nevertheless defend ourselves on solid historical ground in light of the fact that reading texts as integrated wholes, with various patterns and thematic continuities operative throughout, is an interpretive strategy inherent in the Tamil literary and commentarial tradition.

We can see how various commentators operated with the assumption that the *Tirukkuraḷ* reflects a coherent authorial vision most vividly in the *viḷakkam* (“explanation”) section of their commentarial exegesis on each verse, which follows immediately after the *patavurai* (“word-by-word gloss”) or *polippurai* (“paraphrased gloss”). For example, Parimēlaḷakar’s *viḷakkam* section is very frequently governed by a final verb such as *enrār* (“he said”) or *kūriṇār* (“he described”), using the honorific *-ār* ending to convey respect, to explain his view of what the author intended to convey. This assumption can also be seen in the introductory remarks that some commentators provide at the beginning of each chapter to explain its specific placement in the overall sequence of chapters. Again using Parimēlaḷakar as our example, one often finds the following phrase:

ātaḷiṇ itu . . . piṇ vaikkappaṭṭatu (“thus, this (chapter) was placed after (the previous chapter)”).

⁸ See K. C. Kamaliah, *Preface in the Kuraḷ* (Madras: M. Seshachalam & Co., 1973), 66-67; Kamil Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan: On Tamil Literature of South India* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 158-160; E. Sundaramoorthy, “Commentaries of Tirukkuraḷ: Some Aspects,” *Annals of Oriental Research* 29, no. 1 (1980): 1-8; N. Subrahmanian and R. Rajalakshmi, *The Concordance of Tirukkural: With a Critical Introduction* (Madurai: Ennes Publications, 1984), xvi; P. S. Sundaram, “Introduction,” in *The Kural*, trans. P. S. Sundaram (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1990), 9-10; Norman Cutler, “Interpreting Tirukkuraḷ: The Role of Commentary in the Creation of a Text,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 112, no. 4 (1992): 551-553; Norman Cutler, “Three Moments in the Genealogy of Tamil Literary Culture,” in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 317; Anand Pandian, “Tradition in Fragments: Inherited Forms and Fractures in the Ethics of South India,” *American Ethnologist* 35, no. 3 (2008): 471; François Gros, “Introducing Tiruvalluvar: *The Book of Love*,” in *Deep Rivers: Selected Writings on Tamil Literature*, ed. Kannan M. and Jennifer Clare (Pondicherry: French Institute of Pondicherry, 2009), 125.

He assumes that the sequence of the *Tirukkural*'s chapters can be read according to a specific linear logic in which each chapter logically proceeds from the previous chapter while also setting up the content of the chapter that follows. While these rhetorical strategies provide commentators with an opportunity to infuse their own interpretive agendas into the commentary, all under the guise of articulating the original intentions of the author, they are nonetheless instructive insofar as they reveal certain shared assumptions among the commentators about how the *Tirukkural* should be read: namely, as a unified, coherent, deliberately-authored whole.

There are also literary reasons for engaging the *Tirukkural* as a whole. One of the primary assumptions guiding this chapter, and indeed the project as a whole, is that in order to understand how the *Tirukkural* functions as a work of literature, we need to pay attention to both the content and form of the text, and how they work together to impact the audience.⁹ While the *Tirukkural* does not present a narrative with an obvious beginning, middle, and end that could structure our engagement with the text, I would argue that the *Tirukkural* nevertheless has a set of literary strategies that guide audiences toward a particular vision of human life as marked by the inward cultivation of personal virtue accompanied by the outward expansion of human relationships, in which both of these processes mutually enrich and reinforce each other and culminate in a happy and fulfilling marital life. The *Tirukkural* never communicates its vision of human life explicitly, but it is tacitly implied throughout the text as a whole through subtle literary strategies, defined here as a set of instructions that is revealed through the dynamic interaction between the content of the text and the form in which it is presented, which guide the audience toward specific

⁹ Here, I build upon Emily T. Hudson's work on the *Mahābhārata*, in which she argues that "in order to comprehend *what* the epic is saying about *dharma*, one first has to understand *how* it communicates its messages about *dharma*." See Emily T. Hudson, *Disorienting Dharma: Ethics and the Aesthetics of Suffering in the Mahābhārata* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

interpretive choices and impact that audience in ethically significant ways.¹⁰ To put it another way, one could say that I use a close reading of the *Tirukkuraḷ* to develop a method for doing a close reading of the *Tirukkuraḷ*. In doing so, my reading of the poem attends carefully to both its content and the structural presentation of that content, which together communicate a certain vision of human life to the audience; in turn, that vision of human life becomes the fulcrum around which we can understand how the *Tirukkuraḷ* is operating and wants to be read as a literary whole.

Such claims may strike one as somewhat odd or circular; one may ask, for example, what prevents such a reading from becoming simply a modern, American response to the *Tirukkuraḷ* rather than a deep interpretive engagement with the text? I would defend against such criticism by arguing that the *Tirukkuraḷ* actually instructs us to read it in particular ways and that we can interpret the *Tirukkuraḷ* on the basis of its own literary strategies. Particularly when many readers simply use the *Tirukkuraḷ* to get what they want out of it,¹¹ there is important and indeed valuable work to be done by returning to the text itself and engaging it interpretively. Here, I have in mind something of Umberto Eco's distinction between "interpreting" and "using" a text. While interpreting a text is "to read it in order to discover, along with our reactions to it, something about its nature,"¹² using a text is "to start from it in order to get something else, even accepting the risk of misinterpreting it."¹³ By reading the *Tirukkuraḷ* with attention to its literary

¹⁰ Again, I am indebted to Hudson's delineation of the concept of "narrative strategies," though I modify her terminology to account for the fact that the *Tirukkuraḷ* is not a narrative. See *Ibid.*, 28-29.

¹¹ To name but one example, see Anand Amaladass, "Values in Leadership in the Tamil Tradition of *Tirukkural* Vs. Present-day Leadership Theories," *International Management Review* 3, no. 1 (2007): 9-16, which reads the text in search of leadership principles and advice that could be useful for contemporary management experts.

¹² Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 57.

¹³ *Ibid.*

strategies, I argue that we can develop a robust interpretation of the text as a whole that goes beyond merely projecting our own views onto it. If we can return to Chakravarti and Arulappa for a moment, we can see on the one hand that they do model a productive way of engaging the *Tirukkuraḷ* insofar as they seek to understand how the text operates as a whole. On the other hand, they scan the text for evidence of its religious orientation, drawing conclusions that align rather conspicuously with their own religious identities. For Chakravarti, the *Tirukkuraḷ* becomes an exposition of Jain principles, while for Arulappa, the *Tirukkuraḷ* becomes a closeted work of Christian literature. In this way, even as they model certain modes of reading and interpreting the *Tirukkuraḷ*, they also “use” the text in order to find traces of their own religious ideology within it rather than building up an interpretation from a close reading of the text itself.

With this theoretical backdrop in mind, this chapter reads the *Tirukkuraḷ* attentive to the literary strategies animating the text as a whole. In doing so, it is necessary to work through the text at the level of the largest structures governing the whole, the section or *pāl*. The rest of this chapter examines the content of the *Tirukkuraḷ* in the order that it has come down to us today, starting with the *Arattuppāl*, proceeding through the *Poruṭpāl*, and ending with the *Kāmattuppāl*. In line with the theorization of literary strategies presented above, I read each section on its own terms, focusing on the specific themes and ideas articulated throughout and the sequence and style in which those ideas are presented. In turn, by providing an account of each section, we will slowly begin to see a specific vision of human life emerge in the context of the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a whole. The vision of human life presented is an idealized one in which a person cultivates habits of virtue while engaging in social life through the acquisition of specific human relationships, culminating in the achievement of a fulfilling marriage. The literary strategies of the poem have

an impact on the reader, who must read this idealized presentation of human life against the reality of his own life and consider whether and to what extent he measures up to that ideal.

Part I: Reading the *Arattuppāl*

The *Tirukkural* opens with a “preface” (*pāyiram*) consisting of four chapters: “The Praise of God” (*kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu*), “The Excellence of Rain” (*vāṇḱirappu*), “The Greatness of Renouncers” (*nīttārperumai*), and “Affirming Virtue” (*araṇvaliyuruttal*). The medieval commentators all group these four chapters together as a unit, as do all modern published editions. As a result, there has been a significant scholarly debate about the exact nature of these four chapters and how to read them vis-à-vis the thematic content that follows. Some scholars have read the preface with an eye toward uncovering information about the author’s intentions.¹⁴ In particular, given the title and theme of the opening chapter, there has been much debate about whether the preface points toward any particular religious or sectarian affiliation that animates the text as a whole. While most scholars agree that the opening chapter does not use any kind of language that would prove the sectarian affiliation of the author,¹⁵ at least some have read this chapter in an effort to uncover a latent religious bias within the text.¹⁶ Still other scholars have

¹⁴ See B. Natarajan, “Economic Ideas of Thiruvalluvar,” in *Thirumathi Sornammal Endowment Lectures on Tirukkural, 1959-60 to 1968-69* (Madras: University of Madras, 1971), 63-72; Rao Sahib K. Kothandapani Pillai, “Thirukkural—Kamathuppal,” in *Thirumathi Sornammal Endowment Lectures on Tirukkural, 1959-60 to 1968-69*, (Madras: University of Madras, 1971), 192-196; N. Murugesu Mudaliar, “Polity in Tirukkural,” in *Thirumathi Sornammal Endowment Lectures on Tirukkural, 1959-60 to 1968-69* (Madras: University of Madras, 1971), 523; Shulman, 95.

¹⁵ These scholars include J. M. Nallaswamy Pillai, “The Ethics of Kural,” *The Light of Truth or Siddhanta Deepika* 2 (July 1897): 37-43; H. A. Popley, *The Sacred Kural or The Tamil Veda of Tiruvalluvar* (Calcutta: Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, 1931), 26-28; T. P. Meenakshisundaran, “Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar,” in *Thirumathi Sornammal Endowment Lectures on Tirukkural, 1959-60 to 1968-69* (Madras: University of Madras, 1971), 235-245; V. A. Devasenapathi, “The Ethics of the Tirukkural,” pts. 1 and 2, *Annals of Oriental Research* 20, no. 1 (1965); 21, no. 1 (1966): 4-7; S. M. Diaz, *Aphorisms of Valluvar: Commentary and Comparative Study* (Madras: International Society for the Investigation of Ancient Civilizations, 1982), ix; V. C. Kulandai Swamy, *The Immortal Kural* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994), 48.

¹⁶ See, again, Chakravarti, li-liv; the same author has also published on the topic in Tamil as A. Cakkaravartti Nayiṇār, *Tirukkural vaḷaṅkum ceyti* (Cennai: Kuṇḱiṇḱip Patippakam, 1959), 80-112. Both works argue that the

questioned whether the preface is an original part of the *Tirukkuraḷ*, speculating that it may have been added to the text at a later point in history.¹⁷

In contrast to these approaches, the most productive approach for reading the preface seems to have been done by those who have thought about the ways in which these opening four chapters provide a structural pattern for reading the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a whole.¹⁸ Indeed, such efforts to think about the preface in relation to the rest of the content of the *Tirukkuraḷ* models the type of reading practices adopted in this chapter, which focus on the literary strategies of the text and what those literary strategies communicate to the reader. How do the literary strategies of the *Tirukkuraḷ* begin to emerge within these opening chapters, and how do they work upon the sensitive reader of the text? How does the preface prepare the reader for the rest of the content of the *Tirukkuraḷ*, and how does it activate a mode of reading the text as a unified whole? Reading the *Tirukkuraḷ* in this manner, the preface acts as a coherent thematic introduction to the text overall and previews the content that follows.

Consider, for example, the opening verse of the *Tirukkuraḷ*: “All letters begin with ‘a’; the world indeed begins with God.”¹⁹ Every extant commentary places this verse at the very

Tirukkuraḷ is a Jain text. See, also, Arulappa, *Thirukkural, A Christian Book?*; R. Arulappa, *God in Thirukkural* (Madras: Meipporul Publishers, 1976). Both works argue that the *Tirukkuraḷ* is a Christian text.

¹⁷ See, for example, Va. U. Citamparam Piḷḷai, “Tiruvalluvar tirukkuraḷ—pāyira āraycci,” *Tamilp poḷil* 5, no. 6 (1930): 232-237, which argues that the first three chapters were added by later commentators, and M. Arunachalam, *An Introduction to the History of Tamil Literature* (Tiruchitrāmbalam: Gandhi Vidyalayam, 1974), 78, which speculates that the first chapter may be an interpolation or later addition to the text and not the work of Tiruvalluvar.

¹⁸ See Popley, 27; Avvai S. Duraiswamy Pillai, *An Introduction to the Study of Tiruvalluvar* (Madurai: Visalakshi Pathipagam, 1961), 4-9; Kō. Vaṇmikanāṭaṇ, *Potumaṇai* (Tiruppaṇantāl: Śrī Kācīmaṭam, 1980), 18-26; Subrahmanian and Rajalakshmi, xliii-xlv.

¹⁹ Verse 1: *akara mutala eḷuttellām āti / pakavaṇ mutarrē ulaku*. All citations from the Tamil text follow *Tirukkuraḷ uraikkottu: Arattuppāl* (Tiruppaṇantāl: Śrī Kācīmaṭam, 1969), and transliterations separate words according to the requirements of the meter. For the sake of ease, I follow the numbering of the verses that appears in modern editions. All translations from the Tamil are mine unless otherwise indicated.

beginning of the text, and modern published editions have followed in suit.²⁰ On the surface, the content of this verse is relatively simple: just as ‘a’ is the first letter of the Tamil alphabet and thus the source of all other letters, so, too, is God the source of the world. There is a comparison between two distinct things, both of which act as a point of origin: the letter ‘a’ and God. This comparison suggests that there is an order to the manner in which letters are organized and that these letters proceed from a single source. However, the verse goes one step further and connects the structure of the Tamil language to the structure of the world, which is created by God. Just as language has embedded within it ordered patterns that form a coherent structural whole, so too does the world contain ordered patterns that are governed by a larger structural whole in the form of the divine. The reader of the *Tirukkuraḷ*, attuned to this subtle connection, possesses a framework for reading the rest of the text, carefully considering how language and order are intertwined. Second, this verse suggests to the reader that language and the natural world are uniquely comparable: the letters of the Tamil alphabet and the world around us are both coherently structured and proceed from a single source. It also suggests that there is an order to the rest of the text of the *Tirukkuraḷ*, all of which proceeds directly from the opening verse. In this way, the reader is on the lookout for signs of an organized project in the rest of the *Tirukkuraḷ* and ready to pick up on the ways in which the *Tirukkuraḷ* develops its literary structure from this verse as its singular point of origin.

The other verses in this chapter extend these dimensions of the *Tirukkuraḷ* in interesting ways. For example, most of these verses further elaborate on the divine figure mentioned in the

²⁰ As discussed in chapter 1, the five extant medieval commentaries often differ in terms of how they arrange the verses within each chapter. Though the same ten verses almost always appear within the same chapter, each commentator rearranges the order of the verses according to his own view of how they should proceed. It is thus striking, though perhaps not surprising, that the commentaries are in unanimous agreement about the opening verse.

opening verse. These verses use a number of epithets to describe this divine figure, including “he whose knowledge is pure” (*vālarivaṇ*), “he who dwelled upon a lotus” (*malarmicai ēkiṇāṇ*), “he who is without desire and aversion” (*vēṇṭutalvēṇ ṭāmai yilāṇ*), “he who subdued the five senses” (*porivāyil aintavittāṇ*), and “he who is lord” (*iraivaṇ*).²¹ As noted earlier, many scholars read these verses with the intention of uncovering a particular religious ethos that undergirds the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a whole. While several of them have noted that these verses, and the epithets within them, are vaguely Jain in character,²² neither the verses nor the epithets explicitly indicate any one religious affiliation or another. In fact, the somewhat vague and rather broad references to the divine in these verses may actually suggest that the *Tirukkuraḷ* anticipates an audience that is not only well versed in Tamil literature and linguistics, but also in a wide range of religious imagery. The reader of the text senses that these verses deliberately obscure any particular religious affiliation on the part of the text or its author. In this way, the text opens itself up to a broad audience of potential religious readers who might claim affiliation with a number of religious traditions. In contrast to the assumption that the *Tirukkuraḷ* actively *hides* its religious affiliation, the first ten verses of the text actually reflect a subtle literary technique in which the *Tirukkuraḷ* opens itself up to as many readers as possible through its deliberate use of epithets and imagery that transcend any one tradition alone, and thus apply to all traditions alike. In this

²¹ See verses 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10.

²² See V. V. S. Aiyar, *The Kural or the Maxims of Tiruvalluvar* (Madras: Subrahmanya Shiva, 1916), xxxiv-xxxvii; M. S. Purnalingam Pillai, *Critical Studies in Kural* (Munnirpallam: The Bibliotheca, 1929), 10; Tiru. Vi. Kaliyāṇacuntaraṇ, “Aṇinturai,” in *Tirukkuraḷ āraṇycciyum jaiṇacamaya cittānta viḷakkamum*, ācīriyar Tiru. Aṇantaṇāta Nayiṇār (Ceṇṇai: Śrī Ātimūlam, 1932), 5-12; Chakravarti, li-liv; S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, *History of Tamil Language and Literature* (Madras: New Century Book House, 1956), 81; Cakkaravartti Nayiṇār, 80-112; T. S. Śrīpāl, *Tiruvalluvar vāḷttum ātipakavaṇ* (Ceṇṇai: Tiruttakka Tēvar Ilakkiya Maṇṇam, 1959); Mayilai Cīṇi Vēṇkaṭacāmi, *Camayaṇkaḷ vaḷartta tamīl: kaṭṭurait tokuppu* (Citamparam: Maṇivācakar Nūlakam, 1966), 172-176; Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 125; Ka. Naa. Subramanyam, *Tiruvalluvar and His Tirukkural* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith Publication, 1987), 4, 15, 156, 187; Es. Vaiyāpurip Pillai, *Tamiḷc cuṭar maṇikaḷ: āṛām tokuti* (Ceṇṇai: Vaiyāpurippiḷḷai Niṇaivu Maṇṇam, 1995), 33-76; Tuḷaci Irāmacāmi, *Camāṇa muṇivarkaḷ eḷutiyatu tirukkuraḷ* (Ceṇṇai: Viḷikaḷ, 2008).

way, the *Tirukkural* anticipates readers who are familiar with this imagery and its religious associations and capable of discerning the effects that such imagery would have on a variety of religious readers who want to engage the text on their own terms.

Other verses build upon the opening verse by further constructing an image of an ordered and coherent world for the reader. Several verses repeatedly describe the benefits conferred upon “those who united with” or “those who have reached” (*cērantār*) the feet of the divine. Consider, for example, how the following two verses work upon the *Tirukkural*’s audience:

Those who united with the great feet of he who dwelled upon a lotus
will live long upon earth.²³

For those who united with the feet of he who is without desire and aversion,
there is never suffering.²⁴

Such people who strive to unite with the feet of God are told they will live long lives on earth, will never suffer, will be free of mental anxiety, will be in total control of their senses, and, ultimately, will be liberated from the cycle of rebirth.²⁵ Together, these verses paint a picture of how humans ought to live in this world—namely, by orienting their whole lives toward God. The imagery in these verses, along with the repeated use of the verb “to unite” (*cēr*) with the feet of God, points not only to the advantages that such an orientation toward God can have for devotees, but also to the fact that God is the supreme animating force of the world. We should worship at the feet of God, the verses suggest, not only to free ourselves from suffering in life and to liberate ourselves from the endless cycle of rebirth, but also because it is the natural thing to do in a world that is created and structured by this divine figure. Just as there is a connection

²³ Verse 3: *mārmicai yēkiṇāṇ māṇaṭi cērantār / nilamicai nīṭuvāl vār*.

²⁴ Verse 4: *vēṇṭutalvēṇ tāmāi yilāṇaṭi cērantārkkū / yāṇṭum iṭumpai ila*.

²⁵ See, also, verse 7 (“will be free of mental anxiety”), verse 9 (“will be in control of their senses”), and verses 8 and 10 (“will be liberated from the cycle of rebirth”).

between God as the source of the world and the letter ‘a’ as the source of all other letters, so too is there a connection between God’s divine attributes and how we ought to orient ourselves toward God. By worshipping God and devoting ourselves to God’s feet, we find the promise of benefits in this life and the next. We also discover the organizational pattern that governs our lives in the world, with God as supreme and ourselves as devotees. Our relationship to the divine is indeed one of hierarchy, but it is an ordered, organized, and coherent one that provides the *Tirukkural*’s audience with a conceptual framework to theorize the integrity of all that follows.

The second chapter, “The Excellence of Rain,” shifts suddenly from a focus on the divine to a description of the workings of the natural world around us. Interestingly, this chapter is one that many commentators have struggled to make sense of in relation to the rest of the *Tirukkural*. Just what does rain have to do with the pursuit of ethics, the political life, or love? If we assume that this chapter plays an essential role in conveying the literary message of the *Tirukkural*, we begin to discern some connections with what has preceded this chapter and what will follow. The verses in this chapter outline a number of scenarios that will occur without rain: hunger will afflict those in the world, farmers will not plow their fields, green grass will not grow, the ocean will dry up, and festivals for the gods will cease to be performed.²⁶ Perhaps most alarmingly, the path of virtuous conduct does not exist without the presence of rain to sustain the world.²⁷ This chapter thus builds upon the opening verses of the *Tirukkural*, constructing a literary world in which the reader is carefully attuned to the ordered patterns of the natural world. This reader foresees that there is an ever-present risk that the world will fall into a state of disorder and fully understands the ways in which the human world is connected to the natural world, both of which

²⁶ See verses 13, 14, 16, 17, and 18.

²⁷ See verse 20.

are governed by God. In this way, the preface continues to shape the reader to think in certain ways about the order of the world on a macro level, how we engage with that world on a micro level, and the connection between the two.

The final two chapters of the preface shift our attention away from the divine and the natural world and toward the human world. First, “The Greatness of Renouncers” focuses on the experiences, powers, and practices of those who live apart from and outside of everyday human society. These ascetics or renouncers have literally given up their possessions and abandoned the life of the householder—with all of its familial duties and monetary distractions—in order to cultivate virtue, and the chapter recounts the abilities that such people possess: the power to control their five senses, to speak prophetic words, and to unleash their anger. Likewise, the chapter praises renouncers for their virtuous capacities, noting that they are capable of doing things that are difficult to do that other people would rather avoid. In one particularly striking example, a verse states: “Virtuous people are those who are called ‘*antaṇar*’ due to behaving with a pure nature regularly to all living beings.”²⁸ The term *antaṇar* is often used to refer to Brahmins, the upper-class elites, in classical Tamil poetry, though it can refer to any pure or virtuous person in general. By using this term, the verse compels the reader to make a choice about how to interpret the word within the broader context, forcing the reader to consider who really *is* an *antaṇar*—Brahmin or otherwise—in light of the rest of *Tirukkuraḷ*. In chapter 4 of this project, we will see how the metaphorical structure of this verse operates upon the reader in ethically significant ways. Here, however, as one small piece of a much larger structural whole, the verse underscores the high esteem in which renouncers are held by the *Tirukkuraḷ*, suggesting

²⁸ Verse 30: *antaṇar eṇpōr aṇavōrmaṇ revvuyirkkuñ / centaṇmai pūṇṭoluka lāṇ*.

to the reader that they are models of behavior to be emulated in some way, even if they fall outside the normal realm of society.

Finally, “Affirming Virtue” previews the content of the remaining chapters of the *Arattuppāl* by describing the benefits and advantages of virtue. The possession of virtue (*aṛam*) is twice compared to the possession of wealth or great fortune (*ākkam*), as in the following verse: “There is not any fortune greater than virtue; there is no misfortune greater than forgetting it.”²⁹ In another verse, a connection is established between virtue and pleasure (*inṇam*): “Pleasure only comes through virtue; for all else beyond it, there is not any praise.”³⁰ In chapter 3 of this project, we will see how describing virtue as a form of financial prosperity works upon the reader by forging a connection between the ethical themes of the *Arattuppāl* and the themes of prosperity in the *Poruṭpāl*, while stating that pleasure can only come through virtue connects the *Arattuppāl* with the *Kāmattuppāl*. Such thematic links underscore the larger argument articulated here that the *Tirukkuraḷ* has a single overarching project in mind that can be discerned across the text as a whole. Other verses in this chapter emphasize the fact that a person should act according to virtue through every way possible and at all times in order to develop a mind that is pure and free of faults and to avoid vices such as envy, desire, and anger.³¹

What, then, does the reader make of the preface when taken as a whole? How is this reader prepared for the rest of the content of the *Tirukkuraḷ* to come? By drawing together three distinct realms—the divine, the natural world, and the practices of those who exist outside of mainstream human society—the preface invites the reader to see the connections among them

²⁹ Verse 32: *aṛattiṇṇuṇ kākkamum illai ataṇai / maṛattaliṇ ṇṇkillai kēṭu*.

³⁰ Verse 39: *aṛattāṇ varuvatē inṇamar rellām / puṛatta pukaḷum ila*.

³¹ See verses 34 and 35.

and to consider how they might fit together as a harmonious whole. The preface also suggests to its readers that they live in a world in which everything is related, but in need of being sustained and preserved. We should orient ourselves toward God in the hope that such action might sustain the natural world by bringing the rains, just as we should see ourselves as connected to renouncers and model their behavior by cultivating a life of virtue. We thus see ourselves at the center of an expansive world in which virtue plays a central role. All of these chapters, then, invite the reader to start drawing connections across the chapters of the *Tirukkuraḷ* and to view the world as a complex web of duties and relationships that need to be maintained. In short, the preface prepares the reader for how to engage with the rest of the *Tirukkuraḷ* through its use of literary strategies that invite and encourage the reader to read the text as a unified, ordered whole that is building toward a coherent vision of human life.

Following the preface of the *Arattuppāl* are an additional thirty-four chapters that tackle a variety of themes and topics. Again, though we have no indication of what the original structure of the *Tirukkuraḷ* would have looked like, the commentators are nevertheless unanimous in organizing these remaining chapters into two overarching thematic sections: twenty chapters on “Domestic Virtue” (*illaram*) and thirteen chapters on “Ascetic Virtue” (*tuṛavaram*).³² A final chapter on the topic of “Fate” (*ūḷ*) stands alone as both a chapter and its own sub-section.³³ Much

³² As discussed in chapter 1, this agreement over the division of the *Arattuppāl* into two major sub-sections following the preface is a striking contrast to the disagreement found among commentators over how to divide the *Poruṭpāl* and *Kāmattuppāl*. For a more elaborate summary of how the commentaries divide each section of the *Tirukkuraḷ* into sub-sections, see Sundaramoorthy, 1-8.

³³ The reason why this chapter is sometimes classified as its own sub-section is not entirely clear, and it is the only case in which a single chapter is ever listed as its own sub-section in *Tirukkuraḷ* commentaries. Perhaps the commentators did not find enough thematic continuity with the previous section on “Ascetic Virtue” to include it with those chapters. There is, however, some ambiguity in terms of whether the commentaries are in universal agreement about including “Fate” as a separate sub-section. While most printed editions do organize *Arattuppāl* into four sub-sections, the dense style in which most extant manuscripts are written does not lend itself to ascertaining whether each commentator intended to group the *Arattuppāl* into three or four sub-sections. At least two scholars interpret Parimēlaḷakar’s commentary as organizing the *Arattuppāl* into only three sub-sections, consisting of a

of the scholarly debate on the *Arattuppāl* has centered on the question of how to read these thematic sections together. Some scholars suggest that the author of the *Tirukkural* clearly grants a higher status to domestic virtue than ascetic virtue, given that the life of the householder is discussed immediately after the preface and the fact that there are more chapters devoted to the topic than to any other throughout the rest of the *Arattuppāl*. This theory is certainly a plausible one for the reasons mentioned, though there is no indication in the text of a deliberate preference for the life of the householder over and against the life of the ascetic. Here again, we must ask: what other possibilities exist for reading the *Arattuppāl*? How do the *Tirukkural*'s literary strategies work upon the reader as he moves through the content of the remaining thirty-four chapters of this section? I argue that the remaining chapters of the *Arattuppāl* build upon the work of the preface, which encouraged readers to see themselves as part of a world in which everything is connected. The poem's literary strategies begin to guide the reader toward a vision of the world in which he stands at the center of an ever-expanding number of relationships that present an ever-increasing opportunity to cultivate the internal virtues necessary to maintain those relationships.

First, consider how the sequence of chapters that form the section on "Domestic Virtue" would shape the reader's understanding of the world. The section begins with a chapter that summarizes the content of the sequence overall and proceeds through a number of chapters that relate variously to the people that a person would need around him to participate fully in the life of the householder and the virtues he would need to accumulate in order to succeed in that mode of life. The reader encounters these chapters in the following order:

5. The Life of the Householder (*ilvāḷkkai*)

preface, a section on domestic virtue, and a section on ascetic virtue (which would then include the chapter on "Fate"); see Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan*, 158; Cutler, "Interpreting *Tirukkural*," 554.

6. The Value of Wives (*vāḷkkaittuṇainalam*)
7. The Obtaining of Sons (*putalvaraip perūtal*)
8. The Possession of Love (*aṇṇuṭaimai*)
9. The Welcoming of Guests (*viruntōmpal*)
10. The Speaking of Pleasantries (*iṇiyavai kūṛal*)
11. The Custom of Good Deeds (*ceyṇṇaṇṇiyaṛital*)
12. The Quality of Impartiality (*naṭuvunilaimai*)
13. The Possession of Self-Control (*aṭakkamuṭaimai*)
14. The Possession of Prescribed Conduct (*oḷukkamuṭaimai*)
15. Not Desiring Another's Wife (*piṛaṇilvilaiyāmai*)
16. The Possession of Patience (*poraiyuṭaimai*)
17. Not Having Envy (*aḷukkārāmai*)
18. Not Having Greed (*veḷkāmai*)
19. Not Slandering (*puṛaṇkūrāmai*)
20. Not Speaking Uselessly (*payaṇilacollāmai*)
21. The Fear of Evil Action (*tīviṇaiyaccam*)
22. Knowing What is Proper (*oppuravarital*)
23. Gifts (*īkai*)
24. Fame (*pukaḷ*)

The *Tirukkuraḷ* thus presents the reader with a smattering of human relationships to consider alongside a number of related ethical ideas. The ethical principles themselves are framed at times in positive terms (e.g., “The Possession of Self-Control”) and at other times in negative terms (e.g., “Not Having Envy”), thus presenting a set of prescriptions about what to pursue and what to avoid. However, I want to argue that, within this seemingly random progression, there is a tacit literary agenda that the careful reader of the *Tirukkuraḷ* will pick up on.

We can, for example, take chapters 5-8 above as a unit. The section begins with a chapter on “The Life of the Householder,” which lays out the basic premise of the chapters to follow. The verses in this chapter emphasize the role of the householder at the center of a number of relationships. The householder's life is praised for its support of those in the other three stages of life; the householder is said to support renunciators, the poor, and those who have died; the householder preserves the five groups of people that include the ancestors, the gods, guests,

relatives, and himself.³⁴ The reader who encounters this chapter directly after the preface will perceive an extension of the kind of relational thinking that was fostered in those first four chapters. The householder, like the world around him, is connected to a host of other people, both living and dead, both familiar and unfamiliar, both rich and poor. In the literary world of this chapter, the householder is in fact *defined* through these relationships, such that a person who does not stand at the center of these relationships is no longer fulfilling the proper duties of a householder. The reader of the *Tirukkuraḷ*, then, begins to narrate his own life in these terms, thinking about his relationship to others and the necessary virtues that accompany those relationships.

The next two chapters build upon this groundwork by introducing the two most important figures for a person living the life of the householder: a wife and children. These two chapters extol the benefits of virtuous wives, literally emphasizing their “value” as companions in the domestic sphere, and the importance of raising children, especially sons, who engage in proper conduct and are praised by learned and virtuous men. In this way, these chapters continue the thematic thread of the preface in which each person stands in relation to the structures of the world around him, but they focus in on the relationships that are to be formed first and foremost in the life of the householder. It is no coincidence, then, that the following chapter shifts the focus to the topic of familial love and affection (*aṇpu*), for it is in relation to one’s wife and children that one learns to cultivate this sense of love and affection. Here, the literary strategies of the *Tirukkuraḷ* suggest two things to the reader about the life of the householder and the cultivation of virtue (*aṛam*). First, readers begin to envision their lives in relation to others. Each person stands at the center of a vast constellation of human relationships, and these relationships

³⁴ See verses 41-43.

are forged first and foremost in the home, with those to whom one is most intimately connected. Second, readers begin to perceive a connection between the expansion of their relationships and the cultivation of virtue. Here, the wife and children are inextricably connected to the practice of cultivating loving affection for others; the household and its residents offer a kind of preliminary sphere in which one learns to cultivate an ethos of love toward other human beings that will be necessary for the later work of expanding one's sphere of human relationships.

The next chapter, "The Welcoming of Guests," introduces a new figure into the domestic sphere: the guest. The householder, having cultivated a sense of loving affection in relation to his wife and children who reside within the home with him, is prepared to encounter and engage with the guests who are invited into his home. The verses in this chapter praise the householder who spares no expense in welcoming guests into his home through acts of generous hospitality. In particular, this chapter extols the householder who welcomes guests with a joyful smile on his face and without any sign of displeasure.³⁵ These verses, and the chapter as a whole, suggest to the reader that the householder who has properly cultivated a sense of loving affection with his wife and children is thus prepared to welcome guests wholeheartedly into his home. Once again, the literary strategies at work in the sequence of chapters suggest that the virtuous householder stands at the center of an expanding number of relationships.

The chapters that follow "The Welcoming of Guests" turn once again to the ethical practices that ought to be cultivated by the householder, which are speaking pleasantly, practicing good deeds, exercising impartiality, exhibiting self-control, and adhering to prescribed conduct. Just as loving affection develops in relation to the householder's wife and children, so too do these ethical precepts develop in relation to guests. While the householder remains within

³⁵ See, in particular, verses 84 and 90.

the home, his engagement with guests, who are not among its permanent residents, offers an opportunity to gradually expand his virtues. The vision of human life that has already begun to form in the mind of the reader is thus further extended outward. The reader of the text, imagining himself in the role of householder, envisions his life as a series of opportunities to welcome guests into his home and thus cultivate the virtues that are necessary to attend to these guests. By welcoming guests with sweet words and kind actions, by showing no impartiality to any one person over another, by maintaining control of himself, and by adhering to the path of virtuous conduct, he gradually expands his circle of relationships and ensures that his guests become lifelong friends and allies. Additionally, it is by welcoming guests into the home and attending to their needs in a hospitable manner that he has the opportunity to practice and gradually cultivate the constellation of virtues that are uniquely required for interacting with guests.

Immediately following this sequence of chapters, the *Tirukkuraḷ* turns to the last major human relationship that must be considered by the householder: another person's wife. The chapter, "Not Desiring Another's Wife," marks a sudden shift in the tone of the section on domestic virtue. While the chapters thus far have described the life of the householder in positive terms, emphasizing the gradual expansion of relationships and the virtues that need to be inculcated to build and sustain those relationships, this chapter narrates the engagement with another man's wife in negative terms, describing the "stupidity" (*pētaimai*) and the "evil" (*tīmai*) of a person who regards another man's wife and trespasses into another man's home in pursuit of her. From the perspective of the literary strategies that have been described thus far, this chapter forces the reader to think in drastically different ways. Rather than consider the life of the householder through the framework of possibility and potential and the sense of what one *should* or *will* do, this chapter encourages the reader of the *Tirukkuraḷ* to think in terms of what needs to

be avoided, and the relationships with others that are better left uncultivated. It is worth noting, in anticipation of the content to follow, that the prohibition of sexual liaisons even extends to the domain of unmarried prostitutes, the subject of its own chapter in the *Poruṭpāl*.³⁶ Thus, the effort to curtail the sexual affairs of a man constitutes a key goal of the text.

Here again, the reader picks up on a familiar pattern in which a particular relationship is introduced into the life of the householder, followed immediately by a series of chapters that outline the virtues necessary to engage with and sustain that relationship. By refusing to engage with another man's wife, these chapters suggest that a householder needs to learn patience, even in the presence of fools and those who have wronged him. Similarly, the householder must learn to avoid vices such as envy, greed, slander, useless speech, and evil actions. The reader of the text, carefully attuned to the sequence of chapters and the picture of domestic virtue they paint, must consider the idealized vision of the life of the householder that the *Tirukkuraḷ* has presented. In this case, however, the vision is one of avoidance and omission; the householder is one who *should not* and *must not* covet another man's wife, and marital affairs should never be a part of a householder's life. Likewise, a householder must avoid the faults that can ruin the relationships he has worked so hard to develop and tarnish his virtuous qualities. The reader makes sense of these chapters by thinking about how they build up toward a particular vision of human life, though that vision becomes a bit more complex through literary strategies of prohibition, which present a version of human life that ought *not* to be pursued, within the context of a larger vision of human life that *must* be pursued.

The section on domestic virtue concludes with three chapters entitled, respectively, "Knowing What is Proper," "Gifts," and "Fame." In these chapters, the literary strategies once

³⁶ See *Poruṭpāl*, chapter 92 on "Prostitutes" (*varaiviṇṇmakaḷir*).

again point the careful reader of the text in a forward direction such that he imagines his life trajectory as one that includes knowing what is right to do alongside generous acts of charity and the fame that results from those very acts. In this way, domestic virtue unfolds through a linear progression of stages marked by two related aspects. First, the reader envisions human life as defined by significant relationships, some of which ought to be cultivated while others are to be avoided. Second, the reader perceives that human life is marked by the inward cultivation of virtue that is practiced and perfected through those relationships. The reader is thus primed for the rest of the *Arattuppāl*, which takes on the theme of ascetic virtue.

As discussed above, the final fourteen chapters of the *Arattuppāl* are considered by most commentators to constitute a description of “Ascetic Virtue.” Let us begin by thinking about what the sequence of chapters in this section communicates to the reader of the *Tirukkuraḷ*, and then turn to the question of how to read the *Arattuppāl* as a unified whole. As above, we can consider the progression of chapters in this section as the reader would encounter them if he were to read the *Arattuppāl* from beginning to end:

25. The Possession of Compassion (*aruḷuṭaimai*)
26. Abstaining from Meat (*pulāṇmaruttal*)
27. Austerity (*tavam*)
28. Immoral Conduct (*kūṭāvoḷukkam*)
29. Not Stealing (*kaḷḷāmai*)
30. Truth (*vāymai*)
31. Not Having Anger (*vekuḷāmai*)
32. Not Causing Misery (*innāceyyāmai*)
33. Not Killing (*kollāmai*)
34. Impermanence (*nilaiyāmai*)
35. Asceticism (*turavu*)
36. Knowing Reality (*meyyūṇartal*)
37. Removing Desire (*avāvaruttal*)
38. Fate (*ūḷ*)

Once again, the content of these chapters and their structural presentation together convey a certain vision of human life to the reader. As in the first part of the *Arattuppāl*, the chapter

themes alternate between an affirmation of the virtues that should be cultivated (e.g., “The Possession of Compassion”) and a negation of the actions that ought to be avoided (e.g., “Not Killing”). Unlike the earlier parts of the *Arattuppāl*, however, this section does not address specific human relationships that need to be cultivated alongside these virtues. Indeed, this may be part of the reason that commentators have sought to differentiate these chapters from the rest. There is clearly a kind of thematic transition that takes place among these chapters, whether or not one chooses to accept the label of “Ascetic Virtue” that commentators give to them.

How, then, should these chapters be read in light of the first half of the *Arattuppāl*? Though there are many possible ways of reading them, there are certain patterns embedded within this sequence to which the reader will be attentive. The first chapter, “The Possession of Compassion,” lays out a basic premise: a person should be kind, merciful, and benevolent to others, and such compassion offers significant rewards.³⁷ There are some striking parallels between this chapter and the earlier chapter on “The Possession of Love,” included within the sub-section on “Domestic Virtue,” though they differ in several key respects. First, the earlier chapter discusses *anpu*, translated here as “love,” which is something to be cultivated toward a person’s wife and children; it is a form of reciprocal affection and attachment, cultivated in the domestic sphere, that binds the household together. This chapter discusses *arul*, “grace” or “compassion,” which is a more general orientation to the world that is not specific to certain people. Second, the cultivation of *anpu* toward one’s family in the earlier chapter served as a prerequisite for the cultivation of other relationships and virtues that are exercised primarily within the domestic sphere, such as the reception of guests. This chapter, however, portrays *arul*

³⁷ See, in particular, verses 241, 244, and 245, which describe compassion as itself a kind of wealth that secures a person’s future and prevents them from experiencing grief.

as a virtue that extends outward into the world, far beyond the realm of the household. Whereas *anpu* is cultivated and then exercised in the home, honed through one's familial relationships, *aruḷ* goes beyond the spatial constraints of the home, extended to all without exception.

The chapters that follow “The Possession of Compassion” build upon this theme in various ways, suggesting strategies, methods, and practices for curating a kindly disposition. By placing a chapter on “Abstaining from Meat” directly after “The Possession of Compassion,” the reader infers that a compassionate person is someone who does not eat meat or consume animal flesh of any kind. As a verse in this chapter asks, “How can he be kindly who fattens himself on others' fat?”³⁸ In this way, the reader begins to think about how a kind person will live in the world, and vegetarianism becomes one of the key practices of such a person. The following chapter on “Austerity” suggests that a compassionate person will also engage in practices of religious penance (*tavam*), which are often difficult, painful, and time-consuming for the practitioner. While the person who engages in these practices may undertake extreme acts that cause him pain, he does not harm others in the process and will even gain friends.³⁹ A compassionate person is, additionally, someone who avoids immoral conduct and theft, as the chapters on “Immoral Conduct” and “Not Stealing” illustrate. Such a person will never deviate from the path of prescribed conduct (*oḷukkam*) laid out in the preceding chapters or commit egregious wrongs, nor will he steal from others as a result of his greed. In this way, these chapters form a kind of unit that presents the ideal of compassion and then suggests several qualities that a compassionate person will exhibit, through which others will know him as such.

³⁸ Verse 251: *taṇṇūṇ perukkarkut tāṇpiṇi tūṇuṇpāṇ / eṇṇaṇam āḷum aruḷ*. The translation is from Sundaram, 44.

³⁹ See verses 261 and 264.

These practical themes are immediately followed by a chapter on “Truth,” which builds upon the previous chapters but also moves in a slightly new direction. Of course, someone who is kind is also someone who tells the truth to others, and thus this chapter fits neatly into the various methods of pursuing compassion. The *Arattuppāl* then adds to the practices and methods of compassion in the following three chapters: “Not Having Anger,” “Not Causing Misery,” and “Not Killing.” These chapters further extend the ideals of compassion by adding to the growing list of practices that a kind person will avoid. The reader envisions a person whose life is imbued with compassion by reading these chapters in order and by forming in his mind a portrait of a compassionate person who avoids anger, does not cause any misery to others, and avoids killing at all costs. Each of these chapters emphasizes the ways in which a person is able to create the conditions for the possibility of compassion by embracing or rejecting certain types of behaviors.

“Not Having Anger” encourages the reader to curb his wrath and guard himself against lashing out at others in rage,⁴⁰ while “Not Causing Misery” carries this theme forward and suggests that a person should treat others as he would like to be treated. Even if a person experiences some wrong or pain at the hand of another person, he should return it with kindness and a good deed.⁴¹ “Not Killing” builds upward from the content of the preceding chapters to emphasize a fundamental imperative: one should never, under any circumstances, kill another living being. This moral imperative is, as a verse in the chapter declares, the sum of all virtue.⁴² Even at the cost of one’s own life, one should avoid killing another person.⁴³ In this way, then,

⁴⁰ See, in particular, verses 301, 305, 308, and 309.

⁴¹ See verses 312, 313, 314, 316, and 318.

⁴² See verse 321.

⁴³ See verse 327.

the *Arattuppāl*'s vision of human life is extended through this sequence of chapters that encourages the reader to reject anger, lying, and above all else, killing. Only by avoiding these behaviors can the *Arattuppāl*'s vision of a virtuous human life be attained.

The *Arattuppāl* concludes with a sequence of five chapters that shift the focus in a new direction. While the *Tirukkural*'s literary strategies have thus far laid out a vision of the ideal human life, recounting the stages of progression that the reader must take in order to attain this ideal, these final five chapters present a deeper vision of human life that suggests that our actions are always restrained and governed by forces beyond our control. A chapter on "Impermanence" emphasizes the ephemeral nature of the things we take for granted in our lives. In particular, wealth is singled out as fleeting, as is the passage of time.⁴⁴ Since nothing lasts forever, this chapter suggests to the reader, we must think of human life in broader terms and look beyond the mere quotidian realm, taking care to think of our progression from one life to the next. Next, "Asceticism" emphasizes the virtues of renunciation, in some ways reiterating the themes of earlier chapters, but also further highlighting the ability of ascetics to control their senses, limit their cravings for worldly pleasures, and remove their attachments to the fleeting things of this world.⁴⁵ The chapter on "Knowing Reality" suggests to the reader that he must concern himself with acquiring knowledge of ultimate truth. A person who does not strive for such knowledge is doomed to an endless cycle of rebirths.⁴⁶ A chapter entitled "Removing Desire" emphasizes the need to rid oneself of the desire to acquire endless wealth and possessions. Taken together, these chapters emphasize the fleeting state of all wealth, the value of learning how to free ourselves

⁴⁴ See verses 332, 333, 334, 336.

⁴⁵ See verses 343, 344, 345, 347, and 348.

⁴⁶ In particular, see verses 351, 356, 357, and 358.

from yearning by giving up our attachment to material goods, and the quest for greater knowledge that ought to be pursued instead.

Finally, the *Arattuppāl* concludes abruptly and somewhat unexpectedly with a single chapter on “Fate” (in Tamil, *ūl*). The verses here extend the deeper inquiry into the nature of human life that constitutes much of the scope of the *Arattuppāl*’s concluding chapters as they consider the influence of fate upon human affairs. The final verse of the chapter, and thus the concluding verse of the *Arattuppāl*, states: “What is stronger than fate which foils every ploy to counter it?”⁴⁷ In a paradoxical way, these verses call into question the possibility of achieving the vision of human life that has been articulated throughout the *Arattuppāl* by introducing fate as a powerful force governing all human efforts to conform to that idealized vision. The term used for fate here, *ūl*, literally means “old” or “ancient.” It has often been associated with and translated as *karma*, a Sanskrit term that literally means “action” but is more frequently used to refer to the result of actions done in previous births.⁴⁸ However, “fate” (*ūl*) is distinct from the term that is more frequently used in the *Tirukkuraḷ* to refer to *karma* and the lingering effects of one’s actions: *viṇai*. How these two terms, *ūl* and *viṇai*, are to be understood in relation to one another is a subject that has been much discussed by scholars, as have the implications of these concepts for the possibility of human agency and free will.⁴⁹ The text of the *Tirukkuraḷ* does not provide clear answers on either front. All that can be discerned about the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s definition and understanding of fate is what can be inferred from the final chapter of the *Arattuppāl*.

⁴⁷ Verse 380: *ūlir peruvali yāvuḷa marṇṇu / cūḷinum tāṇmun tuṇu*. The translation is from Sundaram, 56.

⁴⁸ See Aiyar, xviii; Popley, 78; Meenakshisundaran, 234-235; Kulandai Swamy, 64-65.

⁴⁹ See, for example, M. S. Purnalingam Pillai, *Tamil Literature: Revised and Enlarged* (Munnirpallam: The Bibliotheca, 1929), 78; Duraiswamy Pillai, 40-43; Devasenapathi, 21-22; Subrahmanian and Rajalakshmi, lxy.

How, then, should the reader of the text read this chapter in light of the rest of the *Arattuppāl*? One way to read the chapter is to see it as a kind of bookend that works together with the first chapter, “The Praise of God,” to shape our understanding of the content that falls in between.⁵⁰ Just as the opening chapter of the entire *Tirukkural* inspires the reader to see himself as connected to the structures of the world around him, and to surrender himself fully at the feet of the divine, so too does “Fate” force the reader to come to terms with the fact that there are larger forces at play in the world, many of which remain unseen. Indeed, the very recognition of such larger forces within the world may compel the reader even more fully to surrender to the feet of the divine for protection from the powers of fate. Regardless, the reader understands that he must contend with the fact that some things are beyond his control in the pursuit of virtue, and he must learn to take them in stride.

Another way to read this final chapter is to see it as a summation of the *Arattuppāl*’s attempt to convince the reader to pursue a life of virtue grounded in the gradual expansion of human relationships.⁵¹ In this reading, the chapter on “Fate” serves as a kind of concluding argument on behalf of a life of virtue. Even if the reader has yet to fully comprehend the text’s vision of human life, and even if the reader has deliberately rejected that vision in favor of other possibilities, this final chapter leaves no room for doubt about the consequences of failing to pursue a virtuous life. The fate of those who fail to live in accordance with the path of conduct that is prescribed in the *Arattuppāl* will come back to haunt them in the next life.⁵² Conversely, if

⁵⁰ This reading approach has been suggested in Meenakshisundaran, 244-245.

⁵¹ This interpretative possibility is advocated by Aiyar, xx-xxi, and Subramania Gopalan, “*Dhammapada* and *Tirukkural*: A Comparative Study,” in *Pāli Buddhism*, ed. Frank J. Hoffman and Mahinda Deegalle (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1996), 71-72.

⁵² See verses 372, 376, 378, and 379.

one follows the path of virtue and learns to exercise these ethical practices in relation to others, there is no need to concern oneself with how fate may affect one's future births.⁵³ In either interpretation, the reader must fit the chapter on "Fate" into the vision of human life that has been constructed thus far. The only way to do this is by incorporating a sense of fate or destiny into the *Arattuppāl*'s vision of human life and learning to see ourselves as subject to various forces beyond our control. And, if the proper virtues have been cultivated by the reader who is shaped by the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s literary strategies, then such a reader may in fact be better prepared to deal with the ravages of fate.

In what way, then, can we read the *Arattuppāl* as a whole? Much of the scholarly debate on this question has centered on the issue of how to read the chapters on "Domestic Virtue" and "Ascetic Virtue" together. Several scholars have argued that the chapters on "Domestic Virtue" are given precedence over the chapters on "Ascetic Virtue."⁵⁴ Yet, by reading the *Arattuppāl* with careful attention to its literary strategies—the dynamic interaction between the content of the text and the form in which it is presented—a somewhat different interpretive possibility is suggested to the reader in which both sections work together as part of a coherent whole in order to gradually impart a specific vision of human life. In this interpretation, the *Arattuppāl* does not confine itself to any one set of readers but is indeed universal. Any person who engages with the text in this way has access to the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s vision of human life as it is presented to the reader and at times even called into question, such as in the chapter on "Fate." In this way, then, the

⁵³ See verses 371, 372, 375, and 379.

⁵⁴ Nallaswamy Pillai, 39; C. Jesudasan and Hephzibah Jesudasan, *A History of Tamil Literature* (Calcutta: Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, 1961), 121; N. Subbu Reddiar, *Collected Papers* (Madras: Paari Nilayam, 1985), 105-106; Amaladass, 15; George Hart, "The Relation Between Tamil and Classical Sanskrit Literature," in *Passages: Relationships Between Tamil and Sanskrit*, ed. Kannan M. and Jennifer Clare (Pondicherry: French Institute of Pondicherry, 2009), 44.

Arattuppāl begins the work of the *Tirukkural* by shaping the reader's engagement with the text through its literary strategies, suggesting certain ideal possibilities to the reader, and, finally, encouraging the reader to imagine those possibilities in relation to his own life.

Part II: Reading the *Poruṭpāl*

The *Poruṭpāl* builds upon the vision of human life that was begun in the *Arattuppāl* and further expands it in several key ways. As was the case with the *Arattuppāl*, the *Poruṭpāl* has remained remarkably consistent over time in terms of the sequence of its chapters and the set of verses that appears within each chapter. However, the commentaries reveal a wide range of discrepancy in terms of how the *Poruṭpāl* has been organized into sub-sections and the arrangement of the verses within each chapter. Once again, we must consider how the *Poruṭpāl*'s literary strategies work to convey a certain vision of human life to the audience. The *Poruṭpāl* builds upon the literary strategies of the *Arattuppāl* by offering a vision for how to engage in the social and political life of a society. This process of social engagement has as its prerequisite the cultivation of close personal relationships and the virtues necessary to facilitate those relationships, as outlined in the *Arattuppāl*. At the same time, the *Poruṭpāl* shifts the *Tirukkural*'s vision of human life out of the household and into society. The *Poruṭpāl* suggests to the reader that the ideal next step for the person who has acquired the virtues necessary to flourish with and among those closest to him is to find his place in society and fulfill the duties that accompany that role.

This reading in part aligns with how other scholars have interpreted the *Poruṭpāl*. Several scholars have argued that the *Poruṭpāl* should be read simply as a continuation of the *Arattuppāl*

and an extension of its ethical themes;⁵⁵ indeed, this approach offers a productive model for reading the *Arattuppāl* and *Poruṭpāl* together as part of a single, coherent, and integrated whole. Yet, in various ways, the *Poruṭpāl* differs and thus needs to be distinguished from the content that preceded it. First, there is the question of the *Poruṭpāl*'s intended audience. While the content of the *Arattuppāl* seems directed at a broad audience of readers, many scholars have commented upon the fact that much of the *Poruṭpāl*'s content seems directed specifically at kings and princes.⁵⁶ This raises the question of how the *Poruṭpāl* is relevant to a broader audience of readers, which in most cases would not include royal figures alone. Several scholars have sidestepped this issue by observing that, while some of the content relates directly to the situation of a king, the majority of the *Poruṭpāl* speaks to a much broader audience, and thus opens itself up to a wide range of readers.⁵⁷ Yet, there is still a need to read the *Poruṭpāl* in a way that attends to this multitude of potential readers and the various positionalities they might hold. A second issue arises from the fact that the *Poruṭpāl*, perhaps more than any other part of the *Tirukkural*, seems uniquely indebted to other texts on kingship and governance, including the Sanskrit *Arthaśāstra*. While several scholars have suggested that the *Poruṭpāl* derives much of its content and structure from Sanskrit sources,⁵⁸ others have rejected this claim, taking great

⁵⁵ D. I. Jesudoss, "The Political Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar," *Tamil Culture* 2, no. 2 (April 1953): 143-144; Devasenapathi, 1, 4; Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan*, 165; K. V. Nagarajan, "Thiruvalluvar's Vision: Polity and Economy in *Thirukkural*," *History of Political Economy* 37, no. 1 (2005): 131-132.

⁵⁶ See, for example, Aiyar, xxii; Subrahmanian and Rajalakshmi, lxxvii; Subbu Reddiar, 103-104.

⁵⁷ Aiyar, xxiii; Jesudoss, 143-144; T. P. Meenakshisundaran, *A History of Tamil Literature* (Annamalainagar: Annamalai University, 1965), 58; Meenakshisundaran, "Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar," 295-297; Mudaliar, 566; Ranganayaki Mahapatra, P. Bhanumathi, and Sukla Chakrabarti, *Studies in Tirukkural* (Calcutta: Tamil Department, Calcutta University, 1996), 70; Nagarajan, 131-132.

⁵⁸ P. T. Srinivas Iyengar, *History of the Tamils from the Earliest Times to 600 A. D.* (Madras: C. Coomarasawmy Naidu & Sons, 1929), 590; Popley, 31; Ka. Naṭēca Uṭaiyār, *Tirukkural tīravu: poruṭpāl īraimāṭci* (Cēlam: Cēlam Tiruvalluvar Kaḷakattār, 1953); Mahapatra, Bhanumathi, and Chakrabarti, 29.

care to distinguish the vision of a harmonious human society presented within the *Tirukkural* from the vision of a powerful ruler articulated in the *Arthaśāstra*.⁵⁹ The result of these debates has been a tendency to read the *Poruṭpāl* in an aggressively comparative mode, showing how various verses and chapters may have been culled from prior Sanskrit and Tamil texts, at the expense of paying attention to the *Poruṭpāl* as a unique literary product in its own right and in relation to the other parts of the *Tirukkural*.

This chapter acknowledges and builds upon these ongoing debates about how to read the *Poruṭpāl*, but it moves past them in several ways. First, while the question of the intended historical audience of the *Poruṭpāl* is an interesting one that demands further study, this chapter is more concerned with the imagined community of readers who might pick up the *Tirukkural* and encounter the *Poruṭpāl*'s seventy chapters ensconced between the *Arattuppāl* and *Kāmatuppāl*. Rather than holding the question of the text's intended audience as the key to unlocking its meaning, we can use its literary structure, including both its form and content, to think about the message that the *Poruṭpāl* communicates to any reader who picks it up and reads it from start to finish. Similarly, while questions of source criticism have been much debated in the history of *Tirukkural* scholarship, this chapter sets aside these debates in an effort to think about the ways in which the *Tirukkural* reaches out to *any* reader to communicate its message about how to flourish in human society. By engaging with the form and content of the *Poruṭpāl* directly, without comparison to other literary texts and genres, this chapter argues that we can better attend to the literary strategies at play within it.

⁵⁹ H. A. Popley, "Social Ethics in the 'Tirukkural,'" *Tamil Culture* 2, no. 3 & 4 (September 1953): 262-263; Meenakshisundaran, *A History of Tamil Literature*, 58; Natarajan, 102; Meenakshisundaran, "Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar," 295; Mudaliar, 508, 568; Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan*, 165; S. Maharajan, *Tiruvalluvar* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982), 45; Subbu Reddiar, 103-104; Nagarajan, 131-132.

In all of the extant commentaries and published editions today, the *Poruṭpāl* opens with the following verse: “An army, subjects, supplies, ministers, allies, and a defense—he who possesses all six is a lion among kings.”⁶⁰ The first half of the verse simply lists six components that a king should possess; here, the reader begins to wonder how these six components work together and anticipates some way of connecting them in the chapters that follow. The content of the first half of the verse, in listing the six aspects of a kingdom, encourages the reader to think about the overall structure of the *Poruṭpāl*’s content and how the content of this verse might offer a framework for reading the rest of the text.⁶¹ As the reader encounters the second half of this verse, a seventh figure is added to the list: a king. Here, by focusing on the figure of the king and ascribing the previous six components to his domain, the verse implies that the king should possess the aforementioned six components and that he is seen as the leader of the other six spheres. Taking the verse as a whole, it speaks most directly to an audience of kings, princes, and other royal figures. This reading is further supported by the fact that the opening chapter of the *Poruṭpāl*, in which this verse appears, is entitled “The Excellence of a King” (*iraīmāṭci*). As already discussed, this verse raises questions about the *Poruṭpāl*’s intended audience, and has suggested to some that the *Poruṭpāl* is intended primarily to be read and studied by kings. Yet, the *Poruṭpāl* gives no indication that its content should be restricted in any way or limited to a specific audience. Furthermore, while we might say that this verse speaks *most* directly to the king as reader, it also lays out several social arenas into which other readers might fall, such as

⁶⁰ Verse 381: *paṭaikuṭi kūlamaiccu naṭparaṇ ārum / uṭaiyāṇ aracarūḷ ēru*. All citations from the Tamil text follow *Tirukkuṟaḷ uraikkottu: Poruṭpāl* (Tiruppaṇantāl: Śrī Kācimaṭam, 2011), and transliterations separate words according to the requirements of the meter. For the sake of ease, I follow the numbering of the verses that appears in modern editions. All translations from the Tamil are mine unless otherwise indicated.

⁶¹ See Naṭēca Uṭaiyār for an example of how one scholar has used the *Poruṭpāl*’s opening verse vis-à-vis the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*’s extant medieval commentaries to derive a framework for reading organizing the content of the section as a whole.

the “subjects” of the kingdom that are the second item in the verse’s list. Even a reader who is not involved in affairs of the state is still one of the subjects of the kingdom, and thus he would be able to integrate himself into the structural vision laid out in the opening verse. In this way, the verse not only provides a kind of structural framework for reading and organizing the content of the *Poruṭpāl*, but it also enables the reader to access the text by aligning himself with one or more of these respective roles. Once again, the literary strategies of the *Tirukkural* come into play as the reader sees himself as part of a larger social realm and reflects upon his role within it. Regardless of whether or not he is involved in affairs of the state, this verse encourages the reader to see himself as connected to a broader structural whole that extends beyond the household, even as his participation in that broader social system is enhanced and facilitated by the cultivation and maintenance of virtues and relationships developed within the household.

Just as the *Arattuppāl*’s opening verse shaped how the reader engaged with the text by providing a thematic and structural framework for understanding the rest of the section’s content, so too can we use the *Poruṭpāl*’s opening verse as a guide for organizing and interpreting the content of this section’s seventy chapters.⁶² In addition to the king, who comes into sharp focus in this opening verse as the figure around whom all of the elements of the kingdom revolve, the verse instructs the reader to look for relevant themes in the text on an army, subjects, supplies, ministers, allies, and a defense. In line with the literary strategies that have guided our reading thus far, I argue that the best way to read the *Poruṭpāl* is through the lens of this opening verse, thinking about how these six components—along with the addition of a seventh component in the figure of the king—work together in the context of the *Poruṭpāl* as a whole. Even more, I

⁶² Interestingly, this approach to organizing the *Poruṭpāl*’s content aligns with Kāliṅkar, who is the only one of the *Tirukkural*’s medieval commentators to organize the section into seven sub-sections (*iyaḷ*) that correspond exactly to the seven components listed in the opening verse. For further reference, see Sundaramoorthy, 4.

argue that *Tirukkural*'s literary strategies take on a new dimension when we consider how the *Poruṭpāl* actively weaves together multiple perspectives at once. Though not every reader will be able to relate every part of the *Poruṭpāl* directly to his own life, the *Poruṭpāl* still draws him into its capacious vision of human society, in which every component operates harmoniously with every other component, suggesting that every person has a part to play in the maintenance and security of the kingdom and, by extension, the social sphere of human society writ large.

The opening chapter of the *Poruṭpāl*, "The Excellence of a King," suggests that kingship is one of the primary roles in the text's vision of human society. The reader is primed to look for additional themes and qualities related to kingship in the chapters that follow in order to flesh out this role. Here, I propose that the literary strategies of the *Poruṭpāl* present a vision of kingship that unfolds gradually over the course of the following twenty-five chapters:

39. The Excellence of a King (*iṛaimāṭci*)
40. Education (*kalvi*)
41. Ignorance (*kallāmai*)
42. Listening (*kēḷvi*)
43. The Possession of Wisdom (*aṛivuṭaimai*)
44. The Rejection of Moral Error (*kurraṅkaṭital*)
45. Receiving the Assistance of Great People (*periyārait tuṇaikkōṭal*)
46. Not Joining Low Company (*cirriṇaṅcērāmai*)
47. The Manner of Acting Intelligently (*terintu ceyalvakai*)
48. Knowing the Strength (*valiyarital*)
49. Knowing the Time (*kālamarital*)
50. Knowing the Place (*iṭaṇarital*)
51. Deliberating Intelligibly (*terintu telital*)
52. Performing Actions Intelligibly (*terintu viṇaiyāṭal*)
53. Cherishing One's Kin (*currantāḷal*)
54. Not Forgetting (*pocāvāmai*)
55. Righteous Rule (*ceṅkōṇmai*)
56. Unrighteous Rule (*koṭuṅkōṇmai*)
57. Not Causing Fear (*veruvanta ceyyāmai*)
58. Kindness (*kaṇṇōṭṭam*)
59. Managing Spies (*orrāṭal*)
60. The Possession of Strength (*ūkkamuṭaimai*)
61. Avoiding Sloth (*maṭiyiṇmai*)
62. The Possession of Manly Action (*āḷviṇaiyuṭaimai*)

63. Not Faltering in Distress (*iṭukkaṇaḷiyāmai*)

Thematically, these chapters are all connected in some way to the responsibilities of kingship.⁶³

Taken together, they reveal a new dimension of the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s literary strategies by inviting readers to consider kingship on two different levels, a primary level and a secondary level.

Primary-level readers consist of actual kings, princes, and other royal figures, for whom the content of these chapters applies most directly. Secondary-level readers are those who are privy to the *Poruṭpāl*'s vision of kingship even though it may not impact their lives directly and who imagine themselves as in some way connected to and capable of benefitting from that vision.

As we have already seen, the opening verse of “The Excellence of a King” provides a structural pattern for reading the *Poruṭpāl* as a whole and suggests at least one type of imagined reader of the text in the figure of the king. Another verse in that same chapter follows a similar structural framework, this time centered on the attributes a king should possess: “Generosity, kindness, kingly justice, protecting his subjects—he who possesses all four is a light for kings.”⁶⁴ Indeed, the attributes that a king should possess is the focus of much of this chapter, building upon the *Arattuppāl*'s vision of human life as one governed by the cultivation of virtues on a personal level. Indeed, one verse specifically describes the king as one who “has not strayed from virtue” (*araṇ iḷukkātu*),⁶⁵ thus explicitly connecting the habits of virtue (*aram*) that were emphasized in the first section of the *Tirukkuraḷ* with the figure of the king who is the ostensible

⁶³ Though the argument here relies upon the text of the *Tirukkuraḷ* itself to develop a structural pattern for reading the *Poruṭpāl*, it is worth noting that several commentators also group these chapters together under the heading of “The Sub-Section on Governance” (*araciyaḷ*), including Parimēlaḷakar, Maṇakkuṭavar, and Paripperumāḷ. My reading of the *Poruṭpāl* thus aligns with how other readers of the text have organized its content even as some of my approach to reading the *Tirukkuraḷ* departs from some of the interpretive strategies used by these commentators.

⁶⁴ Verse 390: *koṭaiāḷi ceṇkōḷ kuṭiyōmpal nāṇkum / uṭaiyāṇām vēntark koḷi*.

⁶⁵ See verse 384.

focus of its second section. As a whole, this chapter provides a point of connection in the text to remind the reader of the vision of human life introduced in the *Arattuppāl* while also structuring the reader's engagement with the rest of the content of the *Poruṭpāl*. The literary strategies of the text encourage the reader to look backward and forward simultaneously, seeing how far we have come but also how far we have to go in order to understand the full scope of the intentions of the text.

Following from this, chapters 40-46 can be read as a coherent unit, building upon the opening chapter by laying out the qualities a king should possess, the vices he should reject, and the practices that mark a successful ruler. First, "Education" emphasizes the need for a king to be educated and learned, often in vivid and even violent metaphorical terms. One verse puts it bluntly: "Educated people are said to be those who possess eyes; uneducated people are those who possess two sores on the face."⁶⁶ If a king is not educated, then he is as good as a blind man. The next chapter, "Ignorance," presents an opposing quality, which further underscores the importance of education by criticizing those who fail to pursue knowledge. The verses in this chapter are particularly derisive of the person who tries to speak before an audience without the necessary preparation.⁶⁷ Then, a chapter on "Listening" drives home the importance of education by outlining the method for attaining it: namely, by listening carefully to those who are more educated than you. Those who listen to "food for the ear" (*cevikku uṇavu*), as several verses describe it, will never have to worry about food in their stomachs.⁶⁸ Conversely, the words that are spoken from the mouths of people who do *not* listen to those who are wiser than them are

⁶⁶ Verse 393: *kaṇṇuṭaiyar eṇpavar karṇōr mukattiraṇṭu / puṇṇuṭaiyar kallā tavar*.

⁶⁷ See, in particular, verses 401, 402, and 403.

⁶⁸ See verses 412 and 413.

completely worthless.⁶⁹ In reading these chapters, a vision of kingship begins to take shape in the mind of the reader, and the *Poruṭpāl*'s literary strategies guide him to think about this vision in relation to his own life.

The following four chapters build upon these themes by juxtaposing two sets of oppositions: “The Possession of Wisdom” precedes and is opposed to “The Rejection of Moral Error,” while “Receiving the Assistance of Great People” stands in direct contrast with “Not Joining Low Company.” First, “The Possession of Wisdom” lays out the specific attributes of a wise person, noting that such a person is capable of grasping the truth at all times and anticipating what will happen before it even occurs, while “The Rejection of Moral Error” spells out six qualities that need to be rejected by a king, including desire, anger, lust, greed, pride, and passion.⁷⁰ Next, “Receiving the Assistance of Great People” extols the benefits of friendship with those who have more wisdom and virtue than the king, even if it means that he must sometimes accept their sharp rebukes,⁷¹ while “Not Joining Low Company” outlines the potentially disastrous consequences that can befall a king who does not choose his company wisely. Here, the *Poruṭpāl* suggests to the reader that you are who you hang out with, particularly when it comes to the acquisition of wisdom, which is said to originate through the company one keeps.⁷² As one verse states: “For those who are pure of mind, the offspring are good; for those who are pure of company, there is no action that is not good.”⁷³ In chapter 4, we

⁶⁹ Verses 415, 417, 419, and 420.

⁷⁰ These six qualities are spelled out across the first two verses of the chapter, 431 and 432.

⁷¹ See, for example, verse 447.

⁷² See, for example, verses 452 and 454.

⁷³ Verse 456: *maṇantūyārka keccanaṇ ṛākum iṇantūyārka / killainaṇ ṛākā viṇai*.

will see how this verse provides a key example of how the *Tirukkural* uses inference as a literary strategy to shape the reader ethically. In the context of reading the *Tirukkural* as a whole, this verse shores up the section's larger argument about the benefits of carefully guarding the company one keeps. Together, these chapters continue to shape the reader's engagement with the overall literary vision of the *Tirukkural*, suggesting that the next logical step for an educated king who has avoided ignorance through careful listening is to slowly make his way into the social sphere. This transition from a more private life of study to a more public life of leadership requires a certain level of wisdom and a concerted effort to avoid and reject the vices that can bring about his downfall. Once a king has shored up his virtuous wisdom, he is prepared to surround himself with wise counselors and avoid those who would detract from his excellence.

At this point, the reader has begun to pick up on a vision of human life about kingship. Yet, as suggested above, this vision manifests on two different levels, each of which reaches out to a different set of readers. At the primary level, the *Poruṭpāl* reaches out to a specific audience of kings. Regardless of whether or not kings actually would have picked up and read the *Poruṭpāl* as a kind of instructional manual historically, the intention of the *Poruṭpāl* is clearly to convey certain ideas about kingship that call out to be read first and foremost by the king at the primary level. As the king connects his own life story to the idealized image of the king in the *Poruṭpāl*, the content of the text and the structural presentation of that content encourages the king to imagine his life unfolding in gradual stages, starting with the cultivation of wisdom through education and slowly expanding his role in the social sphere. At the same time, these chapters reach out to another set of readers on a secondary level, which includes any other person besides a king who engages with the literary strategies of the text. These readers are privy to the primary-level discursive frame of the text, which reaches out first and foremost to a king,

but because they are not kings themselves, they must access these chapters on a secondary level, which invites them to imagine how they might nevertheless apply this ideal image of kingship to their own lives. In this way, these readers also envision their lives in relation to the *Poruṭpāl*'s vision of human life, but they do so indirectly, looking to the *Poruṭpāl* for general instructions about how they ought to live and how the virtues of the king might be emulated. The *Poruṭpāl*'s image of kingship holds promise and potential for anyone who might choose to follow it, and thus these readers imagine their own lives as capable of being enhanced by education, wisdom, and the company of great people. In this way, we begin to see how the *Poruṭpāl* works on two distinct levels, each of which reaches out to a different set of readers, and thereby opens itself up to any reader who engages with its literary strategies.

Having thus introduced the *Poruṭpāl*'s vision of kingship in the opening chapters of the text, let us consider how this vision develops in chapters 47-52, each of which addresses the issue of how a king should act in the world. "The Manner of Acting Intelligently" introduces some of the key themes, emphasizing the need to weigh the consequences of every decision before one acts upon it. As one verse instructs the reader, "Act having considered the cost, the gain, and the profit that results from having done it."⁷⁴ This verse deliberately uses the language of monetary investment to shape how the reader perceives action; just as a person desires a return on a financial investment, so too should there be a kind of "return" on one's investment when it comes to engaging in actions. The way to ensure that there will be surplus rewards, the verse argues, is to act only after having considered all of the potential consequences. Next, "Knowing the Strength" refers to the need to know one's own capabilities in relation to those of one's allies and enemies, arguing that it is unwise for a person to act quickly before taking stock of those

⁷⁴ Verse 461: *aḷivatūm āvatūm āki vaḷipayakkum / ūtiyamum cūḷntu ceyal*.

around him. Likewise, “Knowing the Time” and “Knowing the Place” demarcate the temporal and spatial contexts in which a person should act, emphasizing the need to choose the right time and the right place through careful, patient consideration. Next, “Deliberating Intelligibly” offers specific strategies for how to choose allies and companions. Potential allies should be tested on the basis of their virtue, wealth, pleasure, and fear of death, while being free of moral defects and behaving without fault.⁷⁵ Finally, “Performing Actions Intelligibly” outlines the methods for selecting men for employment. The king should select men on the basis of qualities such as loyalty, a clear head, and contentment.⁷⁶

At this point, the reader must connect these chapters with what has preceded them. The literary strategies work upon the reader by expanding his own sense of his role in society, thus encouraging him to assume greater and broader responsibilities. As a primary-level reader of the text, a king envisions his own life in relation to the ideal version presented by the *Poruṭpāl* as he takes on the public duties of kingship and assumes a larger role within the kingdom. In doing so, he is reminded that he must cultivate good habits that will ensure the success of the kingdom and act with caution after careful deliberation. Likewise, the king must expand his social circle by securing allies and carefully selecting men for employment. In this way, the primary-level reader of the text incorporates these six chapters into the vision of human life that has already begun to form in his mind. At the same time, secondary-level readers also forge a connection between the *Poruṭpāl*’s vision of kingship and their own lives as they consider how the prescriptions offered in these chapters are relevant to them. These secondary readers thus benefit from the *Poruṭpāl*’s

⁷⁵ See especially verses 501, 502, 504, and 505.

⁷⁶ See verses 511, 513, 515, and 516.

advice by imagining how their own lives might be improved through careful deliberation and conscious action, and they are inspired to expand their role in society in emulation of the king.

Next, chapters 53-63 extend the *Poruṭpāl*'s vision in interesting new ways. A chapter on "Cherishing One's Kin" marks a pause in the kind of pragmatic, managerial, decision-oriented advice that was rendered in the preceding chapters. The verses describe the value of surrounding oneself with close relations, for they stick by one's side in times of trouble and enable a person to put his wealth to good use.⁷⁷ As a whole, the verses emphasize the value of forming close relationships with friends and family. This chapter, coming as it does after a lengthy sequence of practical advice, creates a dramatic pause in the progression of the content, forcing the reader to slow down, think about the value of his kin, and integrate them fully into the *Tirukkural*'s vision of human life. It is not enough for a king to surround himself with wise counselors who will support him in the duties of kingship; he also needs to understand the value of his familial relationships and cherish them as a result. In this way, the chapter acts as a direct point of contact between the *Arattuppāl* and the *Poruṭpāl*, even as the reader has already begun to weave the two sections together. The king, as a primary reader, will connect this chapter most explicitly to the reality of his own life as a ruler, while secondary readers will pick up on the fact that the values of family and friends described in this chapter are equally relevant to them.

Following this brief pause in the pacing of the text, chapters 54-58 turn to the interior qualities that need to be cultivated by the king in order to govern his kingdom successfully. First, a chapter entitled "Not Forgetting" cautions against behaviors that cause a king to be reckless and to abandon his duties, including wild behavior, excessive eating, overconfidence, and

⁷⁷ See, in particular, verses 521, 522, 524, 525, and 527.

laziness.⁷⁸ Then, “Righteous Rule” uses the image of the king’s scepter as a metaphor for the justice of his reign, introducing some of the most vivid imagery yet encountered in the *Poruṭpāl*. Its verses argue that a just king must be observant, impartial, and willing to punish those who deserve it when the time comes.⁷⁹ The king’s scepter, as the symbol of his justice, is the centerpiece of the kingdom, and the king stands above all others as the person to whom people look as a model of exemplary behavior and a source of hope in the pursuit of justice.⁸⁰ As one verse describes it, “The king who rules according to the law never lacks rain and corn.”⁸¹ Here, the reader is reminded of an earlier verse in the *Arattuppāl* that ascribes the power of summoning rain to a devoted wife: “Rain will fall because she tells it to rain; she will cause it to appear by worshipping her husband before worshipping the gods.”⁸² The reader, sensitive to these similarities and eager to draw connections across the text, will thus regard a righteous king as having a special kind of power. Further, the reader will be reminded of the *Tirukkural*’s preface, in which connections were drawn between the structures of the natural world and the structures of human society. In this way, the *Tirukkural*’s literary strategies thus encourage the reader to draw connections across the entire text; a devoted wife confined to the household and a king fully committed to his social duties may seem worlds apart, but the sensitive reader will see them as connected through their power to sustain the rains when their duties are properly exercised. This contrapuntal use of imagery is one way in which the *Tirukkural*’s literary strategies build a

⁷⁸ See especially verses 531, 532, 539, and 540.

⁷⁹ Verses 541, 549, and 550.

⁸⁰ Verses 542, 543, and 546.

⁸¹ Verse 545: *iyalpuḷik kōlōccu maṇṇavan nāṭṭa / peyalum viḷaiyuḷum tokku*. The translation is from Sundaram, 75.

⁸² Verse 55: *teyvan toḷāaḷ koḷunar roḷuteḷuvāḷ / peyyenap peyyum maḷai*.

vision of human life for the reader. By introducing themes and then reengaging them at different points, the *Tirukkuraḷ* weaves the *Arattuppāl* and *Poruṭpāl* together into a single, coherent literary whole.

Next, a chapter on “Unrighteous Rule” follows the common structural pattern of the *Tirukkuraḷ* in which a theme is introduced (in this case, righteousness) and then emphasized by contrasting it with an opposing quality. This chapter serves largely to underscore the themes of the previous chapter, while emphasizing that a king must avoid oppressing his subjects, engaging in selfish or greedy behavior, and pursuing unjust courses of action.⁸³ This chapter also reiterates the connections that were drawn between the natural world and the human world, stating in two verses that rain is withheld from the kingdom of an unjust king.⁸⁴ The next two chapters again juxtapose two qualities. A chapter on “Not Causing Fear” admonishes a king who behaves as a tyrant and punishes his subjects with excessive force, predicting that he will lose his kingdom, his wealth, and, ultimately, his life.⁸⁵ In contrast, the next chapter on “Kindness” stresses the value of treating people well. The chapter’s first verse explicitly states that kindness is not only an essential virtue for kings, but for all people alike: “It is compassion, the most gracious of virtues, which moves the world.”⁸⁶ Other verses describe how kindness is a quality that can be projected onto others directly through the eyes and is in turn received through the eyes of others; thus, a king should strive always to look kindly on others.⁸⁷ These two chapters, when taken

⁸³ Verses 551, 552, 553, 556, and 559.

⁸⁴ See verses 557 and 559.

⁸⁵ Verses 563, 564, 566, 568, and 569.

⁸⁶ Verse 571: *kaṇṇōṭṭam eṇṇum kaḷiperuṇ kārikai / uṇmaiyaṇ uṇṭiv vulaku*. The translation is from Sundaram, 78.

⁸⁷ See, for example, verses 573, 574, 575, 576, and 577.

together, emphasize the need for a king to behave properly toward his subjects by cultivating an ethos of kindness and eschewing a reign characterized by fear and terror.

While earlier chapters illustrate the ways in which a king expands his role in the social sphere, these chapters turn our attention inward by emphasizing the internal qualities that a king should possess in order to successfully manage his kingdom. The king, attentive to the vision of human life that has been developing up to this point, recognizes that his role in the social sphere requires a habitual practice of inward cultivation grounded in specific actions like treating others kindly and governed by particular ideals such as justice and impartiality. In this way, the reader recognizes that the process of moral formation described in the *Arattuppāl* does not end there but remains a part of his public life as described in the vision of human life of the *Poruṭpāl*. The king must habituate himself to certain behaviors while checking himself for mistakes and flaws. As he enters the social sphere, he must constantly take stock of himself as a moral exemplar to ensure that he is putting virtue into practice and avoiding the vices that might detract from or even ruin his kingdom. At the same time, these chapters reach out on a secondary level to address any reader by presenting the king as a moral exemplar to be observed and emulated. While certain metaphors, such as the image of the scepter as the symbol of the king's rule, will have less relevance to readers on this secondary level, they are nevertheless capable of picking up on the *Poruṭpāl*'s vision and relating it to their own ideals of moral formation. Such readers envision their lives as capable of being enhanced through acts of kindness and by avoiding qualities such as forgetfulness. Just as the life of a king is enhanced through such practices of inward cultivation, so too are the lives of all readers capable of being enhanced through these practices. In this way, too, the *Poruṭpāl* continues what the *Arattuppāl* began, presenting a vision of human

life that is governed by the cultivation of an ethical self through habits, patterns, and practices of engaging with others in the world.

The *Poruṭpāl*'s vision of kingship is concluded in chapters 59-63, which shift our attention back to the kinds of external duties required of the king. First, "Managing Spies" takes up the practice of espionage that is assumed to be central to maintaining the safety and security of the kingdom in the literary world of the *Poruṭpāl*. The verses in this chapter refer to spies as the king's eyes; they are covert figures that move in disguise, taking in everything around them and informing the king accordingly.⁸⁸ Indeed, the chapter asserts that the king should keep the identities of his spies a secret to such an extent that they do not even know each other, such that the information provided by one spy can be confirmed by another.⁸⁹ The next four chapters move on to address the specific qualities that a king should possess, starting with "The Possession of Strength." According to this chapter, a king should showcase his strength with a courageous mind that is resolute in all decisions, and he should not shy away from showing the power of his fearless zeal to engage in any action in order to gain the respect of his kingdom and achieve success and prosperity in his pursuits. In contrast, "Avoiding Sloth" presents the grim reality of the alternative, in which the king does not act with strength and conviction but is consumed by sloth and inaction. The verses in this chapter argue forcefully against such a state of existence for the king, noting that sloth leads to the destruction of the kingdom and destroys the king's virtue.⁹⁰ Next, "The Possession of Manly Action" states the need for a king to possess a type of masculine energy that will enable him to succeed in his efforts, while "Not Faltering in Distress"

⁸⁸ See, in particular, verses 581, 584, 585, 586, 587, and 590.

⁸⁹ Here, one can look to verses 588-590.

⁹⁰ See verses 601, 604, and 608.

urges the king to triumph over misfortune. The former chapter advocates on behalf of persisting in a course of action without showing signs of weakness or offering up excuses for failure, while the latter cautions against letting oneself be overcome by worry and emotion, as they lead to failure in any pursuit.

As indicated above, these five chapters together shift the reader's attention to the external qualities that a king should possess in order to manage the kingdom successfully. On the one hand, this involves the management of his spies who act as his eyes and ears throughout the kingdom and alert him to any information that he might need to know. On the other hand, this involves the outward manifestation of qualities that illustrate a king's ability to lead his court, such as strength, courage, energy, and persistence. While each of these qualities builds upon the foundation that was established through the inward practices of moral formation described earlier, they expand the king's duties and his role within the social sphere by offering a vision of how the king should engage with the world outwardly. Again, the vision of human life reaches out to kings directly as primary-level readers who engage with the *Poruṭpāl* by comparing its vision of kingship to the lived reality of their own lives and striving to live up to it. Secondary-level readers recognize that this vision reaches out first and foremost to kings; yet, they also sense that it is one that might be productively incorporated into their own lives. Even when specific moments in the text appear to exclude a non-king reader, such as the chapter on managing spies, the secondary-level reader of the text can nevertheless draw out larger themes from the *Poruṭpāl*, envisioning the king as someone to be emulated in the world. Any reader of the text, whether a king or not, in choosing to follow the literary strategies of the text, picks up on a vision of human life within the text that can only be discerned through a careful reading of the *Poruṭpāl*'s content in light of the structure in which that content is presented. In this way,

then, the *Poruṭpāl* utilizes the same literary strategies as the *Aṛattuppāl*, even as it builds upon them in new ways.

At this point, the reader may recall the opening verse of the *Poruṭpāl*, which listed the seven components of a kingdom as a king, an army, subjects, supplies, ministers, allies, and a defense. Earlier, we argued that the best way to read the *Poruṭpāl* is through the lens of this opening verse, and that the reader of the text would seek out ways of reading the text through this framework and drawing these seven areas together in the context of the text as a whole. Recognizing that the *Poruṭpāl* has thus far only addressed the role of the king, the reader is prepared to look for clues within the text about how the other six components relate to this vision of human society. The next chapter, “The Ministry,” alerts the reader to the fact that there has been a shift in the direction of the *Poruṭpāl*’s content and suggests that the text will next address the role that ministers play within the kingdom. At this point, the reader becomes more confident about using the opening verse as a structural framework for organizing the *Poruṭpāl* and is prepared to look for additional themes related to the ministry in the chapters that follow. I argue that we can read the following ten chapters as a coherent unit on the topic of ministers:

64. The Ministry (*amaiccu*)
65. Eloquence (*colvaṇmai*)
66. Purity in Action (*viṇaittūymai*)
67. Firmness in Action (*viṇaittiṭpam*)
68. The Manner of Performing Action (*viṇai ceyalvakai*)
69. Embassy (*tūtu*)
70. Behaving in Conformity with the King (*maṇṇaraic cērntolukal*)
71. Guessing the Intentions (*kurippaṛital*)
72. Knowing an Audience (*avaiaṛital*)
73. Not Fearing an Audience (*avaiañcāmai*)

As in the previous section on kingship, these chapters are all connected in some way to the responsibilities of ministers. Taken together and read in sequence, the literary strategies of the text operate upon readers at two different levels: the primary level includes the ministers

themselves, for whom the *Poruṭpāl*'s vision of human life is most directly relevant and who are able to connect this vision to their own lives, while the secondary level includes any person who might pick up the *Poruṭpāl* and read these chapters. On each level, the reader engages with the text by thinking about its ideal vision of human life in relation to the reality of his own.

First, let us take up the chapter on “The Ministry” to think about how it frames the rest of this sequence for the reader. The opening verse states, “Call him minister who best contrives the means, the time, the mode and the deed.”⁹¹ At first glance, this verse communicates a relatively straightforward idea: a minister is, in short, someone who gets things done. He accomplishes this task by arranging the method by which an action can be done and ensuring that it is done in a timely manner. Yet, the literary structure of this verse is quite interesting in that it includes a rather open-ended pronouncement to the reader to “call him minister” who best accomplishes these duties. In other words, a minister can be *anyone* who successfully assists others in arranging the method, time, and opportunity for a particular task. In this way, the opening verse already reaches out to multiple readers at once. While ministers can read this text on the primary level and understand how it directly applies to their role as assistants to the king working in a courtly context, others can read this text on a secondary level and apply it just as easily to their own lives. If, as the verse suggests, we can call anyone a minister who fulfills these duties, then this verse, the chapter in which it appears, and the sequence of chapters that follows might similarly reach out to a broad set of readers, regardless of whether or not they are directly employed in the ministry of the king.

⁹¹ Verse 631: *karuviyum kalamum ceykaiyum ceyyum / aruviṇaiyum māṇṭa tamaiccu*. The translation is from Sundaram, 84.

The rest of the verses in “The Ministry” further expand upon the qualities that ministers should possess. One verse states, “Firmness, concern, learning, judgment and effort—these five should mark a minister,”⁹² while another verse adds to this list, saying, “Enquiry, deliberate action and advice should mark a minister.”⁹³ These verses deliberately assign certain qualities to ministers, and the reader, moving through the chapter, begins to formulate some idea of what ministers should be and do. The reader imagines a minister as someone who acts confidently, after a careful study of the situation and thorough deliberation. Ministers are also inquisitive, thoughtful, and useful. Several verses in this chapter emphasize the importance of education and intelligence, recalling a similar emphasis on these qualities in the sequence on kingship. The chapter is careful to note, however, that these qualities should not come at the expense of practicality.⁹⁴ Ministers who form the primary-level readers of the text will draw together a vision of the ideal minister from these verses and consider that vision in relation to their own lives. Secondary-level readers of the text will recognize that these verses reach out first and foremost to those who are actually in the service of kings, but they can also pick up on the vision of human life at work and think about that vision in relation to their own lives. Even though they are not ministers, these verses encourage secondary readers to reflect upon the ways in which the qualities ascribed to ministers might nevertheless be useful to possess. The impetus to make these kinds of connections is further underscored by the fact that much of the content in these verses reiterates the content of the chapters on kingship; qualities like intelligence and careful deliberation transcend the formal roles within a kingdom and thus can be attained by any reader.

⁹² Verse 632: *vaṇkaṇ kuṭikāttal karrarital ālviṇaiyō / taintuṭaṇ māṇṭa tamaiccu*. The translation is from Sundaram, 84.

⁹³ Verse 634: *teritalum tērntu ceyalum orutalaiyāc / collalum valla tamaiccu*. The translation is from Sundaram, 84.

⁹⁴ See verses 632, 635, 636, and 637.

This mode of repetition further underscores how the *Tirukkuraḷ* ties multiple threads together in the context of the whole, allowing readers to draw connections within and across the *Arattuppāl* and *Poruṭpāl*.

The next chapter, entitled “Eloquence,” takes up the ability to speak well on a variety of subjects and thereby convince others to accept one’s view, a quality that is ascribed uniquely to ministers in the *Poruṭpāl*. The verses here emphasize the power of a strong speaker, noting that persuasiveness is a true gift that should be thought of as a kind of wealth in its own right and that eloquence can make or break a person’s career.⁹⁵ The life of a minister includes not only practical matters such as making oneself useful to others and completing tasks in a timely manner, but also cultivating certain skills that enable one to fulfill the role successfully. In this case, ministers need to be skilled in the art of public speaking and rhetoric in order to deliver a message clearly and expressively to an audience and persuade them accordingly. Through its literary strategies, the *Poruṭpāl* invites primary-level readers to think about the life of a minister as an ongoing pursuit of the skills and attributes that are required and secondary-level readers to consider how these principles and ideals might be more broadly applicable.

Next, chapters 66-68 form a thematic unit by addressing the role of action in the life of a minister. First, “Purity in Action” emphasizes the need for ministers to act according to virtue with a proper view of how those actions will affect others. One verse states: “The goodness of friendship gives prosperity; the goodness of action gives all that is desired.”⁹⁶ We will return to this verse in chapter 3 of this project, where we examine how it functions within “Purity in Action” as a whole to shape the reader to think about human choice and action in narrative terms,

⁹⁵ See especially verses 641, 642, 644, and 647.

⁹⁶ Verse 651: *tuṇainalam ākkam tarūm viṇainalam / vēṇṭiya ellām tarum*.

and in chapter 4 of this project, where we will see how it uses inference as a literary strategy to show the reader that ethical thinking requires complex skills of reasoning and interpretation. Here, in the broader context of the *Poruṭpāl*, the verses in “Purity in Action” lay out the actions that ministers should take care to avoid,⁹⁷ suggesting that they too need to engage in the same kind of internal ethical cultivation that the text guided its readers toward in the *Arattuppāl*.

Next, “Firmness in Action” suggests that the next step for a minister who has cultivated the right ethical habits is to engage confidently in action. According to these verses, engaging confidently requires one to be efficient, persistent, prompt, and firm.⁹⁸ The chapter implicitly critiques ministers who speak about what they will do but do not actually go out and do it, suggesting that the life of a minister is filled with moments in which action is required and that failing to pursue that action will render a person useless. Finally, “The Manner of Performing Action” addresses the steps that should be taken by a minister who has cultivated pure intentions and is prepared to act decisively. These steps include weighing all of the options, then making a decision without delay and sticking to it.⁹⁹ Several verses in this chapter offer incredibly specific pieces of practical advice that seem to apply especially to the context of the royal court,¹⁰⁰ but the chapter as a whole contains a relatively broad range of advice on the practical matter of how to engage in action generally.

On the primary level, these chapters again reach out to an audience of ministers, who think about how to apply this practical advice in their own lives. If, as the first chapter suggests,

⁹⁷ See, for example, verses 652, 653, 655, and 656.

⁹⁸ See especially verses 661, 662, 665, 666, 668, 669, and 670.

⁹⁹ See, in particular, verses 671, 672, and 676.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, verse 675: *poruṭkaruvi kālam viṇaiyiṭaṇo ṭaintum / iruṭtira eṇṇic ceyal* (“Five things should be pondered over before you act: resources, weapons, time, place and deed”). The translation is from Sundaram, 88.

a minister is someone who is helpful above all else, and if, as the second chapter suggests, a minister is someone who speaks well in front of others in order to persuade them to a particular view, then these chapters make it clear that the life of a minister is ultimately one of action. Even an educated minister who is qualified for the role and has the best of intentions is useless if he does not have the skills needed to make decisions and act. At the same time, these chapters reach out to an audience of general readers on a secondary level. Even as they recognize that some of the verses in these chapters are uniquely relevant to the context of a royal court, the text invites its audience to consider its vision of the ministry in relation to their lives and to think about the larger values that can be derived from it. Here, these secondary readers ask themselves how their own lives might be enhanced by cultivating a sense of inward purity to guide their action and standing firm in their decision to pursue a course of action.

Chapters 69-73 conclude this sequence of chapters on ministers. Together, they address a wide range of duties and help paint a fuller picture of the life of a minister. First, “Embassy” takes up one of the most essential roles of the minister, which is to serve as an ambassador on behalf of the king and to represent his interests abroad. These verses lay out a long list of skills and qualities that a minister should possess in order to accomplish this end. One verse describes the three essential qualities of an envoy as loyalty, intelligence, and careful words,¹⁰¹ while another verse states that a minister should be well read, confident, persuasive, and resourceful.¹⁰² Next, “Behaving in Conformity with the King” addresses the need for a minister to act in concert with the king that he serves, which entails gaining his trust, knowing his temperament, and

¹⁰¹ Verse 682.

¹⁰² Verse 687.

avoiding the arousal of suspicion through deceitful behavior.¹⁰³ A minister should be useful to a king and avoid creating unnecessary tension in the court. He should also know when and how to talk to the king and forge a trusting relationship with him. Then, “Guessing the Intentions” describes the need for a minister to have a keen ability to know what others are thinking and feeling. The verses in this chapter argue that a minister needs to be intuitive and capable of reading the room by looking at the eyes and faces of those around him.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, as one verse puts it, “He is worth any price who by intuition can read another’s thought.”¹⁰⁵ Clearly, keen perception is one of the most critical qualities for a minister to possess, to such an extent that the person who possesses it is regarded as priceless.

Finally, two chapters address the fact that ministers are often required to speak before an audience and should therefore be prepared to do it well. “Knowing an Audience” argues that a minister needs to gear a speech to the particular context in which he is speaking, and he does so by ensuring that his words are appropriate to the audience he plans to address.¹⁰⁶ Several verses also emphasize the need for a minister to appear humble when appearing before a wise audience, while discouraging him from appearing before an audience of fools.¹⁰⁷ Next, “Not Fearing an Audience” encourages ministers to perfect their ability to speak before a crowd so that they do not slip up or say something in error. The chapter advocates on behalf of careful study and

¹⁰³ See especially verses 691, 693, 694, 695, and 696.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, verse 705, 706, 707, 709, and 710.

¹⁰⁵ Verse 703: *kuṛippir kuṛippuṇar vārai uṛuppiṇuḷ / yātu koṭuttum koḷal*. The translation is from Sundaram, 91.

¹⁰⁶ See verses 711, 712, and 713.

¹⁰⁷ Verses 715, 718, 719, and 720.

preparation so that the minister can speak eloquently before a crowd.¹⁰⁸ One of the most egregious faults a minister could possess would be speaking poorly or becoming tongue-tied as a result of ill preparedness or fear, preventing their knowledge from being shared with others.¹⁰⁹

In this sequence of chapters, the *Poruṭpāl* draws together all of the disparate skills that are expected of ministers into one cohesive portrait. Already, the reader has been thinking about the life of a minister as one that requires a number of qualities and skills, most important among them being the ability to speak well and act quickly. Additionally, a minister's actions should be done with pure intentions, efficiency, and confidence. The vision is extended in these last five chapters by illustrating the various contexts in which a minister will need to put these skills to use. These include, for example, his role as an ambassador, which requires him to travel far and wide to represent the interests of his king, and his role as a public speaker, which requires him to be educated, alert, and sensitive to particular contexts. And as a representative of the king, a minister must always be aligned with his needs and attuned to the best manner in which to engage his attention. For primary-level readers, this vision is one that will be easy to apply to the context of their own lives; they recognize that the life of a minister involves a continual process of skill acquisition and decision making, and often involves serving in a public role both within the court and outside of it. Secondary-level readers also pick up on the *Poruṭpāl*'s vision and imagine how their own lives might intersect with it in some way; they thus access the text on a secondary level and consider how its broader themes may be relevant in their own lives.

After these chapters, the reader of the *Poruṭpāl* suddenly turns to a very new topic with a chapter entitled "The Land." The reader of the text first tries to draw this chapter into the

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, verses 721, 722, 724, and 725.

¹⁰⁹ See in particular verses 726, 727, 729, and 730.

Poruṭpāl's vision of human life on ministers, but, as we will see, its verses do not seem to apply directly to the life of a minister. The reader must continue to look for clues about how to incorporate this chapter into the overall structural framework of the *Poruṭpāl*, and it is only by turning to the following chapter on “The Defense” that this reader is able to recognize the fact that the *Poruṭpāl* has once again shifted to a new topic, one of the seven components of a kingdom described in the opening verse. The reader recalls that a defense is one of the seven components and reads these two chapters as a unit:

74. The Land (*nāṭu*)

75. The Defense (*araṇ*)

Although quite brief, let us consider how these two chapters nevertheless further the *Poruṭpāl*'s vision of human life and how the reader, in reading the text carefully and looking for thematic continuities across it, weaves these chapters into that larger vision.

First, “The Land” paints a broad vision of the landscape as a whole. The title of this chapter (in Tamil, *nāṭu*) can also be translated as country, state, region, earth, or any populated landscape that can be demarcated as such. The verses in this chapter map onto the wide semantic range of the chapter title, and they draw together a wide range of people into a singular bounded identity. Take, for example, the opening verse: “Tireless farmers, learned men and honest traders constitute a country.”¹¹⁰ By drawing together three disparate groups of people into one identity as “a country,” the chapter makes an implicit argument that diverse groups of people can and should live together as part of a singular community. Other verses in this chapter highlight the ways in which these disparate groups can live together in harmony, and they paint a picture of a flourishing kingdom in which all people earn their fair share of profits and give back to their

¹¹⁰ Verse 731: *taḷḷā viḷaiyuḷum takkārum tāḷvilāc / celvarum cērvatu nāṭu*. The translation is from Sundaram, 94.

community in some way.¹¹¹ Another verse points to the significant connection between the king and his subjects, drawing together connections between earlier parts of the *Poruṭpāl* and the current chapter: “All excellences are vain where ruler and ruled disagree.”¹¹² Next, “The Defense” takes up ways in which a kingdom needs to be defended. Several verses in this chapter cite practical methods such as the building of a fortress that is protected by water, hills, or thick forests on all sides and constructed with high walls and no weaknesses.¹¹³ These verses suggest to the reader that a kingdom is never completely safe from outside attacks, and there are multiple references to the enemies or foes that may try to attack the kingdom from outside.¹¹⁴ In short, this chapter suggests that the kind of communal identity forged in the previous chapter is a tenuous one at best and must be secured through whatever means possible.

The reader of the *Poruṭpāl* will incorporate these chapters into the vision of human life that has already been developing throughout the text. While this vision has so far focused primarily on the king and his ministers, these chapters broaden its scope to encompass a sense of communal identity that is essential to a kingdom. Again, we must think about how our two kinds of readers would engage with these chapters. In this case, primary readers include a much larger array of people, since the idea of a communal, land-based identity extends far beyond the walls of the royal court. Here, the *Poruṭpāl* reaches out to a broad audience of readers who live in and contribute to the king’s realm, including farmers, scholars, and merchants. These readers think about their lives in relation to the country (*nāṭu*), and they look for ways to contribute to its

¹¹¹ See especially verses 732, 733, 735, and 739.

¹¹² Verse 740: *āṇkamai veytiyak kaṇṇum payamiṇṇē / vēntamai villāta nāṭu*. The translation is from Sundaram, 94.

¹¹³ See verses 742, 743, 744, 745, and 746.

¹¹⁴ Verses 744, 747, 748, and 749.

prosperity and protect it from outside attacks. Secondary readers, then, are those readers who are not the subjects of a kingdom due to vastly different circumstances of historical or cultural situation. Yet, they can read these two chapters in relation to their own lives and envision how they might live with others for the greater good of all.

The next chapter addresses the topic of how to procure supplies for the kingdom, and it marks yet another shift in the *Poruṭpāl*. Again, the reader must look for ways to make sense of this chapter in light of the *Poruṭpāl*'s larger vision of human life. The chapter, "The Manner of Producing Supplies," reminds the reader of the *Poruṭpāl*'s opening verse and the components of a kingdom. Recalling that supplies was among the seven components listed, the reader perceives that the *Poruṭpāl* has shifted once again to address a topic on that list. Of course, the *Poruṭpāl* does not indicate this shift directly, and the reader reaches this conclusion only by reading the text carefully and picking up on the tacit instructions for how it should be read. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to think that the reader of the text would search for ways to align this chapter with the structural framework provided by the *Poruṭpāl*'s opening verse and thus classify it as constituting its own section on supplies:

76. The Manner of Producing Supplies (*poruḷ ceyalvakai*)

That there is only one chapter on this theme, while earlier components of the kingdom received many chapters, may surprise the reader. It is the only one of the seven components mentioned in the first verse to receive a single chapter alone, and the reader will need to consider why the *Poruṭpāl* is structured in this way and how to make sense of it in light of the rest of the text.

First, let us consider the actual content of "The Manner of Producing Supplies." The verses in this chapter address the topic of "supplies" or "wealth" (in Tamil, *poruḷ*) and how to procure them. Interestingly, the term used for supplies is the same one from which the *Poruṭpāl*

derives its title; it is, literally, the “section” (*pāl*) on “wealth” (*poruḷ*). Nevertheless, the term *poruḷ* is a broad one that covers a wide range of things, including wealth in the sense of financial and material success as well as the possessions and property that are derived from that wealth. The verses in this chapter certainly seem to use the term to refer to this kind of wealth in the sense of money or possessions, and they praise it accordingly. As one verses indicate, wealth distinguishes its owner and has the power to dispel darkness from the kingdom.¹¹⁵ Yet, this praise of wealth is checked by the reminder that wealth must not be accrued through wicked means, but rather should be used as a tool to lift up others alongside the person who possesses it.¹¹⁶ In short, wealth is seen as a natural part of life, and even a beneficial one, if it is acquired appropriately and put to good use. The chapter suggests that the pursuit of wealth constitutes a reasonable human goal and encourages the reader to flourish in the broadest terms possible.

The reader of the *Poruṭpāl* will look for ways to incorporate this chapter into the text’s ever-expanding vision of human life. The previous chapters widened the scope of the *Poruṭpāl*’s vision to encompass a wide range of people, including anyone who lives on the king’s territory and helps to secure the kingdom from outside threats. In this chapter, this vision is elaborated by suggesting that the ideal society is one in which all subjects flourish in their own way. Prosperity and success are not just reserved for kings and other royal figures, but, this chapter argues, are available to anyone who procures them justly and uses them to lift up other people as well. For primary readers of the *Poruṭpāl*, the pursuit of wealth becomes another part of the *Poruṭpāl*’s vision of human society, and they seek out ways of applying this vision to their own lives.

Secondary readers, who do not find themselves in the context of the kind of land-based kingdom

¹¹⁵ See, for example, verses 751, 753, 758, and 760.

¹¹⁶ See verses 754, 755, 757, and 760.

assumed by the *Poruṭpāl*, nevertheless look for ways to engage this chapter in the context of their own lives, and they envision human life as necessarily marked by the pursuit of wealth. On the whole, this chapter encourages its readers to think in broad terms about the nature of human flourishing and the conditions that make it possible.

After this chapter on supplies, the following two chapters mark yet another shift in the direction of the *Poruṭpāl*'s content, addressing the qualities of the army. The reader recognizes the following two chapters as forming their own cohesive unit:

77. The Excellence of an Army (*paṭaimāṭci*)

78. The Courage of the Army (*paṭaiccerukku*)

Again, these chapters reach out to primary readers of the text, the members of a king's army for whom the content is most directly relevant, and secondary readers of the text, which includes everyone else.

First, "The Excellence of an Army" integrates the army directly into the constituents of a kingdom by describing it as the greatest possession a king can have: "The greatest wealth of a king is an army well-manned and fearless."¹¹⁷ Other verses continue this theme, emphasizing the need for an army to stand strong together and to rise up against any potential foes.¹¹⁸ The qualities that an army should possess include courage, honor, tradition, and fortitude,¹¹⁹ while avoiding occurrences of desertion or cowardice.¹²⁰ "The Courage of an Army" then adds further detail to this description and prioritizes courage as the most essential trait that an army should possess. Several verses vividly compare courageous soldiers to wild elephants in a rut, thus

¹¹⁷ Verse 761: *uruppamain tūrañcā velpaṭai vēntaṇ / verukkaiyuḷ ellām talai*. The translation is from Sundaram, 97.

¹¹⁸ See especially verses 762, 763, 765, and 767.

¹¹⁹ See verse 766.

¹²⁰ See verse 769.

encouraging an army to be fierce and fearless in battle.¹²¹ Most poignantly, the verses argue that at times the members of an army will need to lay down their lives in the service of protecting their country; such a death brings honor to the army and tears to the eyes of the king for whom they served.¹²² In short, an army must be composed of men who are capable of acting together with courage in service of the greater good of the kingdom.

We can thus begin to see how the earlier chapters of the *Poruṭpāl* paved the way for these two chapters by forming a sense of social identity in the mind of the reader, for it is the army that protects the kingdom from its foes and enables one to prosper without fear of loss. In the context of these two chapters, the primary readers are the members of the army themselves. They will be intimately familiar with the qualities that make up a strong army and able to apply the *Poruṭpāl*'s vision to their own lives. Regardless of whether or not we can imagine the members of an army actually picking up the *Poruṭpāl* and reading it as an instructional manual at some point in history, the text seems to anticipate such a reader and speaks directly to this experience. At the same time, secondary readers, by engaging with the *Poruṭpāl*'s content in these chapters, will imagine how they might contribute to the protection of their friends, family, and neighbors. In this way, the *Poruṭpāl*'s literary strategies invite all readers alike to think about the needs of a kingdom—even if broadly construed—and how those needs relate to their own lives.

The next chapter turns to yet another one of the seven components from the *Poruṭpāl*'s opening verse: allies. Thus far, the *Poruṭpāl* has covered the king and ministers at length, while moving quickly through the defense, supplies, and army. The reader, once again utilizing the opening verse as a structural framework for reading the text, will recall that there are two topics

¹²¹ See, for example, verses 772 and 774.

¹²² See verses 777, 778, 779, and 780.

that have not yet been covered: allies and the subjects of the kingdom. I argue that the *Poruṭpāl* guides the reader to read the following seventeen chapters as relevant to the formation of allies:

79. Allies (*naṭpu*)
80. Scrutinizing Allies (*naṭpārāyṭal*)
81. Old Friendship (*paḷaimai*)
82. Evil Allies (*tīnaṭpu*)
83. False Allies (*kūṭānaṭpu*)
84. Foolishness (*pēṭaimai*)
85. Ignorance (*pullarivāṇmai*)
86. Hostility (*ikal*)
87. An Enemy King (*pakaimāṭci*)
88. Knowing the Aspects of an Enemy (*pakaittiṭramterital*)
89. Internal Hostility (*uṭpakai*)
90. Not Wronging Great People (*periyāraip piḷaiyāmai*)
91. Being Led by a Wife (*peṇvaḷiccēral*)
92. Prostitutes (*varaiviṇmakalir*)
93. Not Drinking (*kaḷḷuṇṇāmai*)
94. Gambling (*cūtu*)
95. Medicine (*maruntu*)

This sequence of chapters covers a vast range of topics, but, as we will see, when they are read together as a unit, they form a vision of human life about allies in the mind of the reader.

First, “Allies” lays out the premise upon which the rest of the chapters build: namely, that friendship is one of the most powerful things that a person can have in life. As the first verse in the chapter states, “What is rarer to get than friendship and a stronger shield against a foe?”¹²³ Many of the verses in this chapter describe friendship in lyrical and often quite beautiful terms, comparing true friends to the waxing crescent moon, good books, and even the hand that reaches out to help when a piece of clothing slips out of place.¹²⁴ Having thus laid out the importance of allies, a chapter on “Scrutinizing Allies” presents the method for obtaining them. This chapter cautions the reader against choosing friends too quickly and urges the reader to carefully observe

¹²³ Verse 781: *ceyaṅkariya yāvuḷa naṭpiṇ atupōl / viṇaikkariya yāvuḷa kāppu*. The translation is from Sundaram, 99.

¹²⁴ See verses 782, 783, and 788.

a person's qualities and character.¹²⁵ Chapters 81-83 take up the different kinds of people that one will encounter and how to think about these people in relation to the *Poruṭpāl*'s broader message about friendship. "Old Friendship" praises longtime friends as the greatest allies one can find, for they have survived the test of time and proven themselves worthy of lasting friendship. Even in times of trouble or momentary strife, an old friend is someone who never abandons a friend or ceases to love a friend dearly.¹²⁶ Next, "Evil Allies" takes up those people who should not be regarded as friends or allies at all. These are people who form friendships with ulterior motives and wicked motivations, whose actions do not match their words, and who ultimately betray their friends.¹²⁷ Finally, "False Allies" addresses people who pretend to be one's friend outwardly, but harbor resentment and ill will internally. As one verse cautions, "Beware of those who smile without and are false within."¹²⁸ On the whole, these chapters urge the reader to be cautious in the pursuit of friendship and allow time for friends to prove themselves as worthy of the title.

Next, chapters 84-85 build upon the topic of false friends by illustrating the kinds of qualities that one should avoid in a friend. A chapter on "Foolishness" highlights the ways in which a fool can lead one astray, and one should thus avoid having foolish friends. A fool is, these verses describe, someone who loves what is improper, who lacks control, who does things without regard for the consequences, and who is incapable of managing his wealth.¹²⁹ Even if a

¹²⁵ See especially verses 791, 782, and 793.

¹²⁶ See, for example, verses 801, 805, 806, and 807.

¹²⁷ See verses 812, 813, 815, 818, and 819.

¹²⁸ Verse 824: *mukattiṇ iṇiya nakāa akattiṇṇā / vañcarai añcap paṭum*. The translation is from Sundaram, 103.

¹²⁹ Verses 832, 834, 835, 837, and 838.

foolish person acts as a true friend, the chapter urges, one should not regard that person as a friend at all, for they can lead one into trouble as a result of their foolishness. Then, a chapter on “Ignorance” lays out a case against befriending ignorant or uneducated people. Ignorant people, the chapter argues, are those who know nothing and who refuse to listen to others.¹³⁰ As one verse says poignantly, “The harm fools do to themselves is beyond anything their foes do to them.”¹³¹ Ignorant fools are those who harm themselves through their lack of knowledge and their inability to perceive what they lack. Together, these two chapters highlight two of the most egregious faults that a potential friend could possess, and, in focusing on these qualities in particular, suggest to the reader that he must avoid associating with such people at any cost. In this way, these chapters continue the *Poruṭpāl*’s vision of human life on allies by emphasizing, through negative example, the kinds of traits that allies should *not* possess.

Chapters 86-89 turn the vision of human life in a slightly new direction by focusing on the hostility of one’s enemies. They form a unit by addressing specifically the kinds of evil allies that need to be avoided, and the kinds of traits that such evil allies will exhibit. First, “Hostility” emphasizes the harm that harboring any kind of hatred or hostility toward another person will do to the person that holds it. Even in cases where one receives hostility from another person, the chapter repeatedly urges the reader not to retaliate: “Even if another’s hatred causes harm, avoid hostility and retaliation.”¹³² Other verses plead with the reader to set aside hatred, not to be fond of hostility, and to know that the riches of virtue come only from love.¹³³ Next, “An Enemy

¹³⁰ See, for example, verses 841, 845, 847, and 848.

¹³¹ Verse 843: *arivilār tāmtammaip pīlikkum pīlai / ceṟuvārkkum ceytal aritu*. The translation is from Sundaram, 105.

¹³² Verse 852: *pakalkarutip parrā ceyiṇum ikalkaruti / iṇṇācey yāmai talai*. The translation is from Sundaram, 106.

¹³³ See verses 853, 854, 858, 859, and 860.

King” specifies the kinds of actions that will be taken by an enemy king toward the kingdom. Throughout the chapter, the verses encourage the reader to avoid engaging in war with enemies. Here, the chapter builds upon earlier chapters, as the verses mention repeatedly that no king who is powerful in securing allies will ever be attacked by another from the outside; the surest way of preventing enemy attacks is to possess a powerful network of friends and allies.¹³⁴ Then, a chapter on “Knowing the Aspects of an Enemy” includes some practical suggestions for how to avoid war and avoid facing one’s foes. The verses address many possible courses of action, though none more than the simple act of turning a foe into a friend, as in the following verse: “The world is secure under one whose nature can make friends of foes.”¹³⁵ Though much of the original historical context in which the *Poruṭpāl* was written assumes that war is normal and often necessary, this chapter is striking for its almost pacifist tone, urging the reader to avoid war at all costs and whenever possible.¹³⁶ Finally, “Internal Hostility” takes up the existence of enemies within the kingdom and the royal court, noting that one must always be on guard against them. The surreptitious enemy who would destroy one from the inside, by lying and causing internal dissensions, is more dangerous even than an enemy with a sword.¹³⁷

Finally, chapters 90-95 take up another set of themes that broaden the scope of human life to include not only the people who are close to the king within the royal kingdom, but the members of the kingdom as a whole. Chapters 90-92, for example, address specific actions that should be avoided. “Not Wronging Great People” takes up the pitfalls of irreverence and the

¹³⁴ See verses 862, 863, 864, 865, 867, and 868.

¹³⁵ Verse 873: *ēmuṛ ravariṇum ēlai tamiyaṇāyp / pallār pakaiḱol pavaṇ*. The translation is from Sundaram, 108.

¹³⁶ See, for example, verses 871 and 875.

¹³⁷ Verse 882 makes the sword analogy directly, though verses 883, 884, 885, 887, and 889 also discuss this theme.

dangers of offending important people by not guarding oneself and what one says. The category of “great people” is a rather capacious one that includes kings and sages,¹³⁸ but also anyone who is learned, virtuous, and just. As one verse says, “Irreverence to the great will lead to endless trouble through them.”¹³⁹ Next, “Being Led by a Wife” tackles the very specific problem of a man who is controlled by his wife, clearly regarded as a vice to be corrected. The verses discuss the dangers that arise when a wife is given too much control over the household, suggesting that it can lead to the loss of virtue, wealth, and happiness as well as widespread public scandal.¹⁴⁰ As one verse states succinctly, “Those who fear their wives’ slender shoulders may live like gods but are not men.”¹⁴¹ Third, “Prostitutes” criticizes prostitution in very clear terms, emphasizing repeatedly that the man who pursues these “public women” will suffer a bitter fate by losing his morality, showcasing his ignorance and lack of wisdom, and tarnishing his reputation.¹⁴² Here, the reader may be reminded of the earlier chapter on “Not Desiring Another’s Wife,” which reframed the *Tirukkural*’s vision of human life in terms of relationships and behaviors that are to be avoided. Once again, there is a certain thematic repetition that is used throughout the text to tie multiple threads of possibility and prohibition together in the context of the whole, inviting the reader to draw connections across the *Arattuppāl* and *Poruṭpāl*. Here again, curtailing the sexual affairs of a man constitutes one of the cyclical themes and major intentions of the text.

¹³⁸ See, for example, verses 895, 896, 897, 898, 899, and 900.

¹³⁹ Verse 892: *periyāraip pēṇā toḷukiṇ periyārāl / pērā iṭumpai tarum*. The translation is from Sundaram, 110.

¹⁴⁰ See verses 901, 902, 904, 908, and 909.

¹⁴¹ Verse 906: *imaiyāriṇ vālīṇum pāṭilarē illāl / amaiyārtōḷ aṇcu pavar*. The translation is from Sundaram, 111.

¹⁴² See, in particular, verses 912, 914, 915, 916, and 919.

While the three chapters above describe actions relative to other people, chapters 93-95 focus on actions related to the individual that reflect poorly on his own internal cultivation of ethics and his failure to pursue right action in the world. “Not Drinking” speaks in harsh terms about the dangers of consuming alcohol. While most of the verses speak against drunkenness in particular, at least one verse suggests that drinking should be avoided altogether: “Drink no wine, or let them drink it who do not care what wise men think.”¹⁴³ Next, “Gambling” tackles another vice that must be avoided by all people. The verses emphasize the fact that gambling causes one to lose allies, thus tying the chapter to the *Poruṭpāl*’s earlier themes of friendship.¹⁴⁴ Other verses describe the enormous loss that accompanies a love for gambling, stating in no uncertain terms that gambling leads to poverty, sorrow, ignorance, and disgrace.¹⁴⁵ Finally, “Medicine” focuses on the relationship of the human body with food.¹⁴⁶ In particular, the verses shun the practice of overconsumption and overeating, noting that such excess can lead to a number of problems, from the mundane such as gas in the body, to the more profound such as health and long life.¹⁴⁷ Other verses continue the discussion by describing the need for the appropriate remedy for an illness to be found quickly and accurately, including such practical wisdom as in the following verse: “A doctor should treat taking account of the patient, the illness and the time.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Verse 922: *uṇṇarka kaḷḷai uṇiluṇka cāṇrōrāṇ / eṇṇap paṭavēṇṭā tār*. The translation is from Sundaram, 113.

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, verse 932.

¹⁴⁵ See verses 933, 934, 936, 937, 938, and 939.

¹⁴⁶ While the chapter title is perhaps best translated as “medicine,” the Tamil term *maruntu* can also mean “remedy.”

¹⁴⁷ On the former topic of bodily discomforts, see verses 941 and 944; on the latter topic of health and livelihood, see verses 942, 943, 946, and 947.

¹⁴⁸ Verse 949: *urṛāṇ aḷavum piṇiyaḷavum kalamum / karṛāṇ karutic ceyal*. The translation is from Sundaram, 115.

What kind of vision of allies and friendship do the *Poruṭpāl*'s literary strategies articulate for the reader? As has already been discussed, the reader must organize the content of the text as he reads in order to make sense of the vision of human life within the text and draw the various threads of the chapters together into a unified whole. First, the reader must take up the chapters that define the very nature of allies and friendship to begin with, leading him to think about the allies and friends in his own life. This same reader will hold his old friends closely while taking care to avoid evil friends and false friends, who are said to be revealed through qualities such as foolishness, ignorance, and hostility. Additionally, the reader begins to think about the qualities that a friend should *not* have. In reading the chapters that discourage wronging great people, being controlled by a wife, and cavorting with prostitutes, the reader recognizes that he should similarly avoid engaging with people who pursue such actions. In the chapters that focus on drinking, gambling, and eating, the reader must come to terms with his own habits, considering how the reality of his own life aligns with the vision promoted within the *Poruṭpāl*. In short, the reader weaves together a vision of his own life vis-à-vis the vision of human life articulated by the *Poruṭpāl*'s literary strategies.

In concluding the *Poruṭpāl*'s sequence of chapters on allies, the reader is prepared for and expects to engage with the final topic mentioned in the *Poruṭpāl*'s opening verse: the subjects of the kingdom, or its populace. It is worth noting that, while the *Poruṭpāl*'s content began with a discussion of the king, arguably the most context-specific part of its vision of human life, the *Poruṭpāl* ends with a discussion of the subjects, outwardly extending its vision of human life to encompass the broadest category of people. The final chapters are as follows:

- 96. Lineage (*kuṭimai*)
- 97. Honor (*māṇam*)
- 98. Greatness (*perumai*)
- 99. Nobility (*cāṇṛāṇmai*)

100. The Possession of Good Qualities (*paṇṇuṭaimai*)
101. Useless Wealth (*naṇṇiyilcelvam*)
102. The Possession of Modesty (*nāṇuṭaimai*)
103. The Manner of Bringing Credit to the Family (*kuṭiceyalvakai*)
104. Agriculture (*uḷavu*)
105. Poverty (*nalkuravu*)
106. Begging (*iravu*)
107. The Dread of Begging (*iravaccam*)
108. Inferiority (*kayamai*)

As the reader proceeds to the end of the *Poruṭpāl*, the literary strategies continue to operate upon him and encourage him to consider his own life in relation to the text's idealized vision.

First, chapters 96-99 form something of a unit, taking up four qualities that a populace should possess. First, "Lineage" addresses the quality of a person's birth and the distinguishing marks of those who are considered "well-born." On the one hand, this chapter seems to prize the kinds of caste or class distinctions that may have been a part of the historical context in which the *Poruṭpāl* was written and praises people who are born into a good family and work hard to preserve their family's honor. On the other hand, the chapter acknowledges that one can betray one's lineage through vicious acts: "His lineage is suspect who is harsh and loveless."¹⁴⁹ Next, "Pride" emphasizes not the kinds of arrogant actions that other chapters of the *Poruṭpāl* shun and discourage, but rather the need to possess honor and to hold oneself up to a high moral standard. The verses describe the ways in which those with pride reject base actions, support themselves without relying on others, and even die for their honor.¹⁵⁰ Then, "Greatness" outlines the ways in which all people can achieve great things, regardless of their birth. The verses are emphatic in observing that anyone who has the desire to excel in the world can do so through their own effort

¹⁴⁹ Verse 958: *nalattiṇkaṇ nāriṇmai tōṇṇiṇ avaṇaik / kulattiṇkaṇ aiyap paṭum*. The translation is from Sundaram, 116.

¹⁵⁰ See, for example, verses 961, 965, 967, 969, and 970.

and action alone.¹⁵¹ Offering an interesting counterpoint to the chapter on lineage above, one verse says: “The high who act low are not high, nor the low who act high, low.”¹⁵² Finally, “Nobility” picks up on this thread by showcasing the kinds of traits that are said to be “noble” in nature. These traits include, for example, virtue, the possession of good character, love, modesty, altruism, compassion, and pacifism, and the chapter acknowledges that all are possible to attain by anyone who seeks to be “noble,” not in birth, but in character.¹⁵³

If the first four chapters in this sequence identify the qualities that anyone should possess and the ideals toward which a populace should strive, chapters 100-103 take on the more pragmatic dimensions of how to attain these ideals, and they bring into focus a more detailed account of how subjects might engage themselves in society. First, “The Possession of Good Qualities” urges readers to strive for qualities such as kindness, courtesy, and a gentle demeanor.¹⁵⁴ The content of this chapter and its inclusion within a larger section on the subjects of the kingdom suggest that these are qualities that *all* people should have, regardless of their affiliation with the king’s court, envisioned as the centerpiece of the kingdom in other parts of the *Poruṭpāl*. Then, “Useless Wealth” instructs the reader through negative example by focusing on those who have wealth but do not share it with others. The chapter encourages the reader to cultivate a spirit of generosity toward others and reap the rewards of generosity and love in return.¹⁵⁵ Next, a chapter on “The Possession of Modesty” builds upon the qualities of kindness

¹⁵¹ In particular, see verses 971, 972, and 975.

¹⁵² Verse 973: *mēliruntum mēlallār mēlallar kīliruntum / kīlallār kīlāl lavar*. The translation is from Sundaram, 118.

¹⁵³ See especially verses 981, 982, 983, 984, and 989.

¹⁵⁴ See, for example, verses 991, 992, 994, 995, and 998.

¹⁵⁵ See especially verses 1001, 1002, 1003, 1006, 1007, and 1008.

and generosity cultivated in the previous two chapters to urge the reader to remain humble and modest. Though others may possess food, clothes, and other outward measures of wealth and success, modesty alone distinguishes a person above the rest.¹⁵⁶ Then, “The Manner of Bringing Credit to the Family” lays out the duties of a person who wishes to honor the family name. These duties include, for example, advancing the interests of one’s community and supporting those around oneself as much as possible through positions of leadership and service.

Finally, chapters 104-108 mark a sudden shift in the thematic trajectory of the text. First, a chapter on “Agriculture” focuses on the life of farmers and plowmen, praising the potential for agriculture to both uplift and sustain society in terms that are often quite beautiful. As one verse says, “Ploughmen are the earth’s axle-pin; they carry all the world.”¹⁵⁷ Overall, the chapter observes the conditions for the possibility of prosperity in the agricultural life and the need for subjects to remain connected to the land upon which they are living and from which they derive sustenance. The next chapter, “Poverty,” acts as a foil to the previous chapter, emphasizing the conditions in which a person can fall into a state of poverty and destitution. The verses here declare that there can be no joy or pleasure in a state of poverty and that poverty has the power to destroy both kindness and pride.¹⁵⁸ Poverty is thus the condition in which the pursuit of the ideals laid out in prior chapters becomes difficult if not impossible.

The next two chapters continue to reflect upon the circumstances of poverty and how they affect the lives of a group of subjects. A chapter on “Begging” lays out a vision of a world in which charity reigns supreme as a virtue and in which people give freely to others what they

¹⁵⁶ See verses 1012, 1013, and 1014.

¹⁵⁷ Verse 1032: *uḷuvār ulakattārk kāṇi aḷtārār / teḷuvārai ellām poruttu*. The translation is from Sundaram, 124.

¹⁵⁸ See, for example, verses 1042, 1043, 1044, and 1045.

can. Several verses suggest that charity is the most human of capacities and praise it highly, as in the following: “Without charity this beautiful world becomes a stage for puppets.”¹⁵⁹ Then, a chapter on “The Dread of Begging” offers a counterpoint, suggesting that begging is a condition of life that should be avoided at all costs. Interestingly, while many of the verses shun the practice of begging outright, when they are read in light of the previous chapter, they suggest an aversion to a society in which charity has failed and begging thus becomes necessary. One verse states it poignantly: “The heart melts at the thought of begging and dies at the thought of denial.”¹⁶⁰ Finally, a chapter on “Inferiority” concludes the *Poruṭpāl*’s vision of human life by summarizing the lowest of qualities to be found among the subjects of a kingdom. The inferior qualities summarized here often stand as polar opposites of the virtues and strengths of character described in earlier chapters of the *Tirukkural*, including traits such as carelessness, excessive pride, greed, and slander.¹⁶¹ These, the chapter makes clear, are qualities to be avoided by every member of the populace, and they go against the ideals of honor, humility, and generosity that were laid out in the earlier chapters of the *Poruṭpāl*.

Let us consider how the literary strategies described in the preceding pages work upon the reader in the context of the section on allies as a whole. Once again, the *Poruṭpāl* articulates a vision of the subjects of a kingdom that strives toward an ideal, and the reader must consider that idealized account in relation to his own life. These literary strategies operate upon the reader by first describing the qualities a populace should possess, including lineage, pride, greatness, and nobility. The *Poruṭpāl* then suggests certain pragmatic ways of attaining those ideals, articulating

¹⁵⁹ Verse 1058: *irappārai illāyiṇ īrṇkaṇmā ṇālam / marappāvai cenruvan taru*. The translation is from Sundaram, 126.

¹⁶⁰ Verse 1069: *iravulla uḷlam urukum karavulla / uḷlatūm inrik keṭum*. The translation is from Sundaram, 127.

¹⁶¹ See, in particular, verses 1073, 1074, 1075, 1077, and 1079.

a vision of human society in which a populace is constantly working toward virtues such as kindness, charity, modesty, and community involvement. Finally, the sub-section concludes with a sequence of chapters that describe the responsibilities that the subjects of a kingdom have toward one another, focusing in particular on themes of prosperity and poverty. The *Poruṭpāl* invites the reader to ask: what is my role in creating conditions for the possibility of prosperity, and what is my duty to others in times of hardship? The *Poruṭpāl*'s literary strategies act as a set of instructions that guide the reader toward a vision of human life in which the subjects of a kingdom provide for one another, even in times of great difficulty. That the *Poruṭpāl* ends somewhat abruptly with a chapter on "inferior" qualities suggests a special kind of aversion to character traits that tarnish the vision of social harmony and human generosity that is presented throughout the rest of the text.

Having thus finished the *Poruṭpāl*, by far the longest and most complex section of the *Tirukkuraḷ*, we can now consider how the literary strategies described in the preceding pages work upon the reader in the context of the entire *Poruṭpāl* and how they build toward a coherent vision of human life in the broader context of the *Tirukkuraḷ*. On this point, there are two major themes that emerge. First, the *Poruṭpāl*'s literary strategies build upon the work of the *Arattuppāl* by expanding upon the vision of human life that was introduced within it. While the *Arattuppāl* emphasizes the cultivation of certain virtues, particularly in the context of the domestic sphere, the *Poruṭpāl* shows how those virtues are maximized in society as the reader gradually expands his circle of human relationships. Second, while the *Arattuppāl* does not confine itself to any one set of readers or another, the *Poruṭpāl* branches out at various points by speaking to readers on two different levels: the primary level and the secondary level. Primary-level readers are able to envision the *Poruṭpāl*'s content in direct relation to their own lives, such as kings and ministers.

Secondary-level readers are those who may not belong to a given component in the *Poruṭpāl*'s vision of society but nevertheless imagine how they might also benefit from and live up to the ideals articulated to primary-level readers. In both cases, the reader must ask how the *Poruṭpāl*'s idealized vision of human life corresponds to the lived reality of his own life. The *Tirukkuraḷ*'s literary strategies thus continue to guide and shape readers toward a vision of human life, which gradually unfolds through the content and form of the poem as a whole.

Part III: Reading the *Kāmattuppāl*

The *Kāmattuppāl* builds upon the vision of human life that was begun in the first two sections of the *Tirukkuraḷ* while taking that vision in new directions. While the *Arattuppāl* and *Poruṭpāl* operate in a generally didactic mode, the *Kāmattuppāl* describes two lovers as they make their way through the various stages of romantic courtship and marriage. As a result of this drastic shift in style and tone, scholars have often struggled with how to read the *Kāmattuppāl* in light of the rest of the *Tirukkuraḷ*. In some cases, the *Kāmattuppāl* has been elided from popular public memory, and many of the earliest translations of the *Tirukkuraḷ* omitted this section.¹⁶² Yet, the reader who picks up the *Tirukkuraḷ* today would certainly encounter the *Kāmattuppāl* and need to incorporate it into the vision of human life that has emerged from the *Tirukkuraḷ* thus far. I argue that the *Kāmattuppāl* can be read as coherent with the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s overall vision of human life in that it serves as a capstone to the earlier sections of the text and a dramatic finale to the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a whole. In this reading, human life culminates in the attainment of a complex

¹⁶² As some scholars have observed, the content of the *Kāmattuppāl* has at times been regarded as taboo due to the implicit sexual nature of the verses in which the romantic union of two lovers is implied. For example, the *Kāmattuppāl* is rarely if ever taught in schools, and one would be hard-pressed to find verses from the *Kāmattuppāl* on public display in the same way that one can find verses from the *Arattuppāl* or *Poruṭpāl*. Similarly, many of the earliest translations of the *Tirukkuraḷ* into European languages omitted the *Kāmattuppāl*. It is unclear whether they feared arousing scandal among their European contemporaries or simply did not have access to this third part of the text. See, for example, Aiyar, i-iii; Purnalingam Pillai, *Critical Studies in Kural*, 18; Shulman, 92.

and fulfilling marriage between two people who have been properly prepared for the challenges of domestic and social life. The inward cultivation of virtue and the outward expansion of human relationships described in the earlier parts of the *Tirukkuraḷ* become a propaedeutic for marriage, the most profound social commitment of all requiring a carefully curated set of internal virtues. Marriage becomes the ideal context in which to practice the virtues cultivated in earlier parts of the text and from which a person gradually expands their constellation of human relationships.

This interpretation, though grounded in a close and careful reading of the text and attuned to the ways in which all three sections of the *Tirukkuraḷ* work together to convey meaning to the reader, nevertheless enters into a crowded debate about how to make sense of the *Kāmatuppāl*. In their attempt to read the *Kāmatuppāl* in light of the rest of the *Tirukkuraḷ*, some scholars have argued that the text should be read in reverse, starting with the *Kāmatuppāl* and concluding with the *Arattuppāl*, to emphasize the ethical message of the text.¹⁶³ While this is an interesting idea that offers one productive method for interpreting the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a whole, it goes against all of the available manuscript evidence that indicates that the three sections of the *Tirukkuraḷ* were arranged in a deliberate order, with *Kāmatuppāl* as the concluding section. The approach to reading the *Kāmatuppāl* offered here seeks to understand the section as it would be read today, as forming the third and final section of a larger work.

Other scholars argue that the *Kāmatuppāl* cannot be read literally as depicting an actual romantic union between a man and woman but rather should be read allegorically.¹⁶⁴ One such

¹⁶³ See, for example, M. Aram, “Thirukkural: Its Relevance for the Modern World,” in *Thirumathi Sornammal Endowment Lectures on Tirukkural, 1959-60 to 1968-69* (Madras: University of Madras, 1971), 411. See also Mu. Varatarācan, *Tiruvalluvar allatu vāḷkkai viḷakkam* (Cennai: Pāri Nilaiyam, 1962), which argues that the *Tirukkuraḷ* should be read in reverse, starting with the *Kāmatuppāl* and ending with the *Arattuppāl*, on the basis that *aram* alone holds the highest place in human life.

¹⁶⁴ See, for example, Popley, *The Sacred Kural*, 35; Kothandapani Pillai, 172-177; Devasenapathi, 47-70; Arulappa, *Thirukkural, A Christian Book?*, 22; Arulappa, *God in Thirukkural*, 35-36.

allegorical reading views the text as a symbol of the spiritual union between humankind and the divine, in which the hero symbolizes humanity and the heroine symbolizes God waiting patiently for the hero to arrive. The love described is thus not love between two human beings but love between humans and the divine. In taking this interpretive approach, scholars are able to minimize their apparent embarrassment over the text's more provocative passages and align the text more closely with their vision of what an ethical text like the *Tirukkuraḷ* should look like. Yet, such an approach requires the reader to shift into a drastically different interpretive mode when reading the *Kāmatuppāl*, and it is unclear why the reader should take the verses in the *Aṟattuppāl* and *Poruṭpāl* literally while reading the verses in the *Kāmatuppāl* allegorically. Again, while such an approach to reading the *Kāmatuppāl* represents an interesting interpretive possibility, it fails to read the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a unified, coherent work of literature in which all three sections work together to shape the reader in specific ways.

Additionally, scholars have long debated how to read the *Kāmatuppāl* in light of the traditions of Sanskrit and Tamil literature that preceded it. Several scholars have taken pains to distinguish the *Kāmatuppāl* from Sanskrit works such as Vātsyāyana's *Kāmasūtra*, arguing that the *Kāmatuppāl* is a literary portrait of the various stages of a relationship rather than a technical treatise on the art of love and seduction in the style of Sanskrit texts.¹⁶⁵ Conversely, a number of scholars have shown that the *Kāmatuppāl* draws extensively from the Tamil literary tradition that preceded it and in many cases cannot be understood outside of the framework laid down by earlier Caṅkam poetry and the theorization of that poetry in the *Tolkāppiyam*.¹⁶⁶ These

¹⁶⁵ Chakravarti, lxv; Duraiswamy Pillai, 111-115; Kothandapani Pillai, 191; Meenakshisundaran, "Philosophy of Tiruvaḷḷuvar," 292; Maharajan, 45-46; Subrahmanian and Rajalakshmi, xix-xx; Subbu Reddiar, 104-105, 134.

¹⁶⁶ Srinivas Iyengar, 587-588; Popley, *The Sacred Kural*, 34-35; Duraiswamy Pillai, 76; Meenakshisundaran, *A History of Tamil Literature*, 53; Kothandapani Pillai, 108; Meenakshisundaran, "Philosophy of Tiruvaḷḷuvar," 228;

frameworks include, for example, the distinction between premarital love (*kaḷavu*) and marital love (*karpu*). While premarital love focuses on the early moments of encounter between the hero and the heroine and is often described as “clandestine love” due to the secretive nature in which the two lovers meet in order to avoid detection, marital love traces the relationship as it continues to develop after the marital union of the two lovers.¹⁶⁷ These frameworks also include the highly elaborate system of poetic landscapes (*tiṇai*) outlined in the *Tolkāppiyam*. This system organizes the various states of a romantic relationship into five distinct categories, each associated with a unique landscape, a specific time of day, and various other identifying features that were used by the Caṅkam poets to suggest a particular poetic mood to the reader.¹⁶⁸ At the same time, the *Tirukkuraḷ* represents in part a departure from the Caṅkam literature that preceded it. The meter differs from almost every other Tamil poem that follows the conventions of *akam* poetry. Also, while Caṅkam poems can be read as isolated units that convey a complete literary world in brief, the *Kāmattuppāl* is organized into chapters that suggest a linear progression from one to the next. As such, the reader of the *Kāmattuppāl* must confront the reality that the *Kāmattuppāl* cannot be read through prior frameworks alone.

Finally, there is the question of how to read the *Kāmattuppāl* as a literary work in and of itself. On this topic, there are two approaches that are not necessarily mutually exclusive. One approach builds upon Caṅkam conventions and reads each verse as a discrete unit, complete on

Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan*, 165; Ku. Mōkaṇarācu, *Tirukkuraḷil marapukaḷ* (Cenṇai: Cenṇaip Palkalaikkaḷakam, 1981); Subbu Reddiar, 104-105, 134; Subramanyam, 2; Gros, 134.

¹⁶⁷ See *Tolkāppiyam in English*, trans. V. Murugan (Chennai: Institute of Asian Studies, 2000), 600-605 (*Tolkāppiyam*, *Poruḷ*, *Ceyyul Iyal*, verses 1434-1447).

¹⁶⁸ See *Ibid.*, 373-396 (*Tolkāppiyam*, *Poruḷ*, *Akattiṇai Iyal*, verses 947-1004).

its own.¹⁶⁹ In this approach, each verse describes an isolated romantic situation and can be read as a dramatic monologue on the part of one or more speakers, including the hero, the heroine, and a host of other characters that facilitate the lovers' union. A second approach reads the entire *Kāmattuppāl* as the chronological progression of a love affair, tracing the couple along the various stages of their romance, from the moment of their first meeting through various phases of separation and reunion, quarreling and reconciliation.¹⁷⁰ This approach divides the *Kāmattuppāl* into two sub-sections on premarital love and marital love respectively. Indeed, this approach is the one most favored by the medieval commentators, who work hard to supply the missing contextual information needed to render the verses legible, such as the identity of the speaker, the dramatic context, the stage of the relationship, and so on.

While these debates can and should inform our reading of the text, I also continue to read the *Kāmattuppāl* in light of the literary strategies that have been described in this project thus far, which manifest as a set of instructions revealed through the interaction between the content and the form of the text. Here, I argue that these literary strategies suggest that the vision of human life presented thus far—one marked by the inward cultivation of virtue accompanied by the gradual expansion of human relationships—culminates in the vision of romantic union and marriage articulated within the *Kāmattuppāl*. In this reading, the ideas presented in the previous two sections about the proper virtues a person should possess and the social relationships that a person ought to form are what prepare one to commence the most complex and fulfilling social

¹⁶⁹ See Aiyar, xxvii; Meenakshisundaran, *A History of Tamil Literature*, 53; Meenakshisundaran, "Philosophy of Tiruvaḷḷuvar," 291; Gros, 125.

¹⁷⁰ Aiyar, xxvii; Mu. Varadarajan, *A History of Tamil Literature*, trans. E. Sa. Visswanathan (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1988), 66-68; Gros, 136-137; Eva Wilden, "The Ten Stages of Passion (*daśa kāmāvasthāḥ*) and Eight Types of Marriage (*aṣṭavivāha*) in the *Tolkāppiyam*," in *Bilingual Discourse and Cross-Cultural Fertilisation: Sanskrit and Tamil in Medieval India*, ed. Whitney Cox and Vincenzo Vergiani (Pondichéry: Institut Français de Pondichéry/École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2013), 97, 107, 111; Shulman, 95.

process of all: marriage. While we can read the *Kāmatuppāl* through the lens of the inherited literary tradition behind it, this chapter attends more closely to the literary strategies that exist within the *Kāmatuppāl* itself and how they work together with the two previous sections of the *Tirukkuraḷ* to build toward a coherent vision of human life.

The first chapter of the *Kāmatuppāl* is entitled “Encountering a Beautiful Woman,” and it sets the stage for the content that follows. While there is some discrepancy among the extant medieval commentaries regarding which verse is first, published editions of the *Tirukkuraḷ* today generally open with the following verse: “‘Is she a goddess? Is she a precious peacock indeed? Is she a woman with a perfectly-made earring?’ wonders my heart.”¹⁷¹ Structured as a rhetorical question, this verse is unlike the opening verses of the *Arattuppāl* and *Poruṭpāl*, which articulate overarching worldviews and provide a structural framework for reading the section as a whole. This verse, in contrast, conjures a literary world in which ambiguity reigns supreme. The reader, like the speaker who poses the verse’s question, does not yet comprehend what is being seen or described. The verse instantly captures the attention of its readers, inviting them into the literary world of the *Kāmatuppāl* as they anticipate how the text will answer the question articulated in the verse and a resolution to the suspense that the verse has generated.

Several other verses in the *Kāmatuppāl*’s opening chapter describe the hero’s experience of fear and uncertainty as he gazes at the heroine and she returns his glance.¹⁷² While the hero remains uncertain about the woman’s identity for some time, he ultimately recognizes that she is

¹⁷¹ Verse 1081: *aṇaṅkukol āymayil kollō kaṇaṅkuḷai / mātarkol mālumeṇ neṇcu*. Among the medieval commentaries, Parimēlaḷakar, Paripperumāl, Paritīyār, and Kālīṅkar all arrange the verses in the opening chapter so that this verse is first, Maṇakkūṭavar places this verse as the ninth of ten in his arrangement of the chapter. All citations from the Tamil text follow *Tirukkuraḷ uraikkottu: Kāmatuppāl* (Tiruppaṇantāl: Śrī Kācimaṭam, 1970), and transliterations separate words according to the requirements of the meter. For the sake of ease, I follow the numbering of the verses that appears in modern editions. All translations from the Tamil are mine unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁷² See, for example, verses 1082, 1083, 1084, 1085, and 1086.

a human woman. Yet, even after this recognition has been made, the verses highlight the hero's tumultuous emotional experience as he continues to gaze at the heroine. In one verse, he asks: "Is it the God of Death? Is it eyes? Is it a doe? The glance of the woman is all of these three."¹⁷³

While the second half of the verse confirms that the hero knows her identity, the first half uses rhetorical questions to convey his emotional experience to the reader. The glance may originate from an ordinary woman, but for the hero it is reminiscent of eyes, a doe, and even death. In chapter 3, we will see how the verses in "Encountering a Beautiful Woman," when read in a linear mode as part of a fixed sequence, illustrate to the reader that we live in a world in which our perception is often limited and ethical reflection is influenced by a number of factors outside of our control. In this way, the *Tirukkural*'s literary strategies continually destabilize the very vision of human life that they introduce in order to suggest that accomplishing this ideal vision is often difficult and rarely straightforward. In the context of the *Kāmatuppāl* as a whole, this chapter begins to add complexity to the vision of human life articulated in the *Arattuppāl* and *Poruṭpāl*, drawing the reader into a literary world that is marked by doubt and uncertainty.

In this way, then, the opening chapter of the *Kāmatuppāl* sets up certain expectations for the reader by portraying a literary world in which ambiguity reigns supreme. At the same time, the *Kāmatuppāl* presents the reader with a challenge through the ways in which it diverges from the patterns and expectations that were set up in the *Arattuppāl* and *Poruṭpāl*. How, then, would a reader begin to approach the experience of reading the *Kāmatuppāl*? As in the previous sections, the reader must look for thematic continuities that underlie the section as a whole and ways of organizing the content of the text's chapters. I argue that one way of approaching the

¹⁷³ Verse 1085: *kūṟamō kaṇṇō piṇaiyō maṭavaral / nōkkamim mūṇrum uṭaittu*.

Kāmatuppāl as such a reader is to approach the first seven chapters as a coherent thematic unit describing the first encounter between the hero and heroine.¹⁷⁴ These seven chapters include:

- 109. Encountering a Beautiful Woman (*takaiyaṇaṅkuruttal*)
- 110. Guessing the Intentions (*kuripparital*)
- 111. The Joy of Union (*puṇarcci makīṭtal*)
- 112. Praising the Beauty (*nalam puṇainturaittal*)
- 113. Describing the Abundance of Affection (*kātarciṇappuraittal*)
- 114. Describing the Abandonment of Modesty (*nāṇutturavuraittal*)
- 115. Making Known Through Gossip (*alararivuruttal*)

Together, these chapters describe the pivotal first stages of the romance between the hero and the heroine. These initial stages include the moment of their first encounter, as described in the first chapter above, their first sexual encounter, and the various emotions and effects of that encounter that are experienced in its aftermath. When read in order, these chapters describe the beginnings of a romance that will ultimately end in marriage, while readers will inevitably consider this romance in relation to their own lives and the content of the rest of the *Tirukkuraḷ*.

The *Kāmatuppāl*'s second chapter, "Guessing the Intentions," further describes the first encounter of the hero and heroine, narrated largely from the hero's perspective as he gazes at the heroine and attempts to discern her thoughts. The hero repeatedly describes her subtle glances in his direction, which at times appear to invite his approach and at other times seem to discourage him from advancing.¹⁷⁵ The continuity of the chapter is maintained by the hero's ever-present desire to receive the heroine's glances. Though the hero can only guess what the heroine is thinking at any point, the experience is inherently pleasurable.¹⁷⁶ These moments of uncertainty and indecision culminate in "The Joy of Union," in which the hero and heroine are united in

¹⁷⁴ Parimēlaḷakar also groups these seven chapters into a single sub-section on *kaḷavu* or premarital union.

¹⁷⁵ See verses 1092, 1094, 1095, and 1097.

¹⁷⁶ Consider, for example, the evident delight experienced by the hero in verses 1092, 1098, and 1100.

sexual union for the first time. Again, the verses seem to portray the perspective of the hero as he struggles to find language to describe the experience; as a result, this chapter contains some of the most resplendent lines of poetry in the entire text. In one verse, the hero describes the multisensory experience of sexual union: “All five senses experienced as seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching are found only in she who has a shining bracelet.”¹⁷⁷ In another verse, the hero compares the heroine’s shoulders to the nectar of immortality: “The shoulders of the innocent girl have the quality of ambrosia; through contact they rejuvenate my soul with every touch.”¹⁷⁸ These three opening chapters portray the sheer delight of the hero as he falls in love for the first time, suggesting to the reader that his experience is worthy of being replicated.

Then, chapters 112-115 describe the aftermath of their sexual union, including both the positive experiences derived from the union and its negative consequences. In “Praising the Beauty,” the perspective is again centered on the hero as he ruminates on the remarkable beauty of the heroine. In this chapter, the entire natural world participates in the hero’s reflection as a way of underscoring the depth of his emotional experience. For example, the hero compares the heroine to an *aṇiccam* flower, a flower so delicate that it withers at the slightest touch,¹⁷⁹ and she wears *aṇiccam* flowers around her waist.¹⁸⁰ In the hero’s dramatic discourse, the water-lily bows its head in shame in the recognition that it cannot compare to the heroine’s eyes,¹⁸¹ and the stars become confused when they are unable to tell the difference between the moon and the heroine’s

¹⁷⁷ Verse 1101: *kaṇṭukēṭ tuṇṭuyirt tuṇṇariyum aimpulaṇum / oṇṭoṭi kaṇṇē uḷa*.

¹⁷⁸ Verse 1106: *urutō ruyirtaḷirppat tīṇṭalāl pēṭaik / kamiḷṭiṇ iyaṇṇaṇa tōḷ*.

¹⁷⁹ See, for example, verses 1111 and 1120.

¹⁸⁰ See verse 1115.

¹⁸¹ See verse 1114.

face.¹⁸² The incorporation of these natural elements into the scene heightens the poetic possibilities for describing the heroine's beauty and underscores the magnitude of the hero's emotional experience in the aftermath of their sexual union. In "Describing the Abundance of Affection," the perspective shifts between the hero and the heroine across the verses. The hero prepares himself to be apart from the heroine in a series of poignant verses such as: "Like life for the soul is she who is adorned with ornaments; like death for it is the time of separation."¹⁸³ The heroine's verses are preoccupied with the memory of the hero's appearance, and as such they seem to be uttered in the aftermath of their separation. Though the hero may travel far, the heroine insists that he is ever present: "He dwells happily in the heart always; this town calls him a stranger who dwells far away."¹⁸⁴

In contrast to this joyful reverie, the next two chapters turn their attention to the negative consequences of the couple's union. In "Describing the Abandonment of Modesty," the hero's agony at his initial separation from the heroine compels him to take up the *maṭal*, a horse sculpture made of sharp palmyra stems that he rides around the village while declaring his love for the heroine and a common trope of classical Tamil poetry.¹⁸⁵ The hero's goal is to publicize his love for the heroine, thus hastening their reunion and eventual marriage. The hero declares: "For those who suffered having experienced pleasure, there is no support except for the horse of palmyra stems as a relief."¹⁸⁶ In his desperation, the hero sees no other option other than to take

¹⁸² See verse 1116.

¹⁸³ Verse 1124: *vāṭal uyirkkaṇṇaḷ āyilāi cātal / atarkaṇṇaḷ nīṅku miṭattu.*

¹⁸⁴ Verse 1130: *uvantuṛaiva ruḷḷattuḷ eṇṇum ikantuṛaiva / rēṭilar eṇṇumiv vūr.*

¹⁸⁵ For further reference, see *Tolkāppiyam in English*, 384-385 (*Tolkāppiyam, Poruḷ, Akattiṇai Iyal*, verse 984); Takanobu Takahashi, *Tamil Love Poetry and Poetics* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 103-117.

¹⁸⁶ Verse 1131: *kāmam uḷantu varuntiṇārka kēmam / maṭalalla tillai vali.*

up the *maṭal* and declare his love publicly. In the next chapter, “Making Known Through Gossip,” the perspective again seems to shift between the hero and the heroine as each considers the village gossip surrounding their love affair. In the first part of the chapter, the hero seems to relish the gossip surrounding him. Across several verses, he declares that such gossip only increases his desire to reunite with the heroine and thus sustains him in her absence.¹⁸⁷ Halfway through the chapter, the perspective shifts abruptly, and the reader becomes privy to the heroine’s thoughts as she recognizes that the villagers are gossiping about her. Like the hero, the gossip only increases the heroine’s desire for reunion: “Thinking that I will suppress desire due to gossip is like thinking that I will suppress a fire with ghee.”¹⁸⁸ Like those who make futile efforts to put out a fire with ghee, which only strengthens the flame, the heroine declares all efforts to suppress her desire with gossip as futile.

In terms of developing the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s vision of human life, these first seven chapters accomplish two ends. First, they introduce the figures of the hero and heroine whose journey the reader will follow through the rest of the *Tirukkuraḷ*. We encounter the hero and heroine in the initial stages of their relationship, gradually progressing from the moment of their first encounter to the joy of their first sexual union, and eventually to their first period of separation. Second, these chapters invite the reader to imagine the journey of the hero and heroine in relation to his own life. As has been argued throughout, the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s literary strategies encourage and even compel readers to compare the idealized vision of human life to the reality of their own lives. In the *Arattuppāl*, readers envisioned the ideal human life as one governed by the cultivation of virtue in the context of the domestic sphere. In the *Poruṭpāl*, readers imagined themselves as part

¹⁸⁷ See, in particular, verses 1141, 1143, and 1144.

¹⁸⁸ Verse 1148: *neyyāl erinutuppēm eṇṇarṇāl keḷavaiyāl / kāmam nutuppēm eṇal*.

of an ideal kingdom, engaging the text as primary or secondary readers able to integrate the ideals of various components of the kingdom into their own lived reality. In the *Kāmatuppāl*, then, readers imagine how their own lives mirror the romantic journey of the hero and heroine and how that romantic journey marks the culmination of the *Tirukkural*'s vision. Just as readers imagined themselves in various roles in earlier parts of the *Tirukkural*, they imagine themselves as either hero or heroine, entering into a literary world in which the two characters confront the wonder, excitement, and longing that accompanies the beginning of a new relationship and imagine themselves on a similar romantic journey.

After reading these seven chapters, the reader is primed for the content that follows, in which the lovers' journey takes a sharp and dramatic turn as the hero and heroine undergo their first extended period of separation. The following twelve chapters focus on this period of separation and the experience of anguish and longing that results from it:

- 116. The Distress of Separation (*pirivārrāmai*)
- 117. The Weeping Having Become Thin in Abandonment (*paṭarmelintiraṅkal*)
- 118. The Wistful Gazing of the Eyes (*kaṇvituppalital*)
- 119. The Suffering While Losing Her Complexion (*pacappuruparuvaral*)
- 120. The State of Anguish of the Beloved in Abandonment (*taṇippaṭarmikuti*)
- 121. The Grieving of Those Who Remember (*niṇaittavar pulampal*)
- 122. Describing the Quality of a Dream (*kaṇavunilaiyuraittal*)
- 123. The Pining at Evening (*poḷutukaṇṭiraṅkal*)
- 124. Perishing with the Body (*uruppunalaṇalital*)
- 125. Speaking with the Heart (*neṇcoṭukiḷattal*)
- 126. Losing Reserve (*niṇaiyalital*)
- 127. Trembling at His Side (*avarvayinivitumpal*)

As a whole, these chapters portray the experience of separation largely from the perspective of the heroine as she waits for the hero to return and despairs at his extended absence. In verses that are poignant and often deeply moving, the heroine offers the reader a window into her emotional state. The heroine does not speak to the reader directly but via internal monologues to herself or in dialogue with her friend and companion, the *tōḷi* ("confidante"). Through these dramatic

monologues and snippets of dialogue, the text invites readers to empathize with the heroine's plight and to imagine themselves in her place.

First, in "The Distress of Separation," the focus shifts from the hero to the heroine as her emotional experience in separation takes center stage. The shift is not indicated by the verses directly, but through a subtle change in register that the reader must work carefully to discern. In several cases, the verses clearly depict the condition of the heroine through an emphasis on the speaker's lament at remaining behind while their beloved departs.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, several verses use an honorific male pronoun (*avar*) to indicate the person to whom the verse is spoken or about whom the verse is spoken, as in the following: "If you protect, prevent the separation of he who is worthy; otherwise, if he leaves, union is impossible."¹⁹⁰ The content and structure of the verse suggest that the heroine is speaking directly to her friend and confidante, referring to the hero as "he who is worthy." The implication of the verse is that the heroine is asking her friend to protect her by preventing the hero's departure. Yet, the hero inevitably departs, leaving the heroine with only the memory of the pleasure she felt when she was with the hero and the pain she suffers as a result of his departure. Thus, this chapter shifts the perspective of the speaker by emphasizing the heroine's experience of separation in contrast to the focus on the hero's experience of their initial encounter and union in the opening sequence of chapters discussed above. Additionally, this chapter introduces the basic thematic premise of the chapters that follow by showing the heroine in distress at the hero's imminent departure. At times, the verses seem to reflect the internal

¹⁸⁹ See, for example, verses 1151 and 1154, which portray the heroine's attempts to dissuade the hero from leaving. Verses 1152, 1153, 1156, 1157, 1158, and 1160 underscore the sorrow experienced in separation more generally.

¹⁹⁰ Verse 1155: *ōmpiṇ amaintār pirivōmpal maṛṛavar / nīṇkiṇ aritār puṇarvu*.

monologue of the heroine as she laments her condition, while at other times the verses seem directed to the confidante as the heroine implores her to act on her behalf.

Next, chapters 117-119 focus on the outward manifestations of the heroine's distress as her emotions begin to affect her physical state. In "The Weeping Having Become Thin in Abandonment," the heroine loses hope that the hero can be prevented from leaving and becomes resigned to pining in his absence. As she grapples with the hero's absence, the heroine takes on the appearance of a person who possesses a sickness (*nōy*),¹⁹¹ and she is overwhelmed by an abundance of sorrow.¹⁹² As a result, the heroine is unable to sleep, and she remains awake at night waiting impatiently for the next morning.¹⁹³ The next chapter, "The Wistful Gazing of the Eyes," describes the heroine's weeping and her inability to sleep as she continues to ruminate on the hero's absence. In these verses, the eyes become the object of the heroine's wrath, for they are the very organs that first glanced at the hero and brought him to her attention. As she declares: "Why do the painted eyes that gazed without discretion experience sorrow without discernment?"¹⁹⁴ Then, "The Suffering While Losing Her Complexion" describes the alteration of the heroine's appearance as she grows pale in the hero's absence. In this chapter, the heroine offers her most explicit rebuke yet of the hero, blaming him for the change in her appearance,¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ See the references to "sickness" (*nōy*) in verses 1161 and 1162.

¹⁹² Verse 1165 refers to a "coming of sorrow" (*tuyarvaravu*), while verse 1166 refers to "sorrow" (*tunpam*) that is greater than an ocean.

¹⁹³ See verses 1168 and 1169.

¹⁹⁴ Verse 1172: *terintuṇarā nōkkiya uṇkaṇ parintuṇarāp / paital ulappa tevaṇ*.

¹⁹⁵ See verses 1183, 1185, and 1190.

and she disparages her friend and those around her for discussing her pale complexion without casting blame on the hero for abandoning her.¹⁹⁶

After describing these various changes in the heroine's appearance, chapters 120-123 describe the temporal dimensions of the heroine's suffering. In "The State of Anguish of the Beloved in Abandonment," the heroine ruminates on her feelings of love in the present, eagerly anticipating the hero's swift return in the near future. The verses in this chapter underscore the heroine's complete sense of abandonment and isolation, and her state of anguish in separation. As much as she wishes to see the return of the hero, she recognizes that her love is one-sided without the hero at her side. "The Grieving of Those Who Remember" shifts temporal register into the past as the heroine dwells upon her memories of the hero and her first encounter with him. In one verse, she declares: "I live always on my past days with him—what else have I?"¹⁹⁷ In the present moment, the heroine must rely on her memories of the hero to sustain her. While these chapters focus on the contrast between past delight, present despair, and future hope, the following two chapters describe the transitions that occur in the heroine's emotional experience throughout the day. In "Describing the Quality of a Dream," the heroine eagerly anticipates the moment when she can finally fall asleep, for it is only in her dreams that she can be reunited with the hero. In her present condition, dreaming of the hero provides the sole relief for the heroine's continued isolation when she is awake. In "The Pining at Evening," the heroine describes the anguish that she faces at the end of each day. While the evening once provided the heroine with the cover of darkness under which she could meet with the hero surreptitiously, the evening now

¹⁹⁶ This can be seen most explicitly in verse 1188.

¹⁹⁷ Verse 1206: *marriyāṇ eṇṇuḷēṇ maṇṇō avaroṭiyā / nuṛṛanāl uḷḷa uḷēṇ*. The translation is from Sundaram, 143.

comes to symbolize the end of yet another day without the hero's return while he is away. As she says, "When my love was with me I did not know how cruel evening could be."¹⁹⁸

Then, chapters 124-127 describe the heightened physical and emotional effects upon the heroine of the hero's prolonged absence. For example, "Perishing with the Body" focuses on the continued decline of the heroine's appearance and incorporates several different rhetorical situations. In the first part of the chapter, the perspective of the speaker seems to be that of the confidante, who blames the hero for the loss of the heroine's beauty as caused by her tearful eyes and drooping shoulders. In the middle of the chapter, the heroine seems to take over the speaking role as she begs her friend not to slander her beloved and declares to herself the hope that the hero will return shortly upon hearing of her distress. The final verses of the chapter seem to reflect a subtle return to the perspective of the hero as he recalls the distress at their first parting.¹⁹⁹ Thus, the chapter transitions abruptly from the dialogue between the heroine and her confidante, to the heroine's internal monologue as she anticipates the hero's return, to the hero's internal monologue as he dwells on the memory of his beloved. The reading experience generated by these abrupt transitions requires the reader to focus sharply on the rhetorical situation of each verse, while the shift in the perspective throughout the chapter enables readers to view the heroine's present situation from multiple viewpoints.

In "Speaking with the Heart," the focus returns to the heroine as she begs to be relieved of her suffering. Throughout the chapter, the heroine speaks with her heart both literally and figuratively. At times, she pleads with her heart directly to remove her longing for the hero who

¹⁹⁸ Verse 1226: *mālainōy ceytal maṇantār akalāta / kālai aṛinta tilēṇ*. The translation is from Sundaram, 145.

¹⁹⁹ The confidante seems to be speaking for much of the first part of the chapter, in verses 1231-1235, while the heroine's urging of the confidante to pardon the hero occurs in verse 1236. The final three verses of the chapter reflect the hero's internal monologue as he recalls the memory of the heroine.

has abandoned her: “O heart, what use to stay here and pine when he who causes this sickness is heartless?”²⁰⁰ At other times, she speaks of her heart as the place where the hero metaphorically dwells while he is physically separated from her: “If I keep the deserter longer in my heart, my soul too will wither.”²⁰¹ In “Losing Reserve,” the heroine’s emotional anguish reaches a fevered pitch as she abandons any concern for modesty or feminine reserve. The heroine describes love as breaking all of the boundaries she once maintained and forestalling any possibility of adhering to the social norms and expectations that she once observed. The reader witnesses the heroine as she loses all control, unable to feel any sense of shame in her desperate desire to reunite with the hero. Then, in “Trembling at His Side,” the heroine’s hopes and expectations are finally fulfilled as she is reunited with the hero. This chapter shifts subtly between the perspectives of the heroine and hero. In the opening sequence of verses, the heroine seems to address the confidante, anxiously describing her hopeful expectation that the hero will soon return. In the final three verses, however, the perspective suddenly changes to that of the hero who is contemplating his return. This transition to the hero’s point of view is illustrated by the following verse: “Let the king fight and win; I will tonight join my wife, and feast.”²⁰² After an extended period of separation, the hero finally resolves to make his return.

As in earlier parts of the *Tirukkural*, these twelve chapters use a set of literary strategies to shape the reader’s engagement with the text as it builds toward a larger vision of human life. This sequence focuses on the heroine’s experience of mental and emotional distress at her separation from the hero as well as the physical manifestations of that distress. First, the reader

²⁰⁰ Verse 1243: *iruntuḷḷi enparital neñcē parintuḷḷal / paitalnōy ceytārkaṇ il*. The translation is from Sundaram, 147.

²⁰¹ Verse 1250: *tunṇāt turantārai neñcat tuṭaiyēmā / iṇṇum iḷattuṇ kaviṇ*. The translation is from Sundaram, 147.

²⁰² Verse 1268: *viṇaikalantu veṇṇīka vēntaṇ maṇaikalantu / mālai ayarkam viruntu*. The translation is from Sundaram, 149.

encounters the heroine as she grows frail and fragile as a result of her longing for the hero. Her desperation becomes quite literally embodied as she exhibits the symptoms of illness, her eyes grow weary from crying and lack of sleep, and she loses her complexion. Then, the reader becomes privy to the full extent of the heroine's anguish as the text plays with the temporal dimensions of her sorrow. The heroine's past remembrances of her union with the hero are juxtaposed with the hero's present absence and the hope for his return in the future, while the heroine's blissful experience of dreaming about the hero provides a stark contrast to the utter devastation that accompanies the end of every day that he continues to remain apart from her. Finally, the reader views the heroine's deterioration from three different perspectives as the confidante excoriates the hero while the heroine begs her friend not to criticize her beloved and the hero contemplates his return. Just as the heroine seems to abandon all hope, pleading with her heart to remove the hero from her memory and disregarding all forms of propriety, the hero concludes his journey and decides to make his return.

Additionally, these chapters invite readers to imagine the lovers' trajectory in relation to their own lives through subtle yet perceptible shifts in perspective. Most of these chapters linger upon the heroine's experience of separation, guiding readers to inhabit her perspective and to imagine themselves in her place. The reader becomes privy to the internal thoughts of the heroine and aware of the subtle changes in her physical and emotional state through internal monologues directed to herself and through dialogue directed at her friend. At the same time, several chapters shift the perspective abruptly, providing the perspectives of the hero, heroine, and confidante in rapid succession. This shift from one perspective to another, only perceptible through subtle changes in language, as when verses contain gendered pronouns that indicate the identity of the speaker, further invites readers to imagine the lovers' experience in relation to

their own lives. By encountering these various literary strategies within the text, readers of the *Tirukkuraḷ* become more adept at imagining themselves as players in a similar romantic journey, as the hero, heroine, or a friend moving between two lovers.

In the final six chapters of the *Kāmatuppāl*, the lovers celebrate their reunion and learn how to make their way through the daily realities of their new life together, including moments of disagreement and quarreling that are nevertheless tempered and sweetened by the fact that they provide the lovers with an opportunity to reconcile and reunite in their aftermath. While the *Kāmatuppāl* itself does not describe an actual marriage event, many of the details in these final chapters allude to experiences that would seem to suggest that we are now witnessing the two lovers as they navigate the lived realities of marital life, as we will see in greater detail below.

The final sequence of chapters is as follows:

- 128. Making the Intentions Known (*kuṛippaṛivuruttal*)
- 129. Trembling from Union (*puṇarccivitumpal*)
- 130. Rebuking with the Heart (*neñcoṭupulattal*)
- 131. Sulking (*pulavi*)
- 132. Sulking on Flimsy Grounds (*pulavinuṇukkam*)
- 133. The Joy After Quarreling (*ūṭaluvakai*)

As readers move through these chapters, they reach the end of the *Kāmatuppāl* as well as the end of the *Tirukkuraḷ*. That the *Tirukkuraḷ* concludes with these chapters suggests that marriage represents the culmination of all that has preceded it. The ethical cultivation that took place in the *Aṛattuppāl* and the gradual expansion of one's role in society that was encouraged by the *Poruṭpāl* together serve as the necessary preparation for, and culminate in the achievement of, a dynamic and fulfilling marital life with all the joys and sorrows that accompany it.

The first two chapters showcase the hero and heroine as they encounter each other for the first time since the hero's departure. In "Making the Intentions Known," the perspective shifts across the hero, heroine, and confidante. In the opening verses of the chapter, the hero attempts

to discern the meaning behind the heroine's glances and make sense of her bashful behavior. These verses are a marked contrast to the *Kāmatuppāl*'s opening chapter, in which the hero struggled to ascertain the heroine's identity as he was overwhelmed by her fierce glances.²⁰³ Here, the heroine's timidity and subtle smile only serve to heighten her beauty and his desire for her.²⁰⁴ In response, the heroine emphasizes the dire emotional state in which she found herself after the hero's departure, suggesting that she is not yet ready to celebrate his return.²⁰⁵ Toward the end of the chapter, the confidante intercedes on behalf of her friend, communicating what the heroine cannot bring herself to say: that she waited longingly for his rapid return.²⁰⁶ Then, "Trembling from Union" shifts back to the perspective of the heroine as she deliberates on how she ought to react upon seeing the hero. In a sequence of utterances that seem directed toward her friend, the heroine admits that her love for the hero has an influential power over her and lead her to forgive his extended absence. As she declares in one verse: "My friend, I went all set to quarrel—but my heart forgot and clasped him!"²⁰⁷ The chapter concludes with a subtle indication that the hero and heroine have been reunited at long last as the heroine's love overpowers her feelings of resentment and she embraces the hero.²⁰⁸

²⁰³ See chapter 109, "Encountering a Beautiful Woman" (*takaiyaṇaṅkuruttal*).

²⁰⁴ Verses 1271-1275 describe the heroine's various physical attributes and thus can be attributed to the hero.

²⁰⁵ Verses 1276-1278 remind the reader of the heroine's dramatic physical alteration while the hero was away.

²⁰⁶ See verses 1279-1280. While verse 1279 almost undoubtedly represents the perspective of the confidante as she describes the heroine's behavior during the hero's absence, verse 1280 describes in general terms how women use their eyes to make their intentions known when they are in love and thus could be attributed to any of the speakers.

²⁰⁷ Verse 1284: *ūṭar̥kaṭ ceṇṇēṇmaṇ tōḷi atumaṇantu / kūṭar̥kaṭ ceṇṇhrateṇ neṇcu*. The translation is from Sundaram, 151.

²⁰⁸ See verses 1289-1290.

Then, chapters 130-131 showcase the hero and heroine as they quarrel for the first time after their reunion. In “Rebuking with the Heart,” the heroine chides herself for forgiving the hero so easily. The verses are reminiscent of an earlier chapter in which the heroine spoke earnestly to her heart, at times addressing it directly and begging it to relieve her of her longing for the hero.²⁰⁹ In this chapter, however, the heroine *rebukes* her heart, chastising it repeatedly for yielding so quickly to the hero without first indicating her disapproval of his lengthy absence. Then, in “Sulking,” the heroine prepares herself to face the hero and make the extent of her suffering and displeasure known. Again, the perspective alternates among the hero, heroine, and confidante in ways that are apparent only through subtle changes in tone and rhetorical situation throughout the chapter. In the opening verse, for example, the confidante encourages the heroine to reject the hero’s advances: “Don’t yield, sulk; let us see a little his distress.”²¹⁰ The viewpoint shifts slightly to the heroine as she considers the possible ramifications of a quarrel with the hero. While a little sulking will gain the attention of the hero and can sweeten their romance, too much of it can make their love bitter.²¹¹ At first, in response to the heroine’s behavior, the hero seems to take delight in the quarrel, which heightens the romance: “Love without anger and coyness is a fruit unripe or rotten.”²¹² Yet, he quickly grows impatient for a resolution, expressing his skepticism at the necessity of her sulking and worrying about the possibility of their reunion.²¹³

²⁰⁹ See chapter 125, “Speaking with the Heart” (*neñcoṭukiḷattal*).

²¹⁰ Verse 1301: *pullā tirāap pulattai avaruṟum / allalnōy kāṇkam ciṟitu*. The translation is from Sundaram, 153.

²¹¹ See, for example, verses 1302-1304.

²¹² Verse 1306: *tunṇiyum pulaviyum illāyiṇ kāmam / kaṇṇiyum karukkāyūm arṟu*. The translation is from Sundaram, 153.

²¹³ See verses 1307-1310, which reveal the hero’s growing impatience at their quarrel.

Finally, in chapters 132-133, the reader encounters the lovers as they conclude their argument and reunite. In “Sulking on Flimsy Grounds,” the heroine continues her sulking and is determined to hold her ground.²¹⁴ However, the hero quickly offers his rebuttal, encouraging her to give up her sulking by showing her how ridiculous it is. In a series of retorts, the hero defends himself, arguing that he cannot call her “my dearest” without her accusing him of having more than one “dear”; he cannot insist that he remembered her without her reminding him that he once abandoned her; and he cannot gaze at her silently without her demanding to know about whom he is thinking.²¹⁵ Through these rejoinders, the hero attempts to ridicule the heroine’s behavior and encourage her to forgive him. Finally, in “The Joy After Quarreling,” the hero and heroine are reunited happily once again. While the heroine initially defends her sulking on the grounds that it strengthens their love, she slowly yields to the hero’s desire for her embrace.²¹⁶ Sensing that the heroine will soon give in, the hero even begs her to continue sulking for a bit longer as he recognizes the power that it holds over him and how it heightens the anticipation of their reunion.²¹⁷ The chapter concludes as the hero declares: “Feigning displeasure is pleasure for lovers; its pleasure is to embrace in reunion when it occurs.”²¹⁸

Readers of the *Kāmatuppāl* thus reach the end of the unfolding romantic saga between the hero and the heroine, having joined them at their initial moment of encounter and followed

²¹⁴ See verses 1311-1312, in which the heroine remains unyielding in her anger.

²¹⁵ These examples are found in verses 1314, 1316, and 1320 specifically, though verses 1313-1320 all make a case, from the hero’s perspective, for the absurdity of the heroine’s continued sulking.

²¹⁶ See, for example, verses 1321-1324.

²¹⁷ In verses 1325-1327, the hero praises the heroine’s sulking, while in verses 1328-1329 he implores her to continue sulking for a while longer.

²¹⁸ Verse 1330: *ūṭatal kāmatuppāl kiṇṇam atarṇṇam / kūṭi muyanṇap perin*.

them through the gradual development of their relationship until they are happily reunited after a quarrel. This sequence begins with the two lovers as they see each other for the first time since their separation. While the hero attempts to make sense of the heroine's subtle facial expressions, the heroine recalls the effect of the hero's absence on her physical and emotional condition, and neither seems sure of how to proceed. Then, the lovers quarrel for the very first time as the heroine rebukes her heart for being so easily forgiving of the hero, and the heroine sulks before the hero at the urging of her friend. Even as he recognizes how it will sweeten their eventual reunion, the hero quickly grows impatient with the heroine's sulking, and he proclaims his innocence from any wrongdoing that would be just cause for such behavior. Finally, the sequence concludes as the lovers prepare to end their quarreling and reunite in an embrace.

At the same time, the *Kāmattuppāl*'s literary strategies continue to invite and encourage readers to imagine these events in relation to their own lives. The *Kāmattuppāl* uses dramatic shifts in perspective, sometimes several times within a single chapter, to invite readers to view the romance from a number of different vantage points. For example, when the lovers first see each other upon the hero's return, the scene unfolds through the eyes of the hero, heroine, and confidante alike. Similarly, when the heroine is sulking, the perspective shifts rapidly among all three figures. These shifts in perspective allow readers to understand a scene from multiple points of view, thus facilitating their capacity to tie the *Kāmattuppāl*'s literary vision of the world to their own lives. At the same time, other chapters dwell almost exclusively on the perspective of the heroine. The reader has access to the heroine's internal monologue as she deliberates upon whether to forgive the hero, how long she should sulk, and when to bring their quarrel to an end. As readers dwell upon the heroine's emotional experience throughout the *Kāmattuppāl*, they increasingly empathize with her, viewing the dramatic events unfolding in the

text through her perspective. Thus, the *Kāmattuppāl*’s literary strategies heighten the empathetic capacity of the reader, suggesting that emotional empathy is one of the capacities necessary for a fulfilling marital life.

How, then, do the literary strategies at work within the *Kāmattuppāl* work in the context of reading the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a unified, coherent whole? As should now be clear, the interpretive approach taken here assumes that the *Kāmattuppāl* can only be fully understood in relation to the content that has preceded it. In other words, the *Kāmattuppāl* cannot be understood apart from the *Arattuppāl* and *Poruṭpāl*, and no theorization of the *Tirukkuraḷ* is complete without some sense of how this third section of the text builds upon the literary strategies of the earlier sections of the text. Reading it as part of a larger whole, the *Kāmattuppāl* serves as the culmination and capstone of the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s vision of human life, suggesting that we are capable of entering into a romantic relationship only *after* we have properly cultivated ourselves as ethical persons according to the paradigm of the *Arattuppāl* and learned how to operate in society according to the standards of the *Poruṭpāl*. The first two sections of the *Tirukkuraḷ* serve as the necessary propaedeutic for a complex marital life. At the same time, the pursuit of love and marriage as exemplified by the *Kāmattuppāl* represents the ultimate reward and achievement for mastering the kinds of ethical practices and social norms laid out in the *Arattuppāl* and *Poruṭpāl*. The *Kāmattuppāl* thus serves not only as a capstone to the earlier sections of the *Tirukkuraḷ*, but it also presents the ultimate reward for those who have engaged with the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a unified literary whole, showing readers the way to a marital life that is supported by one’s personal virtues and social responsibilities.

Conclusion

These, then, are ways in which the *Tirukkuraḷ* subtly imparts a vision of human life as marked by the inward cultivation of virtue accompanied by the outward expansion of human relationships, in which both processes mutually enrich and reinforce each other and culminate in the attainment of a complex and fulfilling marital life. Beginning with Chakravarti and Arulappa, who sought to give an account of the text as a unified whole, though not entirely agreeing with them, we have read the *Tirukkuraḷ* with attention to its inherent literary strategies, or the set of instructions that is revealed through the dynamic interaction between the content of the text and the form in which it is presented. At the same time, we have departed from their effort to read the text like a detective in search of clues about the text's religious orientation, looking instead for a coherent vision that, while never described explicitly, is nevertheless tacitly woven throughout each of the three sections (*pāl*) as they work in tandem to build toward that vision. Yet, as we will soon see, this vision of human life is also destabilized and rendered opaque by the very same literary strategies that imparted it to the reader in the first place. When we examine how the *Tirukkuraḷ* works upon its audiences at the level of the chapter (*atikāram*) and the verse (*kuraḷ* or *pāṭam*), we will see that the poem never wants the reader to lose sight of just how tenuous its vision of human life really is. This process of destabilizing the reader in order to illustrate that the pursuit of the ideal human life is anything but straightforward becomes the focus of the next two chapters of this project.

Chapter 3

Reading the *Tirukkural*'s Chapters

Building upon the previous examination of how the *Tirukkural* imparts a vision of human life in the context of reading it as a whole, here I focus on how the text works upon its audiences at the level of its chapters (*atikāram*). As argued in chapter 1 of this project, the organization of the *Tirukkural* into 133 chapters of ten verses each is remarkably consistent across the extant commentaries and manuscripts, and it has been reproduced in modern print editions of the text. As such, even though we cannot reconstruct what an original version of the *Tirukkural* would have looked like, we can be confident that many audiences throughout history, including those today, have engaged with the text's content at this structural level. In the pages that follow, I take up the following questions: how does the *Tirukkural* work upon its audiences at the level of its chapters? How do the literary strategies of the *Tirukkural*'s chapters work in tandem with the literary strategies of the text as a whole, and what kind of vision of human life do they articulate? I argue that the *Tirukkural*'s chapters in fact destabilize the vision of human life conveyed by the text as a whole by using the interplay of verses within each chapter to underscore the fact that the pursuit of the ideal human life is neither simple nor straightforward.

Methodologically, I read the *Tirukkural*'s chapters in three different ways to attend to the enormous amount of variety that exists in terms of how readers have engaged with the interplay of verses within them throughout history. First, I try to capture how a reader who encounters a set of ten verses without a fixed sense of their order would make sense of how they operate within the chapter as an organic whole. This mode of reading is guided in part by the enormous variation in terms of how commentators arranged the verses of each chapter, as summarized earlier. I try to imagine how the literary strategies of the *Tirukkural*'s chapters work upon a reader who is presented with a set of ten verses in no particular order, and to approximate what

the experience of reading, interpreting, and organizing the *Tirukkuraḷ* would have been like in the centuries after its composition, even if this approximation is necessarily limited by the lack of available historical evidence indicating what the *actual* reading experience was like.

Second, I try to capture how a reader who encounters a set of ten verses in a fixed and stable arrangement would make sense of how they operate within the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s chapters. This mode of reading flips the approach described above and is guided by the fact that most modern editions of the *Tirukkuraḷ* publish the verses as they were arranged by Parimēlaḷakar, the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s influential late thirteenth-century commentator. As discussed earlier, the tendency to replicate Parimēlaḷakar's arrangement in modern editions has created the impression that his arrangement is an original feature of the text, even though we know that there was widespread disagreement among the medieval commentators over how the verses should be arranged. Thus, I try to imagine how the literary strategies of the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s chapters work upon a reader who engages with the verses in the specific order in which they are most often published today.

Third, I turn my attention to several places in the text where two or three verses within the same chapter seem to contradict or stand in tension with one another. This mode of reading is guided by the specific content of the verses, which seem designed to create moments of paradox and tension within the text. I consider how the literary strategies of the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s chapters work upon a reader who focuses on these moments of paradox and tension, while likewise considering how those literary strategies work to destabilize the vision of human life presented in the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a whole.

Theorizing the Chapters

In light of what has been said above, how do we actually begin to theorize the literary strategies at work within the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s chapters? On this front, I am guided in part by the

work of Umberto Eco, whom I introduce into this project as a conversation partner and theoretical interlocutor. As I will show, Eco's work is particularly useful for thinking about how to discern the literary strategies of the *Tirukkural*'s chapters across each of the three methods of reading outlined above. There are, however, two potential pitfalls of using Eco as a theoretical resource. First, Eco's work focuses largely on the Euro-American literary tradition without any reference to Tamil literature, poetry, or aesthetics. Second, Eco's theoretical work largely builds upon his reading of the modern novel. In light of these concerns, it is fair to wonder how Eco's work can be useful in reading a Tamil poem from the fifth century C.E. I will address these concerns by making two related points below. First, I argue that within Eco's framework the *Tirukkural* functions as an "open" text rather than a "closed" one. Second, I argue that the *Tirukkural* uses various literary strategies to produce a "model reader" of the text, capable of construing meaning from the constellation of verses within each chapter.

First, what does it mean to say that the *Tirukkural* is an open text? In his earlier work, Eco draws a careful distinction between closed texts and open texts. Closed texts are "those texts that obsessively aim at arousing a precise response on the part of more or less precise empirical readers."¹ In other words, closed texts are written for a specific and easily identifiable audience, such as children, working professionals in a certain field, and so on, and they are meant to foster a certain kind of reading experience. Eco cites Superman stories as an example of a closed text, in that the stories are intended for a specific readership and generate a relatively consistent reading experience through specific pedagogical strategies.² What distinguishes closed texts

¹ Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 8.

² Ibid., 8-9.

from open ones is the fact that they can be read in various ways, and they are “open to any possible ‘aberrant’ decoding,”³ without betraying the text itself. As Eco states, “Why not read Superman stories only as a new form of romance that is free from any pedagogical intention? Doing so would not betray the nature of the saga. Superman comic strips are *also* this.”⁴

Open texts, on the other hand, are of quite a different nature. The intended audience of the text, and the intended response that the text aims to elicit from that audience, is often less clear. Open texts, unlike closed ones, do not lend themselves to an easy or simple explanation, and it is only through the generative process of reading them carefully that their true meaning can be discerned. Yet, while these texts may be open in the sense that they reach out to many different kinds of readers and present their content in structurally complex ways, Eco argues that these texts nevertheless demarcate reasonable boundaries for the interpretive endeavor. As he writes, “You cannot use the text as you want, but only as the text wants you to use it. An open text, however ‘open’ it be, cannot afford whatever interpretation.”⁵ In other words, open texts are not “open” in the sense that every interpretation of them will be successful. Rather, they must be read carefully, often many times over, to discern the most salient interpretation.

Eco cites several texts that he considers to be “open” in this way, including James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Franz Kafka’s *The Trial*. Both are complex works of narrative literature that belie a singular or straightforward interpretation and require sensitivity on the part of the reader to draw out an interpretation that falls within the boundaries of what the texts themselves prescribe. Here again, Eco is careful to demarcate certain boundaries for the interpretive endeavor: “To say that a

³ Ibid., 8.

⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁵ Ibid.

text potentially has no end does not mean that *every* act of interpretation can have a happy ending.”⁶ In this way, Eco argues that open texts guide their readers to make specific interpretive choices in the act of reading, such that even if readers cannot reach an agreement about the final meaning of a text, they might nevertheless come to an agreement “at least about those that a text discourages.”⁷ Eco summarizes it in the following way: “It is possible to be stupid enough to read Kafka’s *Trial* as a trivial criminal novel, but at this point the text collapses.”⁸ Here, I take Eco to mean that if one reads Kafka’s novel as *merely* a story about criminal procedure, one has missed the point of the novel entirely by failing to pick up on the larger social and structural critiques embedded within the narrative and render them meaningful within the context of the novel as a whole. Though open texts may be open to many variable readings, they do not open themselves to *every* possible reading, and they guide the reader toward a specific set of interpretive choices on the basis of their literary structure.

The following chapter, then, assumes that the *Tirukkural* is best understood as an open text in Eco’s sense. The *Tirukkural* is structurally complex and does not convey a singular meaning that is immediately obvious to the reader. Similarly, the presentation of content is often terse and ambiguous, given that each verse conveys a complete thought in only two lines. Indeed, these very literary features of the *Tirukkural* require the reader to return to the text repeatedly in search of meaning, and we know historically that the text has generated multiple readings and a variety of interpretive results. For these reasons, then, even though the *Tirukkural* falls outside of the Euro-American literary tradition examined by Eco, I believe we can think more productively

⁶ Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁸ Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, 10.

about how the *Tirukkural* actually *works* as a text by framing it within this paradigm. Of course, even when we say that the *Tirukkural* is an open text, we must acknowledge that it is written in a specific language, in a particular literary style, with a certain cultural knowledge expected of the reader. The empirical author of the *Tirukkural*, whoever that may have been, could never have imagined a reader such as me, writing and thinking about the text in an English-speaking academic environment in the twenty-first century. Yet, when I read the *Tirukkural*, I can nevertheless read it in such a way that my interpretation is generated from the text alone, attempting to be the kind of reader whose interpretive process builds upward from the text.

Second, what does it mean to say that the *Tirukkural* uses literary strategies to produce a model reader? Eco describes the model reader as someone who in the act of reading makes a series of interpretive choices that are grounded in the generative process of reading the text, and who thereby “cooperates” with that text.⁹ The model reader is distinct from the empirical reader, which is “you, me, anyone, when we read a text.”¹⁰ Empirical readers can read a text in many ways and use a text in whatever way they want without being governed by any particular rules about how they ought to read. The model reader, by contrast, is “a sort of ideal type whom the text not only foresees as a collaborator but also tries to create.”¹¹ In other words, the model reader is not just *any* reader, but one whose profile is generated by the boundaries of interpretative possibility laid out by the text itself. In this view, there is an “intention of the text” that, while difficult to define, is nevertheless realized in the production of the model reader. The

⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰ Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 8.

¹¹ Ibid., 8-9.

textual strategies of a literary work create the conditions for the possibility that any empirical reader can become the model reader of that text.

This model reader is closely related to the model author of the text. Eco describes these parallel figures in the following way: “Since the intention of the text is basically to produce a Model Reader able to make conjectures about it, the initiative of the Model Reader consists in figuring out a Model Author that is not the empirical one and that, at the end, coincides with the intention of the text.”¹² The model author is not the historical author of the text or the narrator within the text, but a kind of authorial presence that animates the text as a whole. It is a voice that “is manifested as a narrative strategy, as a set of instructions which is given to us step by step and which we have to follow when we decide to act as the model reader.”¹³ For Eco, both the model reader and the model author work together, for they “are entities that become clear to each other only in the process of reading, so that each one creates the other.”¹⁴ Every text has gaps that need to be filled in, and the model reader is the person who fills in the gaps responsibly by allowing herself to be guided by the text’s instructions, though they may be “present only as a series of faint traces”¹⁵ within the text. The model reader, then, is not any one specific person, but an ideal type of reader created through the act of reading a text in tandem with the model author.

In the case of the *Tirukkural*, the notion that there is a model author who can be discerned through a careful reading of the text is particularly useful given that nothing is known about the

¹² Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, 58-59.

¹³ Eco, *Six Walks*, 14-15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

historical author, or, for that matter, about Tiruvalluvar, the figure to whom the *Tirukkural* became attributed at some point in history. We can build upon the idea of an authorial presence or model author that lies dormant within the text, waiting to be activated by the sensitive reader. In particular, we can use Eco's concept of the model reader to think about how to read the *Tirukkural* in a way that attends to the subtle literary strategies within the text that set up certain boundaries for the interpretive endeavor and point the reader toward a meaningful understanding of the text.

Of course, one of the challenges of reading the *Tirukkural* is that there is no narrative voice to tie the individual verses together, and the lack of consistency in the arrangement of the verses within each chapter has only further contributed to this difficulty. For these reasons, it is fair to wonder whether Eco's theory can really be applied to a verse text like the *Tirukkural*. Can there be a model reader without a narrative? What happens to the model reader in a poetic text like the *Tirukkural*? Though Eco most often describes the model reader in relation to works of narrative literature, his theory also extends beyond such works, and he argues that there can be model readers not only for texts that are open to multiple points of view but also for those that foresee a very obedient reader: "There is a model reader not only for *Finnegans Wake* but also for a railway timetable, and the texts expect a different kind of cooperation from each of them."¹⁶ While we must admit that the *Tirukkural* is not a work of narrative literature, the complexity of its thematic content and poetic structure certainly heightens its literary power beyond the realm of a mere railway timetable, even as the railway timetable likewise demands a certain kind of model reader. In this way, then, I find Eco's concept of the model reader to be a particularly

¹⁶ Ibid., 16.

productive framework for thinking about the literary strategies at play within the *Tirukkural*'s chapters and how those literary strategies invite the reader to cooperate with them.

Part I: Reading Verses “Out of Order”

My first approach to reading the *Tirukkural*'s chapters attempts to discern how their literary strategies work upon the reader who engages the verses within a chapter without a fixed sense of their order, but nevertheless as part of an organic whole. As indicated above, this mode of reading tries to imagine the experience of reading, interpreting, and organizing the verses that may have taken place historically as readers sought ways to identify thematic coherence within each chapter and make meaning out of the *Tirukkural* more generally. In doing so, we borrow from one mode of interpreting the text that was used by the *Tirukkural*'s medieval commentators while attending to the fact that the arrangement of the verses was fluid throughout much of history. As I will show, even when we read the verses “out of order,” that is to say, out of the order in which they are consistently published today, we can find patterns of meaning that allow us to arrange the verses in meaningful ways and to better understand how the interplay of verses within a single chapter reveals literary strategies designed to destabilize the vision of human life operating at the level of the text as a whole.

To illustrate how this process occurs, let us consider the *Tirukkural*'s fourth chapter, “Affirming Virtue” (*aṟaṇvaliyuṟuttal*), which illustrates how the text uses the interplay of verses to destabilize the reader's notion of “virtue” or “ethics” (*aṟam*) even as it introduces the very concept. In order to facilitate the reader's engagement with my argument below, I provide the complete set of verses before my discussion of each chapter in the order in which they will be discussed and in which I argue a model reader would arrange them. They are as follows:

Virtue is entirely being one without a blemish on the mind;

other things have the quality of idle noise.¹⁷

Envy, desire, anger, harsh words;
that which occurs having avoided all four is virtue.¹⁸

Virtue indeed has the quality of what is to be done, for anyone;
vice indeed has the quality of what is to be avoided.¹⁹

Through every way that is possible, in every way that is suitable,
without ever stopping, perform virtuous action.²⁰

Without thinking, ‘We will know (it) later,’ perform virtue;
indeed, it is an undying friend at the time of death.²¹

Pleasure only comes through virtue;
for all else beyond it, there is not any praise.²²

For a living being, what fortune is greater than virtue,
which gives bliss and gives wealth as well?²³

There is not any fortune greater than virtue;
there is no misfortune greater than forgetting it.²⁴

If one does good without passing a day spent in vain,
it is a rock that blocks the path of a person’s lifetimes.²⁵

¹⁷ Verse 34: *maṇattukkaṇ mācila ṇātal aṇaittaṇ / ākula nīra pīra*. All citations from the Tamil text follow *Tirukkuṛaḷ uraikkottu: Arattuppāl* (Tiruppaṇantāl: Śrī Kācimaṭam, 1969), and transliterations separate words according to the requirements of the meter. All translations from the Tamil are mine unless otherwise indicated. Also, while this part of the chapter examines the verses without reference to any particular arrangement of them, for the sheer sake of simplicity, and so that the reader can more easily locate the verses to which I am referring, I will use the verse numbers that appear in most printed editions today in my footnotes.

¹⁸ Verse 35: *aḷukkā ravāvekuḷi iṇṇāccol nāṇkum / iḷukkā iyaṇra taram*.

¹⁹ Verse 40: *ceyaṛpāla tōrum aṇṇē oruvaṛ / kuṇṇpāla tōrum paḷi*.

²⁰ Verse 33: *ollum vakaiyāṇ aṇaviṇai ōvātē / cellumvāy ellāṇ ceyal*.

²¹ Verse 36: *aṇṇarivām eṇṇā taraṇceyka marṛatu / poṇṇuṇkāl poṇṇāt tuṇai*.

²² Verse 39: *aṇṇātāṇ varuvātē iṇṇamar rellām / puratta pukaḷum ila*.

²³ Verse 31: *ciṛappiṇum celvamum iṇum aṇṇiṇūuṇ / kākkam evaṇō uyirkku*.

²⁴ Verse 32: *aṇṇiṇūuṇ kākkamum illai ataṇai / maṇṇattaliṇ ūṇkillai kēṭu*.

²⁵ Verse 38: *vīḷnāl paṭāamai naṇṇārrin aḷtoruvaṇ / vāḷnāl vaḷiyaṭaikkun kal*.

There is no need to say, ‘This is the result of virtue’;
the place of he who rode the palanquin and he who bore it.²⁶

How, then, would a reader begin to make sense of these verses as an organic whole? An easy starting point is to look for verses that actually define virtue. While the term for virtue or ethics appears in various iterations throughout the chapter, there are two verses that specifically define or describe the concept. First, consider the following verse: “Virtue is entirely being one without a blemish on the mind; other things have the quality of idle noise.” Structurally, the verse centralizes the term for virtue (*aṛaṇ*) by including it in the fourth metrical unit (*cīr*) out of seven total.²⁷ The literary effect of this placement is that the entire verse revolves around virtue, thus highlighting the importance of the concept. In terms of content, the verse offers a precise definition of virtue, noting that it is “being one without a blemish on the mind.” Such a definition of virtue certainly yields more questions than answers on the part of the reader who tries to make sense of it, but at a minimum the model reader perceives that virtue is marked by a certain interior quality within a person. While the verse does not offer any concrete examples of what a virtuous person actually *looks* like, the verse makes it clear that a person is marked as virtuous by the state of their interior self. In other words, virtue exists wholly within the self rather than as something outside of it. As the second half of the verse states, other things—presumably, all things aside from virtue—are just idle noise.

A second verse articulates a slightly different definition of virtue: “Envy, desire, anger, harsh words; that which occurs having avoided all four is virtue.” In contrast to the previous

²⁶ Verse 37: *aṛattā ṛituveṇa vēṇṭā civikai / poruttāṇō ṭūrtā ṇṭai*.

²⁷ Note that in this verse, and throughout the chapter, the *Tirukkural* often uses both *aṛam* and *aṛaṇ* interchangeably to refer to “virtue.” While *aṛam* is often used to convey a more general sense of ethics, *aṛaṇ* can be used to describe a specific virtue or moral obligation. Nevertheless, throughout the text they seem to have a significant semantic overlap and are used without much distinction.

verse, this verse places the term for virtue in the seventh metrical unit, such that the verse's content builds up to the very final moment. Here, virtue is defined as the *absence* of four things that reflect the interior qualities of a person, and this absence can be measured at least in part by how those interior qualities do or do not manifest in certain outward behaviors, such as speaking harsh words. When read in conjunction with the previous verse, the reader perceives that virtue can be defined on the basis of the qualities that person *should* have and the forms of behavior that a person should *not* have. Through these two verses, the reader begins to conceptualize virtue as an internal attribute that manifests in certain external behaviors, and as something that can be acquired and cultivated through specific habits of mind and action.

While these verses push the reader to think about virtue in specific ways, there are many things that remain ambiguous at this point in the chapter. First, there is the issue of what actually constitutes a “blemish on the mind.” While the verse helps the reader to visualize virtue as a quality inherent to a person and as a particular state of mind, the terse structure of the verse does not allow for much elaboration upon the point. Second, there is the question of how virtue should be circumscribed apart from other traits. While one verse lists four qualities that stand apart from virtue, the reader can assume that this list is by no means exhaustive and that there are other qualities that surely stand in contrast to virtue. By acting as a model reader of the text and reading these verses as part of an integrated whole, the reader understands that acting out of envy, anger, and so on, would not be virtuous. However, neither verse offers much guidance in terms of how to actually cultivate virtue and avoid the various attributes that are mentioned. For this reason, the reader must look elsewhere in the chapter to further understand what the chapter wants to communicate to its readers about virtue and the text's larger vision of human life.

While the previous verses defined virtue as an interior quality to be cultivated within a person, three verses within this chapter describe virtue as a kind of action or thing to be done by a person. Consider, for example, the following verse: “Virtue indeed has the quality of what is to be done, for anyone; vice indeed has the quality of what is to be avoided.” In this verse, virtue is described as “the quality of what is to be done” (*ceyarpālatu*). Though the word appears as a noun, the term has embedded within it the Tamil word for “action” (*ceyal*), itself derived from a verbal root that means “to do” (*cey-tal*). This verse thus marks a shift in how the chapter describes virtue, indicating to the reader that virtue is something that is expressed through one’s action in the world; in other words, virtue is both something that a person *has* and something that can actually be *done*. This verse also distinguishes virtue (*araṇ*) from vice (*pali*), suggesting again that virtue must be understood in contrast to what it is not. Through the experience of reading this verse alongside the two verses cited above, the reader infers that the qualities outlined above—envy, desire, anger, and harsh words—fall under the category of vice. Finally, this verse suggests something about the intended audience of the *Tirukkuraḷ*, for the fourth metrical unit refers specifically to “anyone” or “a person (in general)” (*oruvan*).²⁸ In this way, the *Tirukkuraḷ* reaches out to a broad audience of readers, suggesting that the process of cultivating virtue is not reserved merely for a specific class of people; rather, for anyone and everyone, virtue is doing what should be done and avoiding what should not be done.

Two other verses in the chapter also point toward the ways in which virtue is expressed through a person’s actions. One verse states the following: “Through every way that is possible, in every way that is suitable, without ever stopping, perform virtuous action.” First, this verse

²⁸ In the verse, *oruvan* appears with a dative case ending, thus transforming it into *oruvarku* and giving it the sense of “for anyone” or “to anyone” as in the translation above.

shifts the term for virtue into the adjectival form, translated here as “virtuous action” (*araviṇai*). The deliberate pairing of the term for “virtue” with the Tamil word for “action” (*viṇai*) further indicates to the reader that virtue is expressed through a person’s actions in the world.²⁹ This verse also suggests that such virtuous action occurs within a broad field of possible actions. While the verse implores the reader to “perform” (*ceyal*) virtuous action,³⁰ the rest of the verse indicates that virtuous action may indeed be constrained in various ways, such that the reader is encouraged to act virtuously “through every way that is possible” and “in every way that is suitable.” These qualifying statements add complexity and ambiguity to the verse, suggesting that virtuous action may not always be possible or even suitable. The reader must contend with this rather open-ended instruction to perform virtue and consider the ways in which the performance of virtue might be hindered or at times even impossible.

Another verse also implores the reader to perform virtue: “Without thinking, ‘We will know (it) later,’ perform virtue; indeed, it is an undying friend at the time of death.” This verse, like the previous one, uses an imperative verbal form to encourage the reader to perform virtue without delay. In doing so, the verse adds a layer of temporal urgency to the chapter. While the verse implicitly criticizes those who postpone virtuous action because they think that they can simply do it later, the verse also reminds the reader that death can come without warning at any time. When read in conjunction with the previous two verses, the reader must confront several facts about virtuous action. First, the reader recognizes that, while virtue is an internal quality to

²⁹ It is worth noting here that the Tamil term for “action” (*viṇai*), like its Sanskrit counterpart (*karma*), is also used frequently to refer to not only actions themselves, but also the cumulative and lingering effects that are the result of previous actions. Throughout the *Tirukkural*, the term *viṇai* is used in both senses, and it is only through context that one can determine the most appropriate translation of the term in each case.

³⁰ The term *ceyal* has a wide semantic range and can act as a verbal noun (“action”) or an imperative or optative command (“one must do” or “one should do”).

be cultivated by the individual person, it is also something that manifests in the world through a person's actions. In other words, it is only through a person's actions that he or she can be understood as "virtuous." Second, the field of action is a broad one that includes virtuous action and non-virtuous action. Though virtuous action should be performed as much as possible, the reader senses that there may be certain conditions under which virtuous action would be inappropriate or even impossible. Finally, virtuous action is rendered in temporal terms as something that should be pursued without delay, for the possibility of death lingers over every person, and it is virtue alone that will serve as a person's undying friend at the time of death.

Another way of reading the verses of this chapter as part of an organic whole is to look at how virtue is connected to other dimensions of human life. For example, one verse specifically establishes a connection between virtue (*aram*) and pleasure (*inṇam*), thus hinting at the larger connection between the *Arattuppāl* and the *Kāmatuppāl*: "Pleasure only comes through virtue; for all else beyond it, there is not any praise." First, on a basic level, this verse suggests to the reader that virtue not merely dutiful adherence to a rigid system of obligations, but it is actually *pleasurable* for the person who pursues it. From this perspective, virtue is not something one does because one *has* to do it, but rather because cultivating virtue can actually lead to a greater enjoyment of the world. Second, and more broadly, this verse suggests that there are connections to be found among the various parts of the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a whole. While this verse appears in the *Arattuppāl*, the link that it draws between virtue and pleasure gestures toward a sense of the broader thematic continuity between the *Arattuppāl* and *Kāmatuppāl* within the *Tirukkuraḷ*, such that they do not stand at odds with each other but are in fact two sides of the same coin. What is virtuous is indeed pleasurable, while what is pleasurable is indeed virtuous.

Two other verses in the chapter also link the *Tirukkural*'s ethical project with other parts of the text, though in this case the focus is on “fortune” (*ākkam*), ostensibly the subject of the *Poruṭpāl*. First, one verse raises the following question: “For a living being, what fortune is greater than virtue, which gives bliss and gives wealth as well?” This verse praises virtue as a quality with multiple benefits for the person who possesses it, including the increase of wealth and the attainment of “bliss” (*cirappu*).³¹ Additionally, through the structural framework of a rhetorical question, this verse invites the reader to consider the possible connection between virtue and prosperity. Of course, for the model reader of the text, the answer to that question is very much implied. If, as the verse states, virtue gives both heavenly bliss and wealth, then there can be no greater prosperity for a living being. In this way, the verse links virtue with prosperity such that the possession of virtue itself becomes cast as a form of wealth.

This theme is also taken up in another verse: “There is not any fortune greater than virtue; there is no misfortune greater than forgetting it.” While the previous verse uses a rhetorical question to guide the reader to an answer that is very much implied, this verse answers that question directly by asserting that there is indeed no greater fortune than virtue. In terms of its structure, the verse juxtaposes two contrasting ideas. The first half of the verse affirms the point that possessing virtue should be regarded as the greatest form of prosperity. The second half of the verse, however, presents a view of the alternative, in which a person “forgets” to exercise virtue. This act of forgetting is a form of misfortune or loss. It is worth noting here that the Tamil word used for “fortune” in these verses (*ākkam*) shares a wide semantic overlap with the Tamil

³¹ Interestingly, the medieval commentators gloss the word *cirappu* as “heavenly bliss” in the sense of “salvation” (*mutti*) or “liberation” (*vīṭu*). Maṇakkuṭavar adopts the former interpretation while Parimēlaḷakar adopts the latter. Though they defend their interpretations, the word *cirappu* has a broad semantic range that more generally refers to qualities such as “excellence,” “happiness,” “prosperity,” and so on.

word used for “prosperity” (*poruḷ*) in the sense of the political and economic realm in other parts of the *Tirukkuraḷ*. Thus, the reader who reads these verses and frames them in the context of the text as a whole will draw connections between the *Arattuppāl* and *Poruṭpāl* and see them as fundamentally linked in the context of the entire *Tirukkuraḷ*.

In this way, these verses foreground a connection between the ethical project of the *Arattuppāl* and the themes of the *Poruṭpāl* and *Kāmattuppāl*. By holding up virtue as the highest form of prosperity, as something that gives both “bliss” and fortune alike, these verses suggest that the cultivation of virtue (*aṛam*) should not be considered as distinct from the pursuit of wealth (*poruḷ*) and that possessing virtue is itself a form of prosperity. Additionally, by stating that pleasure (*iṇpam*) only comes through virtue (*aṛam*), these verses fuse the literary vision of the *Arattuppāl* and *Kāmattuppāl* together. The cultivation of virtue and the experience of pleasure are not opposed to each other by any means but form an equally important and harmonious part of a person’s life. By acting as the model reader of these verses, we necessarily consider how the cultivation of virtue and the larger project of the *Arattuppāl* as a whole are linked to the *Poruṭpāl* and *Kāmattuppāl*.

Two more verses round out the chapter, and they bring its thematic focus into a much broader temporal frame. As one verse states, “If one does good without passing a day spent in vain, it is a rock that blocks the path of a person’s lifetimes.” Much of this verse is rather ambiguous, leaving the reader to fill in the blanks and read between the lines to derive its meaning. There are, however, several ideas that emerge. First, the verse emphasizes that a person should constantly strive to do “good” (*naṇru*), a Tamil term that is often used interchangeably with “virtue” (*aṛam*) throughout much of the *Tirukkuraḷ*. Second, the performance of virtue is equated metaphorically with a “rock that blocks the path of a person’s lifetimes.” The precise

meaning of the second half of the verse is not entirely clear from the verse alone, though the commentators work hard to render it meaningful.³² Though much of the significance of the fact that “good” is a “rock” that blocks the path of many lifetimes remains implicit within the verse, it is clear from the broader context of the chapter that this result is beneficial to the person who pursues virtue constantly. Finally, this verse places virtue within a broad temporal landscape, suggesting that the cultivation of virtue never ends but is in fact spread over the course of many lifetimes. For this reason, the verse implores the reader not to spend even a single day without doing “good” in the world.

The other verse states: “There is no need to say, ‘This is the result of virtue’; the place of he who rode the palanquin and he who bore it.” Again, the ambiguity of this verse does not allow for an easy or straightforward explanation of its content. The first half of the verse states that there is no need to proclaim the results of virtue. As the reader considers this argument, the second half of the verse then builds its case, suggesting that the reader observe the difference in the position between the one who rides upon a palanquin and the one who bears it. The verse is not explicit about how the reader should connect the first half of the verse with the second half, but there is a subtle implication that the results of virtue can be seen in the world around us by comparing those who live fortunate lives with those who live less fortunate lives. In this case, the status of the person who rides upon the palanquin is implicitly attributed to his virtue, while the

³² Maṇakkuṭavar, for example, glosses “the path of a person’s lifetimes” as “the path that comes on the day that is his birth and death” (*avaṇatu piṇṇappum iṇṇappumākiya nāl varukinṇa valiyai*). Presumably, this refers to the path whereby a person either is reborn into the world and reenters the cycle of rebirth or is liberated from this cycle as a result of his virtuous deeds. In this reading, the verse points toward the goal of liberation from the cycle of rebirth, and he concludes his commentary on the verse thusly: “This (verse) states that it (virtue as the rock that blocks the path) gives liberation” (*itu vīṇu tarum eṇṇatu*). Parimēlaḷakar, by contrast, focuses on the word for “lifetimes” (*vāḷnāl*), glossing it as a reference to the two kinds of action (*iruvakai viṇaiyum*) that govern human existence (presumably, good actions and bad actions) and the two kinds of results (*iruvakai payaṇaiyum*) of those actions (again, presumably a positive future rebirth or a negative future rebirth). In this reading, the verse illustrates the lingering effects of *karma* (in Tamil, *viṇai*) in both the present life and in future lives.

status of the person who carries the palanquin should be understood as the result of his evident *lack* of virtue. Though never stated outright, the verse seems to integrate *karma* (in Tamil, *viṇai*) into the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s theorization of virtue, suggesting that virtuous habits and actions can have lingering positive effects over the course of a person's lifetime and possibly over the course of many future lifetimes to come.

In what ways, then, does the model reader construe these verses as a whole? As we have seen, in order to make sense of this chapter on "Affirming Virtue," the model reader might start by searching for verses that define virtue and provide some thematic groundwork for the rest of the verses to build upon. Two verses define virtue in slightly different ways, inviting the reader to imagine virtue as both an internal attribute and as something to be distinguished from other non-virtuous qualities. Three verses describe virtue as a form of action, thus compelling the reader to consider how the internal cultivation of virtue shapes how one acts in the world, such that one's actions will conform to the principles of virtue at all times. Another three verses draw connections between the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s ethical project and the other two major themes discussed in the text: prosperity and pleasure. As one verse states, pleasure (*inṇam*) only comes through virtue (*aṛam*), signaling to the reader that the *Aṛattuppāl* and *Kāmattuppāl* should be read as describing a singular, harmonious vision of human life in which enjoyment and virtue are inextricably linked. Similarly, two verses emphasize that there is no greater fortune than virtue, thus thematically linking the *Aṛattuppāl* with the *Poruṭpāl*. By emphasizing that virtue is itself a form of prosperity, the reader is more properly situated to encounter the themes of the *Poruṭpāl*, even as the verses also state that the proper cultivation of virtue will lead to material and spiritual rewards. Finally, two verses broaden the temporal scale of virtue by emphasizing that the benefits of virtue can cut across many lifetimes.

As a whole, the chapter uses the gradual accumulation of ideas on virtue to push readers to think about virtue in narrative terms. By juxtaposing verses that frame virtue as an internal attribute to be cultivated by a person, readers will think about virtue in narrative terms as they envision how to avoid envy, desire, anger, and harsh words. This narrative is further propelled by verses that describe virtue as an action to be pursued, inviting readers to consider whether they have properly engaged in “virtuous actions” (*aṛaviṇai*) and pointing to a future in which readers will reckon with their past actions. Further, by reading the verses that draw connections among virtue, wealth, and pleasure, readers narrate a vision of human life in which all three goals cohere and they recognize that a life lived in pursuit of wealth and pleasure but devoid of virtue is not a life properly lived. Finally, the temporal outlook of the verses pushes readers to think about the pursuit of ethics over the *longue durée* and consider the pursuit of ethics not merely in terms of short-term rewards, but in terms of the long-lasting impact of virtue over the course of many lifetimes. As a whole, these verses underscore the fact that the pursuit of the ethical life requires effort and hard work over a lengthy period of time, thus complicating the idealized vision of human life that we examined in chapter 2 of this project.

Let us continue to read the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s verses “out of order,” as it were, by looking at a chapter in the *Kāmatuppāl*. As previously discussed, whereas the *Aṛattuppāl* and *Poruṭpāl* articulate principles that can apply to a broad set of readers, the *Kāmatuppāl* marks a shift in the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s thematic tone, focusing on the various stages of a romantic union between a man and a woman. While chapter 2 of this project argued that the *Kāmatuppāl* can be read as part of a coherent whole, here I want to focus on the interplay of verses within a single *Kāmatuppāl* chapter and consider how they also contribute toward destabilizing the ideal vision of human life that we have been discussing. Let us consider the *Kāmatuppāl*’s sixth chapter, “Describing the

Abandonment of Modesty” (*nāṇuttuṛavuraittal*). While the chapter title offers some clues as to its content, many of the verses are ambiguous and rather opaque, providing little evidence about who is speaking and who is describing the abandonment of modesty. In acting as model readers of the text, we must read the verses together for clues about how to make sense of their content. Once again, I provide the full set of verses in the order in which they will be discussed below:

“The raft that is manhood, along with modesty,
is carried away indeed by the swift flood of desire.”³³

“I possessed before manhood along with modesty; I possess now
the horse of palmyra stems that is mounted by those who desire union.”³⁴

“A woman does not mount the horse of palmyra stems that is experienced
due to desire like the ocean; there is no greater propriety.”³⁵

“The maiden, wearing small bracelets like a garland, gave sorrow that is experienced
in the evening along with the horse of palmyra stems.”³⁶

“I intend to ride the horse of palmyra stems indeed even at midnight;
closing my eyes is not possible due to the innocent girl.”³⁷

“The body and the soul that cannot endure mount the horse of palmyra stems,
having abandoned modesty completely.”³⁸

“For those who suffered having experienced pleasure there is no support
except for the horse of palmyra stems as a relief.”³⁹

³³ Verse 1134: *kāmak kaṭumpuṇal uykkumē nāṇoṭu / nallāṇmai eṇṇum puṇai*. All citations from the Tamil text follow *Tirukkuṛaḷ uraikottu: Kāmattuppāl* (Tiruppaṇantāl: Śrī Kācimaṭam, 1970), and transliterations separate words according to the requirements of the meter. For the sake of ease, I follow the numbering of the verses that appears in modern editions. All translations from the Tamil are mine unless otherwise indicated.

³⁴ Verse 1133: *nāṇoṭu nallāṇmai paṇṭuṭaiyē nīṇṟuṭaiyē / kāmurār ēru maṭal*.

³⁵ Verse 1137: *kaṭalaṇṇa kāmam uḷantum maṭalērāp / peṇṇir peruntakka til*.

³⁶ Verse 1135: *toṭalaik kuṇuntoṭi tantāl maṭaloṭu / mālai uḷakkum tuyar*.

³⁷ Verse 1136: *maṭalūrtal yāmattum uḷhuvēṇ maṇra / paṭalollā pētaikken kaṇ*.

³⁸ Verse 1132: *nōṇā uṭampum uyirum maṭalērum / nāṇinai nīkki nīruttu*.

³⁹ Verse 1131: *kāmam uḷantu varuntiṇār kēmam / maṭalalla tillai vali*.

“Thinking that everyone is unaware,
my desire wanders confused along the road.”⁴⁰

“Without regard for those who are worthy of reserve and those who greatly need protection,
desire becomes public surpassing concealment.”⁴¹

“Fools laugh visible before my eyes because of not enduring themselves
what is endured by me.”⁴²

How, then, would a model reader approach this chapter and begin to make sense of the verses as an organic whole? First, the reader might look for clues about who is speaking within the context of the chapter as a whole. While the title alone does not provide any information about whether this speaker is the hero or heroine, there are two verses that provide a clear indication of the speaker. One verse states the following: “The raft that is manhood, along with modesty, is carried away indeed by the swift flood of desire.” First, since the verse describes the abandonment of manhood (*nallāṇmai*), the model reader assumes that the chapter focuses on the experience of the hero rather than the heroine and that the rest of this chapter should be read with that context in mind. Second, the verse juxtaposes “manhood” and “modesty” (*nāṇ*), stating that both qualities have been carried away like a raft. The verse thus orients the reader to the fact that we are in a literary world in which things are not as they were and not as they *should* be, since both manhood and modesty are praised in other parts of the *Tirukkuraḷ*. Third, the verse blames the loss of manhood and modesty on a “swift flood of desire” (*kāmak kaṭumpuṇal*). Interestingly, it is “desire” or “pleasure” (*kāmam*)—the very subject of the *Kāmatuppāl*—that carries away the hero’s manhood and modesty. The model reader of the text begins to question the relationship

⁴⁰ Verse 1139: *arīkilār ellārum eṇṇēyeṇ kāmam / marukiṇ marukum maruṇṭu*.

⁴¹ Verse 1138: *niṇraiariyar maṇṇaḷiyar eṇṇātu kāmam / maraiyirantu maṇṇu paṭum*.

⁴² Verse 1140: *yāmkannīr kāṇa nakupa aṇivillār / yāmpaṭṭa tāmpaṭā vāru*.

between pleasure and virtue and wonder whether pleasure is in fact an obstacle to the cultivation of virtue emphasized in earlier parts of the text.

A second verse takes up a similar theme and offers further clues about who is speaking: “I possessed before manhood along with modesty; I possess now the horse of palmyra stems that is mounted by those who desire union.” Once again, the qualities of manhood and modesty are juxtaposed by the speaker, and the use of the first-person singular verbal ending indicates that the speaker of this verse has previously possessed those qualities.⁴³ Here, the use of the first-person verbal form suggests that these verses are not only *about* the hero but also *uttered by* the hero; the model reader can use the verses to construct the larger literary context of the chapter and the perspective from which the verses are rendered. If we take the hero as the speaker, we see that he compares his past state of existence to his present one, stating that while he possessed manhood and modesty in the past, he now possesses the horse of palmyra stems, or *maṭal*. As discussed in chapter 1 of this project, the *maṭal* is a common trope in classical Tamil literature in which the hero mounts a horse sculpture made of jagged palmyra stems and rides it around the village with a portrait of his lover in his hand to proclaim his love to the village and hasten his marriage to the heroine.⁴⁴ The verse as a whole suggests that the hero abandons his manhood and modesty by riding upon the *maṭal* due to his overwhelming love for the heroine.

⁴³ In both cases, the verbal form is *uṭaiyēṇ* (“I will possess”), which attains a past tense meaning when it follows *paṇṭu* (“before”) as in “I possessed before,” and a present tense meaning when it follows *inru* (“now”) as in “I possess now.”

⁴⁴ It is difficult to know whether such a practice was common historically, but references to the horse of palmyra stems abound in early Tamil literature, including much of the *akam* (“interior”) corpus and the *Tolkāppiyam*. As discussed in chapter 1, such references in the *Tirukkural* suggest an anticipated audience that is thoroughly versed in Tamil poetics and the literary conventions circulating at the time. For further references to the horse of palmyra stems, see *Tolkāppiyam in English*, trans. V. Murugan (Chennai: Institute of Asian Studies, 2000), 384; Takanobu Takahashi, *Tamil Love Poetry and Poetics* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 103-117.

The next verse further clarifies the identity of the speaker in the context of this chapter: “A woman does not mount the horse of palmyra stems that is experienced due to desire like the ocean; there is no greater propriety.” The first part of the verse states that women do not mount the *maṭal* when they are overcome by desire, suggesting that it is a practice that is done only by men, while the second half of the verse comments upon this fact about women, stating that there is no greater propriety. This verse solidifies the reader’s sense that the speaker in this chapter is the hero rather than the heroine, while continuing to refer to the hero’s need to ride upon the *maṭal* as a sign of his love and affection. The verse thus connects the gendered dimensions of the practice with the possession of “propriety” (*takkatu*). The implication seems to be that women possess an ability to bear the pain of overwhelming desire quietly while men feel compelled to act it out publicly, even if they lose some element of their manhood and modesty in the process.

Another verse builds upon these themes: “The maiden, wearing small bracelets like a garland, gave sorrow that is experienced in the evening along with the horse of palmyra stems.” Here, rather than refer to women in general terms, the hero as speaker focuses on the woman who is the direct cause of his present state, describing her as a maiden wearing small bracelets. The hero casts the blame directly on her, stating that she causes both the sorrow that comes in the evening as well as his need to ride the *maṭal*. In the context of classical Tamil literature, it is the evening time that is best suited for lovers’ meetings, often paired with the mountain landscape. In separation from the heroine, the hero recalls their previous encounters and suffers as a result of his present separation from her. The hero further casts blame on the heroine for his riding the *maṭal* around the village, implying that it is her own action that led him to do this practice. In both this verse and the previous verse above, the hero articulates two distinct arguments about women’s conduct. First, the hero holds up women as exemplary in their conduct vis-à-vis men,

for they bear the pain of desire without resorting to the *maṭal*. Second, the hero then *blames* the heroine for his own present state of sorrow and his decision to take up the *maṭal*.

The combined literary effect of these verses is that the reader empathizes with the hero and his plight as each successive verse reveals his increasing emotional turmoil. While at this point the broader ethical implications of this chapter remain ambiguous, two major themes have emerged. First, the verses suggest that there is sometimes a tension between the expectations of a society and how one experiences those very expectations. While the heroine must adhere to social norms governing how women behave, carefully guarding her own expressions of desire, the hero's speech at times has an almost sarcastic, scolding quality as he praises her propriety while at the same time blaming her for the sorrow that led him to take up the *maṭal*. The contrast between the heroine's adherence to modesty and propriety and the hero's inability to conform to those same virtues frames certain questions for the model reader. How do we account for the fact that our experience of the world is often overpowered by our emotions? How do we face the fact that we sometimes abandon certain virtues in order to act out our emotions publicly? Second, the model reader will pick up on the gendered dynamics of these verses, which suggest that the hero is allowed to act out his desire by riding upon the *maṭal* while the heroine is expected to conform to the norms of modesty and propriety at all times. What are the different normative expectations of men and women? How does gender enable or exclude certain modes of action? What exactly is the relationship between virtue (*aṛam*) and pleasure (*kāmam*) if the latter can present such an obstacle to the successful attainment of the former?

Building upon these themes, three verses underscore the hero's mounting state of frenzy and anguish at his separation from the heroine with continual references to the *maṭal*. In one verse, the hero declares: "I intend to ride the horse of palmyra stems indeed even at midnight;

closing my eyes is not possible due to the innocent girl.” Here, the hero emphasizes that he will continue riding the *maṭal* through the village even at night, as the memory of the heroine and his present state of longing for her prevent him from sleeping. In another verse, the hero proclaims: “The body and the soul that cannot endure mount the horse of palmyra stems, having abandoned modesty completely.” The hero highlights his physical and emotional anguish by declaring that both his body and his soul are incapable of enduring separation from the heroine, causing him to abandon his modesty and mount the *maṭal*. In yet another verse, the hero underscores his plight: “For those who suffered having experienced pleasure there is no support except for the horse of palmyra stems as a relief.” In this verse, the hero proclaims that he has no other recourse but the *maṭal* as a form of relief from his current state of suffering. Structurally, the verse ties the hero’s suffering directly to the experience of pleasure, which can be taken by the reader to mean that the experience of pleasure precedes but also leads to suffering. In other words, the hero refers to those who have suffered *as a result of* their experience of pleasure. The status of pleasure as a positive dimension of human life and one that coheres easily with virtue is thus further called into question by the verse.

Two more verses raise additional questions for the reader about how pleasure infringes upon one’s ability to do what is right. In one verse, the hero says: “Thinking that everyone is unaware, my desire wanders confused along the road.” The poetic ambiguity of this verse is indicative of the hero’s own state of confusion as he wanders the village. In the first half, the hero assumes that the people of the village are unaware of his love affair and present state of longing. Presumably, this assumption is what led him to ride the *maṭal* around the village, as described in the verses above, in order to publicize his affair and encourage the heroine to reunite with him. In the second half, the hero declares that “my desire” (*eṇ kāmam*) wanders on the road

in a state of confusion. Here, desire functions as a metaphor for the hero himself, wandering aimlessly and helplessly around the village in search of his beloved; again, the presence of desire infringes upon the hero's ability to discern clearly the proper course of action. While virtue (*aṛam*) is not explicitly mentioned in the verse, desire (*kāmaṁ*) is clearly the primary cause of the hero wandering along the road in a state of confusion, and, in the context of the rest of the chapter, the cause for the hero's decision to ride the *maṭal* through the village. Further, the very propriety of riding on the *maṭal* has been called into question by the other verses in the chapter, suggesting that the hero's desire may in fact be the direct cause of his inability to pursue the proper course of action.

Another verse continues to explore these themes: "Without regard for those who are worthy of reserve and those who greatly need protection, desire becomes public surpassing concealment." The core of the verse indicates that the hero's quest for his desire to become publicly known has been successful; his desire has become known to the village after it passed the point of concealment. On another level, the reader may notice a subtle tension in the chapter as a whole. Does the hero want to publicize his desire, or does he want to conceal it but cannot do so due to the fact that his desire overwhelms him? Is this verse even uttered by the hero, or have we shifted to a different perspective?⁴⁵ The verse itself remains ambiguous about the exact meaning it intends to convey and the identity of the speaker. Regardless of how the model reader might answer these questions, it is clear that the desire of at least one of the lovers, if not both, has reached a breaking point and passed the point of concealment. The tension between publicity

⁴⁵ We might consider, for example, the fact that the medieval commentators attribute this verse to a moment in the discourse between the heroine and her confidante rather than to the hero. Parimēlaḷakar introduces this verse with the following comment: "What is said during the great increase of desire while in confinement for protection" (*kāppuc ciraṭ mikkuk kāmaṁ perukiya vaḷic colliyatū*). See *Tirukkuraḷ uraikkottu: Kāmattuppāl*, 72.

and concealment that runs through the chapter again highlights the gendered dynamics of the text, in which the hero may publicize his desire while the heroine must hide her own, and it raises the perpetual question of whether desire (*kāma*) is an obstacle to virtuous conduct.

One final verse in the chapter says: “Fools laugh visible before my eyes because of not enduring themselves what is endured by me.” In acting as model readers, we assume that this verse is spoken by the hero, who refers to those laughing in front of him as “fools” because they do not understand his experience. The verse suggests that the hero’s effort to publicize his affair by riding the *maṭal* around the village has been successful and that his desire has become known publicly. However, rather than empathize with his plight, the villagers laugh at the hero’s misery. He rationalizes this response by declaring that they can only mock him because they themselves have never faced the misery that he must endure. This verse thus sets up an interesting contrast between personal experience and general experience. While the world generally does not behave as the hero does, abandoning manhood and modesty by dramatically riding a *maṭal* around town, the hero suggests that his experience exempts him from the bounds of normal worldly conduct. Those who laugh are fools for doing so, for they do not understand his experience and they do not recognize how it has transformed him. The verse thus invites the reader to consider the extent to which individual experience can transcend or transgress the expectations of society. While the hero clearly sees his experience as unique, thus releasing him from the usual obligations of manhood, modesty, and propriety, the reader must confront this question in light of the chapter as a whole and consider whether individual experience, even in extreme situations, should ever constitute an exception to the general rules of how a person ought to behave.

How, then, do we make sense of these verses together? How should the model reader of the text construe them as part of an integrated whole? In what ways do the *Tirukkural*’s literary

strategies shape the reader in this chapter from the *Kāmatuppāl* as a whole? When reading the verses out of order—that is, out of the order in which they are regularly published today—the reader must look for ways to organize the content of the verses thematically. Here, this process involves looking for clues about the rhetorical context of each verse, which in turn provides evidence about the identity of the speaker of each isolated utterance. As discussed above, many of these verses seem to reflect the perspective of the hero as he is filled with desire, brooding in separation from his beloved, and compelled to publicize his love for the heroine by riding on a *maṭal* around the village. The reader also notes the gendered dynamics of these verses, in which the hero abandons his manhood and modesty in taking up the *maṭal*, while the heroine is said to withhold herself from making such public displays of affection. In this way, the chapter outlines a different set of norms for men and women generally; while men are allowed to publicly act out their emotional distress, women are expected to preserve their modesty and propriety. Finally, the reader perceives a certain tension between virtue (*aṛam*) and desire (*kāma*) throughout the chapter. While chapter 2 of this project illustrated how the *Aṛattuppāl* and *Kāmatuppāl* function as part of a unified whole to convey a vision of human life in which the inward cultivation of virtue prepares one for the complexities of love and marriage, here the literary strategies at work within this chapter destabilize that harmonious vision by inviting the reader to ask whether or not pleasure might in fact be an *obstacle* to the cultivation of virtue.

As a whole, the chapter encourages the reader to construe its content in narrative terms as he organizes the verses into a coherent pattern and imagines the scene unfolding in real time. This narrative framing of the text does important ethical work on behalf of the *Tirukkuraḷ* by establishing a kind of paradox or tension between virtue and pleasure. The chapter suggests to the reader that we live in a world where pleasure sometimes infringes on one's ability to act

according to virtue, even though the *Tirukkural* as a whole conceives of both virtue and pleasure as fundamental components of human life. The literary strategies that become apparent when we read the verses out of order invite the reader to grapple with the tension between these two facets of human life and to face the reality of a world in which the pursuit of virtue is often thwarted by the pursuit of other equally viable ends. In these ways, then, the literary strategies at work within the *Tirukkural*'s chapters frame ethical questions in narrative terms and illustrate that the pursuit of the ethical life is rarely if ever straightforward, thus complicating the ideal vision of human life operating at the level of the whole.

Part II: Reading Verses "In Order"

A second approach to reading the *Tirukkural* at the level of its chapters examines how its literary strategies work upon the reader who engages the verses of a single chapter with a fixed sense of their arrangement. As described above, this mode of reading captures the experience of reading the text as it would be done by most readers today, after the order of verses has become regularized according to the arrangement of Parimēlaḷakar's commentary in modern editions and translations of the text. Building upon the method of reading the *Tirukkural*'s chapters outlined above, I will show that we can also find patterns of meaning when we read the verses "in order," that is, the order in which they are almost always published today, that illustrate how the *Tirukkural* uses the interplay of verses within the context of a single chapter to complicate and destabilize the vision of human life operating at the level of the whole.

As an example of how this process unfolds, let us turn to a chapter in the *Poruṭpāl* on "Purity in Action" (*viṇaittūymai*), which focuses on the ways in which a person should act in accordance with virtue and with a proper orientation toward the world. Again, I provide the full set of verses in the order in which they will be discussed below:

The goodness of friendship gives prosperity;
the goodness of action gives all that is desired.⁴⁶

Always one should avoid—when it does not bring about
virtue along with fame—action.⁴⁷

They should avoid an action done that ruins fame—
those who think of greatness.⁴⁸

Those who do not do what is disgraceful, even in distress,
are those whose view does not waver.⁴⁹

One should not do what will be regretted sorrowfully;
even if one does, it is better not to do such a thing again.⁵⁰

Even if one sees the hunger of his mother, one should not do
an action that will be condemned by wise people.⁵¹

Even the poverty that befalls wise people is better than
the prosperity that is obtained having taken upon vice.⁵²

For those who did actions that are rejected,
even if they accomplish them, it causes distress.⁵³

Everything that was taken with crying leaves with crying;
even if they are lost, good things produce an after effect.⁵⁴

Securing wealth through an evil deed is like

⁴⁶ Verse 651: *tuṇainalam ākkam tarūm viṇainalam / vēṇṭiya ellām tarum*. All citations from the Tamil text follow *Tirukkuraḷ uraikottu: Poruṭpāl* (Tiruppaṇantāl: Śrī Kācīmaṭam, 2011), and transliterations separate words according to the requirements of the meter. For the sake of ease, I follow the numbering of the verses that appears in modern editions. All translations from the Tamil are mine unless otherwise indicated.

⁴⁷ Verse 652: *eṇṇum oruvutal vēṇṭum pukaḷoṭu / naṇṇi payavā viṇai*.

⁴⁸ Verse 653: *ōotal vēṇṭum oḷimāḷkum ceyviṇai / āatum eṇṇum avar*.

⁴⁹ Verse 654: *iṭukkaṭ paṭiṇum iḷivanta ceyyār / naṭukkaṛra kāṭci yavar*.

⁵⁰ Verse 655: *erren ṛiraṅkuva ceyyarka ceyvāṇēl / marraṇṇa ceyyāmai naṇṇu*.

⁵¹ Verse 656: *īṇṛāl pacikāṇpāṇ āyiṇum ceyyarka / cāṇṛōr paḷikkum viṇai*.

⁵² Verse 657: *paḷimalain teytiya ākkattir cāṇṛōr / kaḷinal kuravē talai*.

⁵³ Verse 658: *kaṭinta kaṭintorār ceytārṅ kavaitām / muṭintālum pīlai tarum*.

⁵⁴ Verse 659: *aḷakkoṇṭa ellām aḷappōm iḷappiṇum / pīrpayakkum naṇṇā lavai*.

securing water in an earthen vessel that is unbaked.⁵⁵

The chapter opens with the following: “The goodness of friendship gives prosperity; the goodness of action gives all that is desired.” The first half of the verse describes the benefits of friendship, noting that good friends lead to prosperity. The second half of the verse describes the benefits of good actions, observing that they provide a person with everything he desires. The contrast between the two claims is subtle: the goodness of friends gives *prosperity*, while the goodness of actions gives *everything that is desired*. Does “all that is desired” include prosperity as well as many other desirable things? The verse itself does not say, and the model reader must decide how to interpret it. Indeed, as we will see in chapter 4 of this project, this verse uses a literary strategy that I call “inference” to suggest to the reader that the goodness of action may bring more benefits than the goodness of friendship. Here, in the context of the larger chapter in which it appears, it is significant that the verse introduces the concept of purity in action (*viṇainalam*) by suggesting that it brings not only prosperity (*ākkam*), one of the key benefits of friendship, but also “all that is desired” (*vēṇṭiya ellām*). The model reader, sensitive to the subtle way in which the verse opens the chapter, is prepared for the rest of the content to come.

The second verse builds upon this theme: “Always one should avoid—when it does not bring about virtue along with fame—action.” In contrast to the previous verse, which emphasized the actions that a person *should* pursue, this verse makes the connection between virtue and action explicit through the prohibition of any action that does not lead to virtue.⁵⁶ The model reader recognizes that there is a field of possible actions available in any given situation

⁵⁵ Verse 660: *calattār poruḷceytē mārtaḷ pacumaḷ / kalattuḷnīr peytirī yarru*.

⁵⁶ In this verse, the term used for “virtue” (*naṇṇi*) is distinct from the term that we have seen elsewhere in the text as signifying “virtue” or “ethics” (*aṇam*), from which the *Aṇattuppāl* derives its name. We could translate *naṇṇi* quite literally as “goodness,” though it has a wide semantic range that often overlaps with that of *aṇam*. For this reason, I have translated it here as “virtue” and taken it to be a synonym for *aṇam*.

and that not every action will bring about virtue. In order to make sense of this verse, the model reader must imagine the various hypothetical actions that could be pursued, some of which bring about virtue and fame and some which do not. In this way, the model reader begins to think about action in narrative terms by imagining it in relation to virtue. As we will also see in chapter 4 of this project, this verse uses suspense as a literary strategy by withholding the word “action” (*vinai*) until the final metrical unit. As I will argue, suspense has the power to impact the reader in ethically significant ways by engaging him in a process of ethical questioning at the level of the individual verse. In this context, however, this verse underscores the fact that every action is connected to virtue in some way and reminds the reader that that no action is ethically neutral.

The following verses continue to build upon these themes. The third verse states: “They should avoid an action done that ruins fame—those who think of greatness.” This verse extends the narrative sequence of the chapter by picking up on the theme of “fame” or “renown” (*oli*). While the previous verse connected the pursuit of fame with the pursuit of virtue, this verse casts fame as an end in its own right. As the verse indicates, people who want to become great should not pursue action that will tarnish their reputation. The model reader of the chapter understands that, in this context, fame is what comes from the pursuit of virtue, embodied in this chapter by engaging in right actions that contribute to this pursuit. In this sense, fame is not a goal in its own right, such that one might resort to any kind of nefarious effort to achieve it, but something that occurs organically in the context of a life lived according to virtue. Here again, suspense is generated by withholding the identity of “those who think of greatness” until the second half of the verse, which has ethical implications for the reader that will be addressed in chapter 4.

A fourth verse extends these themes further: “Those who do not do what is disgraceful, even in distress, are those whose view does not waver.” Structurally, this verse equates “those

who do not do what is disgraceful” with “those whose view does not waver,” governed by the hypothetical formulation “even in distress.” The implication is that *only* those who avoid what is disgraceful, even in distress, have a view that does not waver. In the broader context of the chapter, the reader is able to draw some conclusions about what this verse wants to convey. For example, “what is disgraceful” (*iḷivanta*) may refer obliquely to the actions that do not bring about virtue and ruin a person’s fame described in the preceding verses. This verse adds another dimension to the narrative that has begun to emerge within the chapter by emphasizing the need to have a view that “does not waver” (*naṭukkara*). Such a view, the verse implies, allows one to perceive that disgraceful actions must be avoided even in a state of distress. In other words, there are no exceptions to the rules governing virtue: good actions should always be pursued and bad actions should always be avoided. In this way, the verse narrows the field of possible action that the reader must consider in the context of the larger chapter. Among the range of actions that could be pursued, “disgraceful” actions are strictly prohibited, even in distress.

The verses that follow continue to use hypothetical formulations to sharpen the model reader’s thinking and further clarify the nature of actions that should be pursued. The next verse states: “One should not do what will be regretted sorrowfully; even if one does, it is better not to do such a thing again.” At a basic level, the verse juxtaposes two ideas. First, the verse says that a person should not act in a way that will be regretted later and require expressions of sorrow for what was done. As readers, we are in the realm of the hypothetical present: such an action has not yet been done, and the intention of the verse is to discourage readers from acting in such a way in the future. Second, the verse shifts into a retrospective mode in which a regrettable action has already been done, telling the reader that it would be better not to make such a mistake again. While the first half of the verse is situated within the hypothetical present, in which a person

considers a course of action that has not yet been done, the second half of the verse is situated within the hypothetical future, in which a person looks back on something that has already been done. The verse thus extends the hypothetical mode of the chapter in a new temporal direction, building upon the existing narrative that has emerged as the reader moves through each verse in sequence and encouraging the reader to work out the hypothetical situations presented from a variety of temporal vantage points. The model reader, sensitive to this shift in temporal register, recognizes that the pursuit of purity in action, like the pursuit of virtue, is not easy. This verse invites the reader to consider those moments when the proper course of action is not pursued and how to correct for the mistakes that one inevitably makes along the way. In this way, the verse signals that the pursuit of the ethical life, and the actions that should accompany it, is complicated and fraught with the possibility of error.

The following verse states: “Even if one sees the hunger of his mother, one should not do an action that will be condemned by wise people.” Once again, the reader is brought back into the realm of the hypothetical present, imagining a future possibility and considering how one should act in that situation. In this case, the verse lays out an extreme scenario in which a person sees their own mother hungry and in need of help. Even in this most extreme situation, the verse prohibits any course of action that would be condemned by wise people (*cāṇṛōr*), using a hyperbolic example to engage the reader in a certain mode of ethical thinking. In this case, the verse asks the reader to confront the reality that ethical decision-making and human action are incredibly complex by presenting the most extreme ethical scenario conceivable. Even as the rest of the chapter orients the reader toward certain ways of acting, encouraging some choices while discouraging others, this verse invites the reader to pause and reflect on the difficult choices that have to be made in the pursuit of an ethical life. The model reader of this verse, sensitive to its

role in the narrative progression of the chapter, is faced with a number of questions. Does the *Tirukkuraḷ* actually expect readers to neglect their own starving mothers? What kind of world are we living in where the ethical life requires such commitments? The verse does not provide any answers to these questions, but it does provide a structure for the reader to ask them and reflect upon them.

The next verse in the chapter says: “Even the poverty that befalls wise people is better than the prosperity that is obtained having taken upon vice.” Again, the perspective of wise people (*cāṇṇrōr*) is emphasized, the very same wise people who in the previous verse condemned any course of action that would save one’s mother but go against what is acceptable to them. This verse compares the poverty of wise people with the prosperity of a person who commits a vice, emphasizing that, in such a scenario, poverty is preferable to prosperity. Again, the verse compels the reader to think about this juxtaposition in narrative terms. The reader must recognize that the right course of action may not always lead to wealth and prosperity—in fact, it may lead to poverty. Yet, doing the right thing while living in poverty is, according the verse, better than doing the wrong thing in order to attain prosperity. Again, the model reader of the chapter focuses on these hypothetical situations and picks up on the ways in which the chapter invites reflection on even the most extreme of possibilities. Just as in the previous verse the reader considered a choice of action in the context of wanting to help his starving mother, so too in reading this verse does the reader consider a range of possible actions. Here, the reader imagines an ethical scenario in which the proper course of action—that is, the action that is most aligned with virtue—may lead to poverty. Again, the reader confronts the reality of a world in which the pursuit of the ethical life is rife with difficult decisions.

The next verse builds upon the earlier hypothetical mode of the chapter: “For those who did actions that are rejected, even if they accomplish them, it causes distress.” This verse in particular is terse and requires the reader to fill in some of the information. The first part of the verse mentions those who did actions that are rejected; while the nature of these actions that are rejected is not spelled out clearly, the model reader might fill in the gaps here by following the narrative thread of the chapter. Presumably, any action that would be condemned by wise people (*cāṇṇrōr*), as mentioned in verse 656, is an action that is “rejected” in the broadest possible sense as an action that goes against what wise people accept and what is therefore virtuous. The second part of the verse introduces another hypothetical possibility, inviting the reader to imagine a world in which such people have in fact undertaken actions that are rejected. As the verse says, *even if* they accomplish those actions, such behavior causes distress. Here, at least two additional themes emerge. First, the verse indicates that action for action’s sake does not necessarily align with virtue, and, in many cases, it may in fact contravene the ethical principles laid out by the text. As the earlier verses indicated, purity in action is a particular kind of orientation that is reflected in one’s ability to choose the proper course of action and avoid action that leads one away from the cultivation of virtue. Second, the verse suggests that action can cause distress, perhaps both to the person who acted regrettably and to those who observe such behavior. In other words, actions have real and lingering consequences in the world. The model reader, highly attuned to this fact through the sequence of verses in this chapter, recognizes that the process of ethical reflection must include weighing the potential consequences of any course of action.

The next verse states: “Everything that was taken with crying leaves with crying; even if they are lost, good things produce an after effect.” Structurally, this verse mirrors the one above it, opening with a basic assertion that all things taken with crying will also leave with crying. It is

up to the reader to fill in the blanks, and the verse seems to imply that there is a chain of cause and effect that results from any action. If someone takes something from another person in a way that upsets them, then what was taken will later be lost in a way that is equally upsetting. The second half of the verse introduces a contrast to such behavior. If someone does good things, even if what would have been taken is lost in the short-term, then the consequences will be felt by that person in the long-run. In each case, the model reader imagines a hypothetical situation in which something has been lost. The first half of the verse presents a scenario in which the things that were stolen are later lost, while the second half of the verse imagines a scenario in which good things are initially lost but later gained. The model reader of this verse must consider the difference between these two scenarios in the context of a world in which nothing lasts forever. Despite the fact that all objects and actions are ephemeral, this verse compels the reader to consider how the proper course of action can benefit a person in the future.

The chapter concludes with a metaphor that summarizes the ethical framework that has been presented to the reader: “Securing wealth through an evil deed is like securing water in an earthen vessel that is unbaked.” In this verse, two types of action are juxtaposed for the reader. First, the verse presents a scenario in which wealth is secured through evil means. The reader must consider whether wealth secured in such a way is ever permissible. While the reader is primed to reject this possibility, the verse nevertheless facilitates a moment of tension by using the word *poruḷ* to signify “wealth,” the very same word that appears in the title of the section in which this chapter appears: the *Poruṭpāl*. Though the text presents wealth as a legitimate aim of human life, the reader confronts the possible limits on the means by which a person might secure this wealth. Next, the verse compares the act of securing wealth through evil deeds to the act of securing water by pouring it into an unbaked clay pot. The reader must work out this metaphor

by considering the utility of pouring water into an unbaked earthen vessel. Of course, such an action is not at all useful for a person who wants to preserve the water, as it will become absorbed into the unbaked vessel. Through this comparison, the verse encourages the reader to see the act of securing wealth through evil deeds as similarly useless. In this way, then, the chapter's final verse acts as a fitting capstone to the chapter as a whole, once again drawing the reader's attention to the ways in which the pursuit of action—even in the effort to pursue a larger, legitimate aim in the literary world of the *Tirukkural*—is restricted in highly specific and very significant ways.

How, then, does this chapter contribute to the ethical formation of the model reader? As we have seen, when the chapter is read “in order,” the first verse and last verse serve as thematic bookends that invite the reader to consider the relationship between ethical decision-making and prosperity. The opening verse implicitly decenters prosperity as a human goal by emphasizing that a person's good actions can yield *all* that is desired rather than mere prosperity alone, thus recasting prosperity as but one goal among many. The last verse discourages the acquisition of wealth through evil deeds, indicating that the ends do not justify the means even when it comes to wealth. Additionally, these verses use hypothetical imaginaries to encourage readers to frame moral choice within a broad field of possibilities. The verses in the first part of the chapter operate largely in the hypothetical present, inviting readers to imagine future scenarios in which they must decide how to act. Later, the verses become more structurally and temporally complex as the hypothetical present is juxtaposed alongside the hypothetical future. While a verse might discourage the reader from pursuing a particular course of action in the present, it might also invite the reader to imagine a future scenario in which that action has already been done.

As a whole, the literary strategies of this chapter instruct the reader to think about action in narrative terms, as unfolding over the long course of a human life marked by various choices. Some actions are imbued with ethical propriety and virtue while other actions are discouraged or forbidden. The model reader comes to see every action as saturated with ethical ramifications; in human life, there is no morally neutral action. While the sheer range of actions that could be undertaken at any given time is overwhelming, even then the verses do not let the reader off the hook, further upping the ante by playing with hypothetical scenarios and multiple temporalities. The literary strategies at work in this chapter thus disorient the reader in a way that mimics the disorientation of moral choice generally, thus illustrating the challenge of decision-making in the very reading experience. The model reader who is sensitive to these literary strategies will come to understand that we live in a world rife with ambiguity and complexity. While we should strive to act in accordance with virtue, we also recognize that every person must face difficult moral choices. The verses in this chapter thus further complicate and destabilize the idealized vision of human life presented at the level of the whole, suggesting that this ideal is not easy to attain.

Let us further consider how reading the *Tirukkural*'s verses "in order," as part of a fixed and stable arrangement, can draw our attention to the literary strategies operating at the level of the text's chapters and how those literary strategies engage the model reader in certain modes of ethical reflection. In doing so, we will turn to the *Kāmatuppāl*'s opening chapter, "Encountering a Beautiful Woman" (*takaiyaṇaṅkuruttal*), which marks a significant transition from the reading experience generated by the *Aṛattuppāl* and *Poruṭpāl*. Nevertheless, in acting as model readers of the text, we will see how this chapter also engages the reader certain modes of ethical reflection. In order, the verses are as follows:

"Is she a goddess? Is she indeed a precious peacock?

Is she a woman with a perfectly-made earring?” wonders my heart.⁵⁷

“Seeing in return the gaze of she who gazes back
is an attack of a goddess with an army.”⁵⁸

“I have not seen before that such as death, but now
I have seen the great warring eyes of a suitable woman.”⁵⁹

“The eyes of the innocent girl who is suitable make war
with a glance that takes the life of he who sees her.”⁶⁰

“Is it the God of Death? Is it eyes? Is it a doe?
The glance of the woman is all of these three.”⁶¹

“If averted without bending the eyebrows, the eyes of this woman
would never cause trembling distress.”⁶²

“The fine cloth on the unbending breasts of this woman
is the cloth adorning the face on an elephant that is wild.”⁶³

“Oh! My strength that is feared even by friends on the battlefield
is defeated indeed by the shining brow.”⁶⁴

“For she who possesses modesty and a bashful appearance like a doe,
what is the use of jewels on the exterior?”⁶⁵

“Toddy takes effect only in those who consume it, unlike pleasure
which produces happiness in those who see it.”⁶⁶

⁵⁷ Verse 1081: *aṇaṅkukol āymayil kollō kaṇaṅkuḷai / mātarkol mālumen neṅcu.*

⁵⁸ Verse 1082: *nōkkināḷ nōkkitir nōkkutal tākkaṇaṅku / tāṇaikkōṇ taṇṇa tuṭaittu.*

⁵⁹ Verse 1083: *paṇṭariyēṇ kūṟṟeṇ pataṇai iṇiyaṟintēṇ / peṇṭakaiyār pēramark kaṭṭu.*

⁶⁰ Verse 1084: *kaṇṭār uyiruṇṇum tōṟṟattāṇ peṇṭakaip / pēṭaik kamarttaṇa kaṇ.*

⁶¹ Verse 1085: *kūṟṟamō kaṇṇō piṇaiyō maṭavaral / nōkkamim mūṇṇum uṭaittu.*

⁶² Verse 1086: *koṭumpuruvam kōṭā maṟaippiṇ naṭuṅkaṇār / ceyyala maṇivaḷ kaṇ.*

⁶³ Verse 1087: *kaṭāk kaḷiṟṟiṇmēḷ kaṭpaṭām mātār / paṭāa mulaimēḷ tukil.*

⁶⁴ Verse 1088: *oṇṇutar kōo uṭaintatē ṇāṭpiṇuḷ / naṇṇārum uṭkumen pīṭu.*

⁶⁵ Verse 1089: *piṇaiyēr maṭanōkkum nāṇum uṭaiyāt / kaṇievaṇō ētila tantu.*

⁶⁶ Verse 1090: *uṇṭārkaṇ alla taṭunaṟāk kāmampōḷ / kaṇṭār maḷiḷceyṭal iṇru.*

The opening verse draws the reader into a literary world full of ambiguity and wonder: “‘Is she a goddess? Is she indeed a precious peacock? Is she a woman with a perfectly-made earring?’ wonders my heart.” Here, the speaker describes the experience of looking upon a figure whose beauty is so great that its true identity remains a mystery. As discussed in the previous section, the reader must discern the speaker of each verse in the *Kāmatuppāl* through a careful consideration of its content and its placement in the overall structure of the text. Here, the verse provides several clues that suggest that it is rendered through the hero’s perspective rather than the heroine’s perspective. The questioner asks whether the figure is a goddess, a peacock, or a woman with perfect earrings; notably absent from the list is any indication that the figure could be a man. While the verse itself is ambiguous, the model reader of the text nevertheless might venture a guess that the verse is articulated from the perspective of the hero as he gazes upon the heroine, evidently for the very first time.

How, the model reader might ask, does the content of this opening verse contribute to the larger processes of ethical formation discussed above? On its own, the verse does not articulate any kind of clear moral framework in the sense of telling the reader how he might act in a given situation. Yet, the verse sets up a literary world, for both its chapter and the larger *Kāmatuppāl*, in which indecision and ambiguity reign supreme. This literary vision of a world replete with ambiguity cultivates certain modes of reflection within the model reader, who anticipates a certain tension between the *Tirukkural*’s larger vision of human life and the literary world being constructed within the *Kāmatuppāl*’s opening chapter. The mysterious figure is so beautiful that the speaker is unable to perceive its true identity, wondering whether it is a goddess, a peacock, or a beautifully-adorned woman. In a state of confusion, the speaker asks about the identity of the figure, but the verse leaves the question unresolved. As a result, the reader enters a literary

world in which doubt and uncertainty loom large, and in which questions do not always have easy answers. As we will see, this opening verse will have lasting significance for the ethical reflection that takes place within the mind of the reader as he moves through the chapter.

The second verse moves this narrative tension forward: “Seeing in return the gaze of she who gazes back is an attack of a goddess with an army.” Once again, the reader engages with the internal monologue of the hero as he gazes upon the figure described in the previous verse. This verse builds the dramatic tension of the chapter by describing the moment when the hero and the mysterious figure lock eyes and acknowledge each other for the first time. Speaking to himself, the hero compares the gaze of this figure to an attack by a goddess with her retinue of warriors. Significantly, this verse does not claim that the figure *is* a goddess, but rather that her gaze is like the experience of being attacked by a goddess. Thus, the reading experience that is generated for the reader as he moves from the first verse to the second continues to be marked by ambiguity and uncertainty. Like the hero, the reader does not yet know whether the figure is a goddess, a peacock, a woman, or something else entirely. In this way, the literary strategies that emerge when reading the *Tirukkuraḷ* in this way begin to work upon the model reader who is sensitive to the strategic use of ambiguity that heightens the tension of the chapter.

As the model reader continues to read the verses in sequence, the third verse states: “I have not seen before that such as death, but now I have seen the great warring eyes of a suitable woman.” This verse finally resolves the chapter’s narrative tension by describing the figure as a “suitable woman” (*peṇṭakai*), indicating that the hero has finally recognized the figure as a woman who is suitable for a love affair and an eventual marriage. The hero focuses once more on the woman’s gaze, describing her great warring eyes and comparing them to the experience of death. The fourth verse utilizes similar imagery: “The eyes of the innocent girl who is suitable

make war with a glance that takes the life of he who sees her.” Again, the hero describes the glance of the young woman as “making war” with him, heightening the dramatic tension of the chapter by describing in poetic terms how the powerful glance takes the life of anyone who gazes back at her. At the same time, the hero describes her as an “innocent girl” (*pētai*), suggesting that she is youthful and inexperienced in the ways of the world. The juxtaposition of the woman’s youth and innocence alongside the fierceness of her war-like glance indicates the discrepancy between the nature of the heroine’s identity and disposition and the hero’s dramatic experience of encountering her for the first time and watching as she returns his glances.

These two verses focus on the hero’s experience of meeting the glance of the heroine for the first time, playing with the fact that he experiences her both as an innocent girl and as a war-like figure with the power to take his life. The tension between his two ways of seeing her is indicative of the larger literary strategies at work within the chapter. While the opening verses brought the reader into a literary world marked by ambiguity and uncertainty, these two verses highlight our often contradictory ways of perceiving and experiencing the world. The model reader, sensitive to this tension, recognizes that we may at times find ourselves confused by our own emotions and desires. Like the hero, we find it difficult to see things as they really are, or we may see things in more ways than one. That our perception is often variegated in this way has enormous significance for the process of ethical cultivation encouraged by the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a whole, further underscoring the complexity of the world in which we live.

In the fifth verse, the hero asks himself yet another question: “Is it the God of Death? Is it eyes? Is it a doe? The glance of the woman is all of these three.” While this verse mirrors the interrogative structure of the opening verse, it concludes with a definitive answer. As the hero gazes into the heroine’s eyes, he wonders whether he is looking at the face of death, eyes alone,

or a doe. He answers his own question by asserting that the heroine's glance is all three, thus affirming the heroine's identity while also using rhetorical questions to describe his experience of seeing her. By comparing the heroine's glance to death, the hero implies that she is fierce and terrifying. At the same time, by comparing her glance to a doe, he suggests that she is also innocent and gentle. The paradox lies in the fact that, for the hero, the heroine is both a terrifying war-like figure reminiscent of the God of Death *and* an innocent young woman reminiscent of a doe. In this way, the verse continues to highlight the tension between the hero's two drastically different experiences of the heroine and the complexity of the world around us.

In the sixth verse, the hero states: "If averted without bending the eyebrows, the eyes of this woman would never cause trembling distress." The hero presents a hypothetical scenario to the reader by stating that if only the heroine would avert her gaze with brows unmoved, her eyes would not cause him such distress. This verse heightens the dramatic tension of the chapter as the hero and heroine see each other from a distance, indicating that the hero remains indecisive about how to approach the heroine and uncertain about how to interpret her glance as she gazes back at him. Rather than pursuing a specific course of action, the hero is frozen in place as a result of his distress. As a result, he focuses on his desire for the heroine to avert her gaze without casting a mean or judgmental look through the bend of her eyebrows. Though his initial confusion regarding the heroine's identity seems to have been clarified at this point, the hero remains indecisive and uncertain about how to proceed.

The seventh verse adds further detail to the heroine's adornment as the hero continues to gaze upon her: "The fine cloth on the unbending breasts of this woman is the cloth adorning the face on an elephant that is wild." This verse shifts the narrative of the chapter from a focus on the heroine's gaze to the beautiful garments that adorn her chest. The hero underscores the heroine's

beauty and youth, emphasized above, by describing her perfect “unbending” breasts and the fine cloth that she wears as he admires her. However, the hero compares her clothing to the decorative garment used to cover the eyes of an elephant (*kaṭpaṭām*). By introducing this comparison, the hero once again reminds the reader of the heroine’s gaze, for, unlike the ornamental cloth that covers an elephant’s eyes, the heroine’s adornment falls over her chest alone. At the same time, the hero reminds the reader of his experience of the heroine’s glance as fierce and intense by specifying that the elephant is wild or aggressive (*kaṭākkalīru*). Again, the hero experiences a paradox as he gazes upon the heroine: on the one hand, she is beautifully adorned, as indicated by the fine cloth that covers her perfect breasts, but on the other hand, that cloth is like the adornment placed over the eyes of a wild elephant. This verse adds to the complexity of the hero’s experience by building upon the chapter’s narrative account of the hero’s experience. Even as he recognizes the heroine as a suitable woman and begins to perceive more details about her, he is unable to overcome his feelings of distress and peril at the thought of encountering her.

The next verse underscores the hero’s mental and emotional state: “Oh! My strength that is feared even by friends on the battlefield is defeated indeed by the shining brow.” The hero cries out to himself about his current physical state, linking the strength that he exhibited on the battlefield in the past with his present lack of strength under the heroine’s gaze. While in the past the hero exhibited such enormous strength in battle that he was feared even by his friends, he is not able to exhibit that strength in front of the heroine and declares that he is defeated by her shining brow. This verse further underscores the ways in which the hero’s encounter with the heroine has transformed him from his usual self. In meeting the heroine, he becomes a version of

himself that is unrecognizable to those who knew him before, and he is now marked by his inability to act in a way that would be recognizable to his friends.

The final two verses of the chapter mark something of a transition in the hero's state of mind, as he focuses on the heroine's appearance with an apparent sense of calm. First, the hero asks: "For she who possesses modesty and a bashful appearance like a doe, what is the use of jewels on the exterior?" The hero's description of the heroine turns away from his earlier focus on the fierceness of her gaze, focusing instead on her bashful appearance, comparing her to a doe, and describing her as modest. He asks whether there is any need for the heroine to be decorated with jewels; the implied answer, of course, is that there is no need, for the heroine already possesses an appearance that is beautiful in its modesty. The tenth and final verse of the chapter states: "Toddy takes effect only in those who consume it, unlike pleasure which produces happiness in those who see it." Here, the hero juxtaposes two different experiences to bring out the contrast between them. In the first half of the verse, the hero observes that alcoholic beverages only affect those who consume them. In the second half of the verse, the hero asserts that happiness can be produced merely by seeing the pleasure experienced by others. The literary effect of this juxtaposition is that the power of pleasure, said to have an effect that is even greater than toddy, becomes illuminated for the reader. Thus, the narrative of the chapter ends on a tranquil and almost upbeat note, with the hero turning away from his earlier emotional torment and emphasizing the pleasure he feels, and the happiness that others may feel by seeing it.

How, then, is the model reader shaped by the literary strategies of this chapter? When we read the verses in order—that is, in the order in which they are published today—the reader is immediately drawn into a literary world marked by ambiguity through the appearance of an unknown, anonymous figure. The opening verse establishes the rhetorical context of the chapter,

as an equally anonymous speaker wonders aloud about the identity of the mysterious figure. The model reader must make an interpretive decision about the identity of the speaker (most likely the hero) and the mysterious figure (most likely the heroine). The next several verses track the hero's emotional experience as he gazes at the heroine and is overwhelmed by the power of her glance. As the reader progresses through the chapter, a tension arises due to the hero's confused and contradictory ways of seeing the heroine; the model reader thus recognizes the fact that our perception is often clouded by our emotional experience of the world. Even after the hero reconciles his competing visions of the heroine, he is indecisive about how to act toward her and becomes overwhelmed at the thought of how she might react to him. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the hero's total loss of courage before the heroine. Though his strength on the battlefield is famous, the heroine's beauty renders him incapacitated; he can only praise her and describe how her glance fills him with pleasure.

Though this chapter does not address ethical dilemmas as we would normally recognize them, and it certainly does not offer the reader any prescriptions for how to behave in the world, this chapter nevertheless encourages the reader to render its content in narrative terms, which in turn contributes to the *Tirukkural*'s larger ethical project. The chapter suggests to the reader that ambiguity lies at the heart of the human experience and that our perception of the world is often clouded by our emotions, thus hindering the clarity of our thoughts and actions. The literary strategies that emerge when we read the verses in order force the reader to confront the fact that ethical deliberation always takes place in a world in which our perception is limited and our judgment is often clouded by emotion. In this way, the literary strategies at work in the opening chapter of the *Kāmatuppāl* further destabilize the ideal vision of human life operating at the level of the text as a whole and, in doing so, render that vision increasingly opaque.

Part III: Reading Verses in Tension

A third and final mode of reading the *Tirukkuraḷ* at the level of its chapters examines how the text deliberately juxtaposes seemingly contradictory verses in order to generate a moment of tension within the text that needs to be worked out by the reader. As described above, this mode of reading focuses on the interplay of just two or three verses within a single chapter rather than all ten verses as a unit. Building upon the method of reading used in the previous two sections, which traced the literary strategies of the text through the eyes of the model reader, I will show how the *Tirukkuraḷ* uses these moments of tension to further its narrative vision of an ethically complex world. In doing so, the vision of human life operating at the level of the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a whole is stretched almost to the breaking point as these verses force the reader to face the reality of a world in which the pursuit of an ethical life is rarely if ever straightforward.

Let us begin by considering a chapter in the *Arattuppāl* on “Not Having Envy” (*aḷukkārāmai*). Toward the end of the chapter, three verses introduce a layer of doubt into the text and begin to obscure what has otherwise been a relatively straightforward account of the pitfalls of envy. In order, the verses are as follows:

The crook called envy, having destroyed
one’s wealth, leads one into hell.⁶⁷

The prosperity of one whose mind is corrupt, and the loss
of a virtuous person, should be considered.⁶⁸

Those who had envy are not those who prospered;
those who are without it are not those who lost wealth.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Verse 168: *aḷukkā reṇaoru pāvi tiruccerṇrut / tīyulī uyttu viṭum*.

⁶⁸ Verse 169: *avviya neñcattāṇ ākkamum cevviyāṇ / kēṭum niṇaiḱkap paṭum*.

⁶⁹ Verse 170: *aḷukkaṇ ṛakaṇṇārum illaiḱ tillār / perukkattiṇ tīrntārum il*.

The first verse articulates the following idea: “The crook called envy, having destroyed one’s wealth, leads one into hell.” This verse introduces the premise that envy brings about the loss of wealth and leads a person to hell. It suggests to the reader that envy is a quality to be avoided, for the person who possesses it will face dire consequences. The final verb, “leads” (*uyttu viṭum*), is in the non-past form, indicating present and future tense simultaneously, with an auxiliary verb attached to it that intensifies the meaning of the action as a whole.⁷⁰ The non-past form of the verb, along with the intensification of the auxiliary verb, encompasses the other verbal element of the verse, “having destroyed” (*ceṛru*).⁷¹ The significance of these verbal forms is that they create a sense of certainty within the verse as a whole and a sense that envy will—beyond a shadow of a doubt—destroy a person’s wealth and lead that person to hell. Even further, the use of a non-past final verb indicates that this result *is* happening currently and *will always* happen to anyone who has envy in the future. There is thus a confidence in the verse’s assertion that the model reader will pick up on when reading the verse.

The next verse, however, seems to contradict this claim: “The prosperity of one whose mind is corrupt, and the loss of a virtuous person, should be considered.” This verse introduces a rather different idea: a person whose mind is corrupt will sometimes attain wealth and prosperity, while a virtuous person will sometimes experience the loss of wealth. According to the verse, this paradox, in which virtuous people suffer and corrupt people experience reward, “should be

⁷⁰ The verb in the verse (*uyttu viṭum*) is formed from the combination of a root verb meaning “to lead” (*uy-ttal*) and the auxiliary verb that adds certainty and intensification (*viṭu-tal*). Together, and in the non-past form in which the verb appears in the verse, the meaning becomes something like “certainly leads” or “most definitely will lead.”

⁷¹ Here, the metrical unit as a whole (*tiruceṛrut*) contains an adverbial participle whose root means “to destroy” (*ceṛu-tal*) and the word for wealth (*tiru*), which is translated above as “having destroyed one’s wealth.”

considered” by the reader.⁷² While this verse introduces a classic philosophical conundrum, pondering a world in which good things happen to bad people while bad things happen to good people, there is a tension that arises from reading this verse alongside the preceding one. As we saw, the previous verse states quite firmly that envy, referred to as a kind of “crook,” will now and forever destroy one’s wealth and lead one to hell. This verse, however, seemingly contradicts that claim, saying that a person whose mind is corrupt (presumably with envy) will sometimes prosper. The model reader, sensitive to this subtle shift in direction from one verse to the next, must face the challenge of reading these verses together within the context of a single chapter and understanding their content in a coherent and meaningful way.

A third verse further complicates matters: “Those who had envy are not those who prospered; those who are without it are not those who lost wealth.” This verse returns us to the original idea articulated in the first verse: envy destroys wealth and prevents a person from obtaining prosperity. The implied meaning is that having envy causes the loss of wealth, while avoiding envy brings prosperity and success. This verse also changes the temporal register of the chapter by rendering the verbs in the past tense, suggesting to the reader that the results have been seen in the past and are proven to be true.⁷³ This verse, along with verse 168 cited above, makes a case for the pitfalls of envy. The premise of both verses is that envious people do not prosper. The shift in temporal register from the use of a non-past verb in verse 168 to a past-tense verb in verse 170 further underscores that point: envy ruins a person’s wealth and leads to

⁷² The verb in the verse translated above as “should be considered” (*niṇaikkappaṭum*) also appears in the non-past verbal form, indicating that the paradox should be considered now and at all times in which it might occur in the future.

⁷³ The verbal forms are juxtaposed in two pairs. The first pair consists of “those who had envy” (*aḷukkarru*) and “those who prospered” (*akaṇṇārūm*), while the second pair consists of “those who are without (envy)” (*illār*) and “those who lost (wealth)” (*tīrntārūm*).

hell now and in the future, while the loss of wealth by those who have envy has already been seen in the world. At the same time, these two verses are broken up by another verse that makes an opposing and contradictory point. Verse 169, as seen above, suggests that those whose minds are corrupt with envy can actually prosper, while virtuous people without envy sometimes experience the loss of their wealth.

How, then, do we make sense of these verses as a unit? Can we derive any sort of coherent meaning by reading them together? How do we act as model readers of the text and follow the interpretive boundaries laid out by the text? It is clear that the inclusion of these verses within the same chapter creates a moment of tension that needs to be worked out by the reader. Furthermore, these verses actually appear together in sequence in modern editions of the text, such that the ambiguity and contradictions are laid out clearly for the reader. Obviously, this pattern within the *Tirukkural*, in which a moral claim introduced in one verse is immediately contradicted in the next, cannot be read as merely the result of careless authorship or shoddy editorial work on the part of later compilers and commentators, at least not if we want to act as model readers who treat the text as a coherent whole. I argue that the *Tirukkural* actually uses these moments of tension, achieved through the deliberate clustering of seemingly contradictory verses within a single chapter, to frame ethical questions in narrative terms. It is only by working through this moment of tension in narrative terms that the reader is able to make sense of these verses as a coherent whole and render them ethically meaningful.

In the case above, the reader must grapple with the tension between the fact that at times the envious person faces dire consequences, while at other times the envious person prospers. The result is a dynamic process in which the model reader, sensitive to this tension, thinks about envy in narrative terms. Such a model reader will think about the effects of envy upon his own

life. How has envy impacted the reader and the people around him? Does envy lead to the result suggested by verses 168 and 170, or does it lead to the result laid out in verse 169? The only way for the reader to make sense of these verses is to think about envy in narrative terms as a vice that affects people in many different ways. Furthermore, these verses push the reader to think about the pursuit of ethics more generally in narrative terms. The reader must face the fact that the cultivation of virtue envisioned by the *Tirukkural* as a whole may not be enough to avoid the experience of loss. At the same time, the reader may question his preconceived notions of prosperity; can those without envy be considered “prosperous” in other ways even if they lack material wealth? By framing the poetic tension of these verses in narrative terms, the model reader confronts the inherent complexity of ethical thinking and the reality of a world in which the pursuit of the ethical life is never simple or straightforward.

Let us consider another example of how the *Tirukkural* uses such moments of tension to shape the ethical thinking of its readers. In another chapter of the *Arattuppāl* on “Truth” (*vāymai*), three seemingly contradictory verses are juxtaposed:

If one asks what is that which is called truth:
speech that is without anything that is evil.⁷⁴

Even falsehood is truth if it produces
good that was free from defect.⁷⁵

Do not lie about what is known in your heart;
if you lie, your own heart will burn you.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Verse 291: *vāymai eṇappaṭuva tiyāteṇiṇ yātonrum / tīmai ilāta colal*.

⁷⁵ Verse 292: *poymmaiyum vāymai iṭatta puraitīrnta / naṇmai payakkum eṇiṇ*.

⁷⁶ Verse 293: *taṇneñ caṇivatu poyyaṛka poyttapiṇ / taṇneñcē taṇṇaic cuṭum*.

The first verse states: “If one asks what is that which is called truth: speech that is without anything that is evil.” This verse sets up the overall thematic tone of the chapter, introducing an inquiry into the nature of truth. The first half of the verse poses a question: what actually *is* truth? The second half of the verse then answers that question, defining truth as any kind of speech that is not evil. The content of the verse uses an equational structure that pairs the first word of the verse, “truth,” with the final word of the verse, “speech.” The reader must bring these words together in order to make sense of the verse’s content and to understand that truth should be seen as a kind of speech act. This structural presentation of content follows a common pattern seen throughout the *Tirukkural*, in which a question is posed to the reader in the first half of the verse and an answer to that question is provided in the second half of the verse. In this way, the opening verse sets up a basic premise about truth, and the rest of the verses in this chapter will be juxtaposed alongside that premise.

The next verse articulates a slightly different idea: “Even falsehood is truth if it produces good that was free from defect.” This verse introduces a new argument into the chapter through a rather paradoxical claim: even falsehood is truth if it produces a good result. This verse also uses an equational structure that pairs “falsehood” with “truth,” placing these words next to each other so that the reader perceives the metaphor directly. The meaning suggested to the reader by this metaphorical juxtaposition is that falsehood actually *is* truth when it produces a good result free from any kind of moral wrong. The reader, sensitive to the sudden shift in argumentative mode from the first verse to the second, must contend with this ambiguous message. While verse 291 articulates a clear and concise definition of truth, verse 292 suggests that truth is much more ambiguous than a clear-cut definition would allow. The reader must absorb this tension and look for ways to interpret these verses together. As a result, the reader begins to see truth through the

context in which it is uttered. *If* truth produces evil, then it is not actually the truth. *If* falsehood produces a good result, then it is actually true.

A third verse builds upon this tension and introduces yet another idea into the chapter: “Do not lie about what is known in your heart; if you lie, your own heart will burn you.” This verse eschews the definitional structure of the previous two, shifting into a negative imperative mode that instructs the reader in very clear terms: do not lie. If you *do* lie, the verse expands, the consequence is that your own heart will burn you. In direct contrast to verse 292, which allows falsehood in cases where it produces a good result, this verse prohibits lying altogether and describes at least one of the consequences faced by the person who tells a lie. Again, this verse seems to contradict the claims of the previous verses. While verses 291 and 292 define truth and falsehood on the basis of their consequences, verse 293 prohibits falsehood altogether.

How, again, can we make sense of these verses together? What kinds of interpretive clues are provided within the text that point toward a coherent theorization of truth within this chapter? As in the case above, the juxtaposition of these verses within the same chapter creates a tension that needs to be worked out by the reader. The arrangement of these verses so that they appear together in modern editions of the *Tirukkural* further highlights this tension. As model readers, we must look for ways of reading these verses as part of a coherent textual plan. It is unlikely that the author and those who later preserved the text simply overlooked the obvious fact that these verses seem to contradict one another; it is more likely that commentators and readers over the centuries recognized this tension within the text and sought to preserve it. I argue that these moments of tension are a deliberate literary strategy designed to shape how readers think about the nature of truth, inviting them to think about truth in narrative terms in order to work out these moments of tension.

In this case, the reader begins to think in narrative terms when reading verses 291 and 292 together. These verses invite the reader to imagine the various scenarios in which telling the truth would be the most appropriate course of action as well as the scenarios in which telling a lie would actually be the more ethical option. Verse 293 then complicates this narrative thinking by prohibiting falsehood altogether. While the first two verses encourage the reader to think about truth with an eye toward its consequences, the third verse states adamantly that lying should be avoided at all costs. The reader who is sensitive to these sudden shifts within the chapter is led to think in narrative terms about truth in relation to his own life and the lives of those around him. By placing truth within a narrative framework, the reader comes to recognize that we live in a world in which telling the truth is generally the best course of action and speaking falsehood is to be avoided. At the same time, the reader recognizes that there may be moments when telling the truth is *not* the best course of action if it would result in negative consequences. By thinking in narrative terms, the reader faces the reality of a world in which the pursuit of ethics is complex and difficult. In this way, the *Tirukkural*'s inherent literary strategies use these moments of tension to destabilize the vision of human life articulated at the level of the text as a whole.

Conclusion

We have thus considered how the *Tirukkural* uses the interplay of verses within each chapter to destabilize the vision of human life conveyed by the text as a whole. The *Tirukkural* uses the literary strategies at work within its chapters to guide its readers toward thinking about ethics in narrative terms and to illustrate the fact that the cultivation of virtue and the pursuit of the ideal human life are neither simple nor straightforward processes. Methodologically, these literary strategies emerged by reading the *Tirukkural*'s chapters in three different ways. First, we read the verses "out of order" as we imagined the reading practices that might have been used by

readers who encountered the text before Parimēlaḷakar's arrangement of the verses became the standard version used in nearly every printed edition. Second, we read the verses "in order" as we considered how readers would encounter the verses today as part of a fixed and stable arrangement. Third, we read the verses by focusing on the moments of tension that arise through the juxtaposition of several seemingly contradictory ideas. In each case, we have read the *Tirukkural*'s chapters through the eyes of the model reader, as defined by Eco, whose engagement with the text is shaped by the interplay of verses and who is patterned to think about human life in specific ways.

What unites these three modes of reading the text, and the literary strategies that emerge from reading the text at the level of its chapters, is an emphasis on the fundamentally ambiguous and complex nature of ethical reflection. The *Tirukkural*'s chapters illustrate the reality of a world in which our ability to think and act is often hindered by the limits of our perception and undermined by our inability to control our emotions. The result is that the model reader comes to see the ethical life not merely as a process of choosing between different courses of action, but as an orientation to the world that requires complex modes of thinking, often in narrative terms. In short, the literary strategies of the *Tirukkural*'s chapters work in tandem with those of the text as a whole to destabilize the vision of human life as constituted by the inward cultivation of virtue accompanied by the outward expansion of relationships. Reading the *Tirukkural* at the level of the whole, that vision becomes our ideal; reading the *Tirukkural* at the level of its chapters, that ideal must face another reality.

Chapter 4

Reading the *Tirukkural*'s Verses

The following chapter builds upon the previous two by continuing to read the *Tirukkural* in light of its literary strategies, which both shape and destabilize a specific vision of human life. Here, I focus on the *Tirukkural* at the structural level of its verses (*kural* or *pāṭam*), and I take up the following questions: what kinds of literary strategies are embedded within the *Tirukkural*'s verses? How do these literary strategies shape the reader in ethically significant ways? How do the *Tirukkural*'s verses work in tandem with the *Tirukkural*'s sections (*pāl*), chapters (*atikāram*), and the text as a whole? I argue that the verses build upon the work of the *Tirukkural*'s chapters to further destabilize the vision of human life imparted by the text as a whole by engaging the reader in modes of ethical reflection that highlight the opacity of moral choice and action. Much like the interplay of verses within each of the *Tirukkural*'s chapters discussed previously, the verses also work on an individual level to underscore the fact that the pursuit of the ideal human life is neither simple nor straightforward.

In the pages that follow, I highlight three different literary strategies operating within the *Tirukkural*'s verses, which I refer to as metaphor, inference, and suspense. These three literary strategies are not described by the *Tirukkural* itself and are by no means exhaustive of the vast number of rhetorical structures that can be found in verses throughout the text; they are, rather, heuristic categories that I use to conceptualize the relationship between ethics and poetry. These literary strategies engage the reader in modes of what we will call “sub-ethical” reflection, a process of framing ethical questions and structuring ethical problems that will be described further below. Throughout, I consider how these three literary strategies work upon the reader who is attentive to their sub-ethical dimensions while also destabilizing the vision of human life presented by the *Tirukkural* at the level of the whole.

Theorizing the Verses

When we consider what the *Tirukkural*'s verses are doing on an individual level, there are at least two broad types of rhetorical structures that can be found throughout the text. There are verses that make a relatively straightforward claim, often of an ethical variety. These verses are sometimes rendered through imperative statements (“one must do,” “one should do”) or their inverse (“one must *not* do,” “one should *not* do”). We might consider an example that was discussed in the previous chapter:

Do not lie about what is known in your heart;
if you lie, your own heart will burn you.¹

When reading this verse in the context of the larger chapter in which it appears, we saw how it creates a moment of tension in the text when read alongside the verses around it. When read on its own, however, it issues a relatively straightforward moral command: do not lie (*poyyarka*).

Yet, there are also verses that convey much more ambiguous ideas. At times, these verses may have an ethical tinge to them, while at other times they may seem to say very little about virtue, ethics, or how a person ought to live. Consider, for example, the following verse:

“From my eyes, he does not leave; if I blink, he does not suffer;
he is a subtle person—my lover.”²

While this verse certainly constructs a literary world marked by ambiguity and suspense, it is not entirely clear what is *ethical* about it. Yet, as I will argue, this verse and others like it also shape

¹ Verse 293: *taṇṇēṇ carivatu poyyarka poyttapiṇ / taṇṇēṇcē taṇṇaic cuṭum*. All citations from the Tamil text follow *Tirukkural uraikkottu: Arattuppāl* (Tiruppaṇantāl: Śrī Kācimaṭam, 1969), and transliterations separate words according to the requirements of the meter. For the sake of ease, I follow the numbering of the verses that appears in modern editions. All translations from the Tamil are mine unless otherwise indicated.

² Verse 1126: *kaṇṇuḷḷir pōkār imaippir paruvār / nuṇṇiyarem kāta lavar*. All citations from the Tamil text follow *Tirukkural uraikkottu: Kāmatuppāl* (Tiruppaṇantāl: Śrī Kācimaṭam, 1970), and transliterations separate words according to the requirements of the meter. For the sake of ease, I follow the numbering of the verses that appears in modern editions. All translations from the Tamil are mine unless otherwise indicated.

the *Tirukkural*'s audience in ethically significant ways. While they may not articulate ethical ideas outright through the use of imperative language, these verses nevertheless engage readers in specific modes of ethical reflection, which I will discuss in further detail below.

What resources exist for theorizing the verses at this individual level? The most obvious place to start is the *Tolkāppiyam*, the oldest extant treatise on Tamil grammar and poetics. While the precise relationship between the *Tolkāppiyam* and *Tirukkural* is unclear—it is difficult to know when exactly these texts were composed or what their influence might have been upon each other—we can nevertheless use the *Tolkāppiyam* as a theoretical resource to think about the *Tirukkural*'s verses through the paradigms of Tamil poetics. For example, the *Tolkāppiyam* elaborates a complex framework on the use of metaphor (*uvamam*) in classical Tamil poetry.³ According to the *Tolkāppiyam*, a basis for comparison can be derived from four different categories: action (*viṇai*), result (*payan*), form (*mey*), and color (*uru*).⁴ More than one of these categories may appear in the context of a single metaphor, as in the following example, in which both form and color serve as the basis for comparison: “The glistening well-set teeth, curve like, resemble the lustrous crescent moon.”⁵ In addition to this framework, the *Tolkāppiyam* spells out a number of complex rules governing the formation of metaphors in Tamil poetry. Some of these rules reflect the fact that metaphors are often implicit, thus requiring the reader to make certain

³ See *Tolkāppiyam in English*, trans. V. Murugan (Chennai: Institute of Asian Studies, 2000), 528-541 (*Tolkāppiyam*, *Poruḷ*, *Uvama Iyal*, verses 1218-1256).

⁴ Ibid., 528 (*Tolkāppiyam*, *Poruḷ*, *Uvama Iyal*, verse 1218). The translator includes an example of each of these metaphors in footnotes below the verse, which are as follows: action (“he pounced like a tiger”); result (“he gifted like the shower from the clouds”); form (“the waist resembles the *tuḷi* drum”), and color (“golden physique”).

⁵ Ibid. (*Tolkāppiyam*, *Poruḷ*, *Uvama Iyal*, footnote to verse 1219).

interpretive decisions when reading a work of classical Tamil poetry,⁶ while other rules indicate something about the cultural context in which the framework was produced.⁷ The *Tolkāppiyam* also specifies a long list of comparative markers—words that specifically indicate that a comparison is being made—and assigns them to one or more of the four categories above.⁸

The *Tolkāppiyam* thus serves as a critical starting point in the task of theorizing the literary strategies of the *Tirukkural*. At the same time, we might consider to what extent Euro-American literary theory can provide us with ways of thinking about the relationship between literary language and ethical formation. One productive area of overlap between the Tamil and European literary traditions can be found in their mutual emphasis on metaphor. While the *Tolkāppiyam* classifies different kinds of metaphor and regulates their use within the Tamil literary context, we can also draw on the work of Paul Ricoeur to deepen our understanding of how metaphorical language works upon its readers. In *The Rule of Metaphor*, Ricoeur theorizes the complex hermeneutic process that is required when a reader encounters a metaphor.⁹ For Ricoeur, metaphors are more than just the juxtaposition of two things for the sake of comparison; rather, metaphors actually have the power to *redescribe* reality by setting an object or idea before

⁶ As in the example of *pavaḷavāy* (“coral mouth”), which requires the reader to discern that the color red is the common feature between the two objects of comparison. See Ibid., 530 (*Tolkāppiyam*, *Poruḷ*, *Uvama Iyal*, footnote to verse 1224).

⁷ The *Tolkāppiyam* allows the comparison of a woman’s hair with peacock feathers, for example, but forbids the comparison of a woman’s hair with crow wings. See Ibid. (*Tolkāppiyam*, *Poruḷ*, *Uvama Iyal*, footnote to verse 1225).

⁸ Ibid., 531-534 (*Tolkāppiyam*, *Poruḷ*, *Uvama Iyal*, verses 1228-1234).

⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies in the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello, S. J. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978).

the mind of the reader in a new way.¹⁰ Metaphorical language, in any literary context, extends itself into the domain of hermeneutics and requires the reader to do the work of interpreting it.

For Ricoeur, the key to metaphor lies in the use of the verb “to be.” As he argues, “the metaphorical ‘is’ at once signifies both ‘is not’ and ‘is like.’”¹¹ In other words, when readers encounter a metaphor, they must recognize that “is” signifies both similarity and difference at once. Consider, for example, a metaphor that Ricoeur draws from Aristotle’s study of Homer’s *Iliad* to describe the warrior Achilles: “The lion leapt.”¹² The poet describes Achilles *as* a lion, thereby transferring the properties of a lion to Achilles. The metaphor requires the reader to think about Achilles in a new way by understanding his actions through the hermeneutic lens of a lion. For Ricoeur, metaphors are valuable because they ask readers to interpret them, and in order to interpret them, readers must suspend their judgment about the literal meaning of the statement—perceiving the “is not” within the “is”—while also arriving at the metaphorical truth indicated by the statement—perceiving the “is” within the “is.” The reader must understand that the metaphor indicates that Achilles *is* a lion in that he *is like* a lion, since both are courageous, while Achilles also *is not* a lion in a literal sense. As Ricoeur says, “It is the reader, in effect, who works out the connotations of the modifier that are likely to be meaningful.”¹³ In this way, Ricoeur’s work can illuminate how the use of metaphors within the *Tirukkural* works upon readers who engage in the act of interpreting them. When the reader encounters a metaphor in the context of reading the *Tirukkural*’s verses, he must understand that the two objects are alike in some critical way

¹⁰ Ibid., 6-7.

¹¹ Ibid., 7.

¹² Ibid., 26.

¹³ Ibid., 95.

without being exactly identical. In Ricoeur's terms, the metaphor presents a concept or idea in a new way for the reader, and thus it has the power to *redescribe* reality for that reader.

At the same time, as we have seen from the examples cited above, the *Tirukkural*'s verses display a number of literary strategies that go beyond the use of metaphor. The verses command various types of ethical behavior, suggest certain ideas or actions to the reader, and ask rhetorical questions without providing any concrete answers. How do these structural forms and rhetorical strategies invite the reader to engage in the kind of hermeneutic endeavor described above, and how do they participate in the ethical formation of that reader?

Here, I am drawn to the work of Geoffrey Galt Harpham, who argues that language and ethics are fundamentally intertwined. For Harpham, language has an ethical dimension insofar as language use itself "requires certain recognitions and kinds of choices essential to ethics."¹⁴ In his view, language does not solve our problems directly but provides a model for how to explore ethical ideas. As he says, language "provides us with model, program, map—our best *example* of ethical thinking, and our point of entry into an ethical world. What language 'infallibly' does is to serve as the medium in which we become adept at ethical thought."¹⁵ For Harpham, ethics is not "an ultimately coherent set of concepts, rules, or principles,"¹⁶ nor does it "provide an answer to . . . fundamental questions."¹⁷ It is, rather, a process of *raising* questions without answering them, of *structuring* problems without providing solutions, that is immanent in "the practice of

¹⁴ Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *Getting It Right: Language, Literature, and Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

language, analysis, narrative, and creation.”¹⁸ By defining ethics in this way, Harpham admits that he is less interested in meta-ethical reflection “on the timeless constraints of the moral law, justice, rationality, maximal social utility, or the Good Life,”¹⁹ and more interested in providing what he calls a “sub-ethical” account of how language provides the very conditions and characteristics for ethical thinking.

Harpham’s notion of “sub-ethics” provides us with a language for describing how the verses of the *Tirukkural* work in ways that are distinctly ethical even when their content, at the surface level, seems to have very little to do with ethics. Harpham’s work points us toward the ways in which all language, and our engagement with it, has the power to shape us as ethical thinkers by influencing the kinds of questions we raise and the frameworks we use to grapple with ethical choices. Literature, then, and the heightened use of language that we find within it, has the potential to pack an extra ethical punch and make a difference in the lives of those who engage with it. Harpham’s work gives us a way of thinking about how the *Tirukkural* shapes its readers ethically even when the content of a verse does not necessarily contain a “moral rule” as we might normally recognize it. To be sure, as we have already seen, many *Tirukkural* verses are rendered in the imperative (“one *must*”) or optative (“one *should*”), and thus their contributions to the *Tirukkural*’s ethical project are somewhat easier to discern. However, I am interested in the cases where the *Tirukkural*’s verses are *not* rendered in such a format—the moments of tension or ambiguity that, while devoid of the “rule-based” moral teachings we might expect from such a text, nevertheless work upon the reader in distinctly ethical ways.

¹⁸ Ibid., 5.

¹⁹ Ibid., 2.

In bringing Harpham into this chapter as an interlocutor, I am indebted to the work of Charles Hallisey and Anne Hansen, who have shown how Harpham's notion of sub-ethics can help us attend to the transformative impact of narratives on the moral lives of Theravāda Buddhist audiences.²⁰ In their article, they first draw upon the work of Dominick LaCapra, who distinguishes between two aspects of a text. The "documentary" aspect "situates the text in terms of factual or literal dimensions involving reference to empirical reality,"²¹ while the "worklike" aspect "supplements empirical reality by adding to and subtracting from it."²² In LaCapra's own simpler terms, the documentary "marks a difference" while the worklike "makes a difference—one that engages the reader in recreative dialogue with the text and the problems it raises."²³ It is their interest in the worklike aspect of Buddhist texts that leads Hallisey and Hansen to focus on Harpham's notion of "sub-ethics," as well as the three modes of ethical figuration described by Paul Ricoeur in his three-volume *Time and Narrative*.²⁴

In this same way, I bring a similar interest in the "worklike" aspects of the *Tirukkuraḷ* to my reading of its individual verses. Though the *Tirukkuraḷ* is not a narrative and does not reflect any singular religious worldview, focusing on the text as a site of sub-ethical reflection is a

²⁰ Charles Hallisey and Anne Hansen, "Narrative, Sub-Ethics, and the Moral Life: Some Evidence from Theravāda Buddhism," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 24, no. 2 (1996): 305-327.

²¹ Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 30.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ These three types of ethical figuration are known as prefiguration (mimesis₁), configuration (mimesis₂), and refiguration (mimesis₃), though Hallisey and Hansen admit that their use of the terms differ slightly from Ricoeur's. See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Vol. 1*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Vol. 2*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Vol. 3*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). See, also, Hallisey and Hansen, 308.

productive way to think about how we are shaped ethically when we engage its verses. In particular, I focus on the phenomenological experience of the reader who encounters a verse for the very first time, and how the poetic form of that verse would impact such a reader. Of course, we know that the *Tirukkural*'s verses circulate widely and appear frequently in everyday settings, and that readers may encounter verses repeatedly over the course of a lifetime. In these cases, the intensity of a particular verse's sub-ethical effects may decrease over time. Nevertheless, I would argue that these verses still provide audiences with a framework for raising questions, structuring problems, and engaging with choices in ways that are ethically significant, whether they are encountered for the first time or the hundredth time. In this light, the *Tirukkural*'s poetic form is not merely a way of *enhancing* the ethical content of individual verses but a way of *participating* in the text's ethical project.

Part I: Metaphor

In the following section, I examine the use of metaphor within the *Tirukkural*'s verses. Given that the *Tirukkural* is composed entirely in the *kural venpā* meter and thus has only two lines to articulate a complete thought or idea, metaphor is one of the primary literary strategies encountered by the text's audiences. Metaphor, as described above, juxtaposes two things for the sake of comparison. I am interested in part in how the *Tirukkural* uses the *Tolkāppiyam*'s rules around metaphor to convey ideas about ethics to the reader in creative ways that nevertheless build upon the conventions of the Tamil literary tradition. I am also interested in thinking about the *Tirukkural*'s use of metaphor through the lens of both Ricoeur and Harpham. In the verses discussed below, I attend to the ways in which their use of metaphor has the power to redescribe reality by requiring audiences to engage in the task of interpreting them. I also consider the sub-ethical dimensions of metaphor, focusing on how metaphors frame or structure ethical ideas for

the reader in ways that Harpham would find productive. Ultimately, I will show how the *Tirukkural*'s use of metaphor has the power to shape the ethical thinking of its readers not only at the level of content but also at the level of form.

First, let us consider the metaphor that appears in the opening verse of the *Poruṭpāl*. It is a particularly useful illustration of metaphor insofar as it closely mirrors the example drawn from Homer's *Iliad*, cited by Ricoeur, in which Achilles is compared to a lion:

An army, subjects, supplies, ministers, allies, and a defense—
he who possesses all six is a lion among kings.²⁵

The first part of the verse simply lists the six elements of a kingdom that a king must possess in order to successfully govern. What begins as a rather mundane list, however, culminates in a metaphor comparing such a king to a lion. At its core, the verse argues that the king *is* a lion. However, through its use of extended adjectival constructions, the verse adds descriptive details to the basic metaphorical structure: “he *who possesses all six (of the items summarized above)* is a lion *among kings*.”

In the framework of the *Tolkāppiyam*, this verse contains a metaphor of action (*viṇai*) by juxtaposing the king, whose action includes possessing these six elements, with a lion, whose actions are associated with courage and valor. Thus, if a king meets the prerequisites outlined in the verse, the reader recognizes that such a king should be seen as lion-like. The juxtaposition of these two figures requires the reader to interpret the verse by parsing the significance of the metaphor; as Ricoeur would argue, the reader must perceive the “is not” within the “is.” The reader must recognize the fact that the king is not *literally* a lion. The reader's interpretive task is

²⁵ Verse 381: *paṭaikuṭi kūlamaiccu naṭparaṇ ārum / uṭaiyāṇ aracarū ēru*. All citations from the Tamil text follow *Tirukkural uraikkottu: Poruṭpāl* (Tiruppaṇantāl: Śrī Kācimaṭam, 2011), and transliterations separate words according to the requirements of the meter. For the sake of ease, I follow the numbering of the verses that appears in modern editions. All translations from the Tamil are mine unless otherwise indicated.

further complicated by the fact that the verse does not contain a verb that explicitly indicates the “is” that is required in a metaphor; instead, the verse uses a common equational structure that appears frequently throughout Tamil poetry and prose to compare two distinct objects. The reader must recognize that the verse equates “he who possesses (all six)” (*uṭaiyāṇ*) with “a lion among kings” (*aracarū ēru*), thus supplying the verb “to be” that is only implied by the verse. By drawing out the metaphor through this interpretive process, the reader comes to see the king through the lens of the lion and envisions successful kingship as an act of successfully procuring these six components of a kingdom.

The metaphor above compares two different figures through the structure “A *is* B,” one of the most common metaphorical patterns used throughout the *Tirukkuraḷ*. This structure is often used to describe specific people, as in the case of the king above, but we can also find examples in which two abstract concepts are juxtaposed in a similar way, as in the following:

The education learned in one birth alone for a person
is a support in all seven successive births.²⁶

The verse places two different objects before the reader: education (*kalvi*) and support (*ēmāppu*); the two objects are united through the use of a verb that equates them (*uṭaittu*).²⁷ The core of the verse thus revolves around the statement that “education *is* a support.” In the *Tolkāppiyam*’s system of classification, this metaphor would seem to fall under the category of metaphors of result (*payaṇ*). Just as a support is something that secures and safeguards, so too is education something that has the effect of securing and safeguarding a person. The rest of the verse adds

²⁶ Verse 398: *orumaikkaṇ tāṇkaṛra kalvi oruvaṛ / keḷumaiyum ēmāp puṭaittu*.

²⁷ The word used in the verse for “support” (*ēmāppu*) can also be translated as “security” or “safeguard.” It indicates something that “supports” a person by protecting them from harm.

further details to underscore this central metaphor; as the verse indicates, the education learned in just *one* lifetime will support a person in their next *seven* lifetimes.

As above, this metaphor requires the audience to engage with it and interpret its meaning. The key to unlocking the metaphor and making meaning out of the verse is to understand that its claim is not that education is *literally* a physical support for a person, but rather that education *is like* an object that supports a person. In Ricoeur’s terms, the reader must supply the unstated “is not” within the “is” while also recognizing the metaphorical truth that the verse wants to impart by comparing education to a support. Furthermore, the reader must grapple with the information that the education attained over the course of a single lifetime can support a person over the course of seven lifetimes. In one sense, this verse reflects a worldview in which human life is impacted by the lingering effects of *karma* (in Tamil, *viṇai*) and humans are reborn repeatedly. Yet, this verse is also unique in how it builds upon that worldview to communicate something about the importance of education to its audience. Through the metaphor, the audience comes to view education in a new light, recognizing its importance in this life as well as its effects in future lifetimes. The verse thus uses its metaphorical structure to urge the reader on the path of education.

A third example will further illustrate how the *Tirukkuraḷ* uses this metaphorical structure to redescribe ideas to the reader:

Virtuous people are those who are called “*antaṇar*”
due to behaving with a pure nature regularly to all living beings.²⁸

The core metaphorical statement consists of the juxtaposition of two different groups of people: “virtuous people” (*aṟavōr*) and “those who are called ‘*antaṇar*’” (*antaṇar eṇpōr*). As in the first

²⁸ Verse 30: *antaṇar eṇpōr aṟavōrmar revvuyirkkuñ / centaṇmai pūṇṭoluka lāṇ*.

example cited above, there is no verb that supplies the meaning “is”; rather, the verse implicitly compares the two different kinds of people through the same equational structure seen above by placing “virtuous people” alongside “those who are called ‘*antaṇar*.’” The reader must supply the missing verb to draw out the meaning that “virtuous people *are* those who are called ‘*antaṇar*.’” The second part of the verse explains why these two groups of people are comparable by noting that they both behave with a “pure nature” (*centaṇmai*) to all living beings.

This verse is particularly interesting for its use of the term *antaṇar*, which has a relatively capacious and thus ambiguous meaning in Tamil. In the *Tolkāppiyam*, the term is used to refer to Brahmins, the upper-class elites who conventionally possess the sacred thread, a staff, and a low wooden seat, but are prohibited from being entreated for gifts, receiving praise, or taking titles of honor, which are ascribed to the conventional domain of the king.²⁹ Yet, the term *antaṇar* in its most literal sense can refer to any pure or virtuous person as well as a range of deities including Brahmā and Śiva.³⁰ Thus, the reader must make a decision about how to understand the meaning of *antaṇar* within the context of the verse, and the choice will invariably have an impact upon how the reader understands the metaphor. Then, the reader must draw out the metaphorical statement itself, perceiving the “is not” within the implicit “is” while also recognizing the metaphorical truth that lies at the heart of the comparison. The verse’s structure allows the reader to move back and forth so that both groups of people are seen in light of the other, and, through this hermeneutic process, the reader arrives at a richer sense of how virtuous people and *antaṇar* should be understood.

²⁹ See *Tolkāppiyam in English*, 641-642 (*Tolkāppiyam*, *Poruḷ*, *Marapu Iyal*, verses 1562 and 1565).

³⁰ See *Tamil Lexicon* (Madras: University of Madras, 1924-1936), the entries under “*antaṇar*.”

At this point, the ways in which the *Tirukkural*'s verses use metaphor to convey ideas should be clear, and a few more examples will show how the text creatively builds upon the basic metaphorical formula of "A is B." One common pattern that emerges throughout the text is the juxtaposition of two groups of people in which one group is described by what they choose *not* to do—in other words, by the actions they avoid—as in the following example:

Those who are wise, who examine words of difficult value,
are those who do not speak words without great value.³¹

Once again, the comparison is suggested implicitly through the use of an equational structure and without any verb supplying the metaphorical relationship between the two groups of people. The reader must recognize that the third metrical unit and the fourth metrical unit are meant to be read together, such that "those who are wise" (*aṟiviṇṇār*) are identified metaphorically with "those who do not speak" (*collār*). The verse then adds additional details to this metaphorical structure in which the reader learns that "those who are wise" examine words that have a difficult value, while "those who do not speak" avoid words without great value.

In the most basic sense, the verse aims to communicate something to the reader about the nature and actions of wise people. While the first part of the verse describes what wise people do in a positive sense, insofar as they examine words that are difficult to understand, the second half of the verse describes wise people in a negative sense, on the basis of the fact that they do *not* speak meaningless words. By framing the qualities of wise people through the lens of the *absence* of a certain kind of speech, the verse suggests certain habits and qualities that wise people should possess. By interpreting this verse and parsing out the larger significance of the metaphor, the *Tirukkural*'s audience learns to attribute wisdom to people who know both how to

³¹ Verse 198: *arumpayaṇ āyūm aṟiviṇṇār collār / perumpayaṇ illāta col.*

act and how *not* to act. The metaphor invites the audience to imagine the behavior of wise people in the context of a broad spectrum of choices and actions. Wise people are wise not simply because of the fact that they *do* certain things, such as contemplate the meaning of things that are difficult to discern, but because they know when to *avoid* certain behaviors. The verse thus redescribes wise people for the reader in terms of their larger habits and patterns of behavior, and the reader views wisdom in the broader context of a life lived according to certain choices.

A final example will further illustrate how the *Tirukkuraḷ* uses this basic metaphorical structure in increasingly complex ways throughout the text. Here, the *Tirukkuraḷ* juxtaposes two different claims through parataxis, a rhetorical technique in which two or more clauses occur one after another independently without any coordinating or subordinating connectives, as in the following:

The poverty among poverties is neglecting a guest;
the strength among strengths is patience towards fools.³²

At a basic level, the verse revolves around two different metaphors. The first metaphor states that “poverty *is* neglecting a guest,” thus inviting the reader to consider neglect as a form of impoverishment. The verse then adds details to heighten this sentiment by claiming that the “poverty *among poverties* is neglecting a guest.” The additional phrase indicates that neglecting a guest is indeed one of the *worst* forms of impoverishment to exist—a poverty among poverties. The second metaphor claims that “strength *is* patience towards fools.” Thus, as above, the reader sees the possession of patience towards foolish people as a kind of strength or skill. Again, the verse adds rhetorical flourish to this claim by stating that “the strength *among strengths* is

³² Verse 153: *iṇṇamaiyul iṇṇmai viruntorāl vaṇṇamaiyul / vaṇṇmai maṭavārp porai*.

patience towards fools.” Thus, the reader comes to understand that having patience towards fools is one of the highest forms of strength—a strength among strengths.

This verse uses parataxis to shape the thinking of the reader who must engage in a double act of interpretation. First, the reader must parse the two metaphors individually, which, as has been discussed at length above, requires the reader to recognize the metaphorical truth that lies at the heart of each statement by suspending judgment about the literal meaning of the proposition. By engaging in this hermeneutic process, the verse is able to redescribe reality for the reader, who arrives at a richer understanding of both poverty and strength by encountering the verse and reflecting upon its claims. Poverty becomes more than just the absence of wealth, but a mode of behavior that includes neglecting a guest, while strength becomes more than just a physical skill or ability, but a mental orientation to the world that enables one to withstand even foolish people. The use of parataxis to bring these two metaphorical claims together heightens the poetic effects of each individual claim by requiring the reader to think about the relationship between strength and poverty writ large. This verse thus has the effect of inviting readers to think about how one behaves toward others through the framework of strength and poverty.

We have now seen how the *Tirukkural*’s verses use metaphors to describe certain ideas to the reader. These metaphorical statements can be understood through the *Tolkāppiyam*, insofar as they fall into one or more of the four categories of metaphor outlined above. Similarly, the verses use the structural possibilities inherent within the Tamil language so that readers at times need to supply the missing verb “to be” that is only implicitly suggested by the verse. In each case, the reader must draw out the metaphorical truth at the heart of the proposition so that the verse can fulfill its function of redescribing reality to that reader. Yet, I would argue that these metaphors are not merely rhetorical flourishes in service of an otherwise straightforward ethical claim or an

aesthetically pleasing container for ethical teachings. Rather, metaphors actually *participate* in the ethical cultivation of the reader. In Harpham's terms, these metaphorical statements engage the audience in "sub-ethical" ways by suggesting a certain orientation toward ethical reflection in which thoughts and actions occur in a range of possible choices that a person makes over the course of a lifetime.

By seeing the king through the lens of a lion, the reader imagines the king as part of a broader narrative in which kings are continually confronted by challenges and decisions about how to govern a kingdom. The verse suggests not only that a king can become like a lion but that his decisions and actions should be judged by the extent to which they do or do not make him lion-like. A similar patterning of the reader as an ethical thinker occurs in the other verses cited above. The benefits of education are cast within a broad temporal frame insofar as the education of one lifetime becomes a support through seven successive lifetimes. Through the metaphorical statement of the verse, the reader becomes attentive to the importance of education and the lingering effects it can have on a person's future lives. The declaration that "virtuous people" *are* "those who are called '*antaṇar*'" encourages the reader to aspire toward such behavior and to consider what it means to be an *antaṇar* in a broad sense. The comparison of those who are wise with those who do not speak meaningless words encourages the reader to imagine human life as marked by a number of choices about how to think and act in the world. The reader understands what it means to be wise in a new way by learning to see wisdom as manifested in the actions that people undertake or the actions that people avoid undertaking. Finally, as the reader engages the verse above, his understanding of "strength" expands to encompass mental and emotional dispositions as well as acts of physical power and his understanding of "poverty" expands to include the ethical impoverishment that arises through the neglect of a guest.

In sum, the *Tirukkural*'s metaphors play a significant role in the ethical formation of the reader by allowing that reader to consider various ideas, choices, and behaviors. Building upon Ricoeur's account of metaphor, which illustrated how even structurally simple metaphors require the reader to engage in a complex hermeneutic process that has the power to redescribe reality in some key way, and Harpham's sub-ethical account of language, I argue that this process of redescription—of seeing one thing *as* another—does important ethical work upon the reader. As readers work through these metaphors, they begin to “think” metaphorically by learning to see people, objects, and ideas through different lenses. Readers learn to see the world around them *as* something else. This process of interpreting and redescribing, of seeing things in ever new ways, is, I would argue, ethically significant. In other words, metaphors work upon their audiences not just by telling them *what* to think but also *how* to think as they learn to perceive the world in many different kinds of ways, both as it is and as it could be. In doing so, metaphors play an important part in the sub-ethical formation of the *Tirukkural*'s audience.

Part II: Inference

A second literary strategy that is used frequently throughout the *Tirukkural* is what I call “inference,” the suggestion of certain ethical ideas and actions rather than a commandment to follow compulsory ethical rules. While inference does not exist as a poetic category in the realm of the *Tolkāppiyam*, I use inference as a heuristic category to describe a set of related literary strategies that appear frequently throughout the *Tirukkural*. In particular, I am interested in thinking about how the *Tirukkural* uses inference as a literary strategy to shape the reader as an ethical thinker. Continuing to build upon Harpham's use of the concept, I reveal the sub-ethical dimension of the *Tirukkural*'s verses that emerges when we examine how literary strategies like inference engage and operate upon the mind of the reader.

One of the most common ways in which the *Tirukkuraḷ* uses inference to suggest various ethical options to the reader is through verses that are structured around rhetorical questions. In such cases, the reader can discern that a verse should be read as a question through a variety of mechanisms including interrogative pronouns such as *yār* (“who”) or *yātu* (“what”), specific markers that imply a sense of doubt such as *kol* (“is it so?”), or interrogative particles like *ō* (roughly the equivalent of a question mark in classical Tamil poetry). We can see how these structures operate in the context of the *Tirukkuraḷ* in the following verse:

For those whose nature disparages even the faults of friends,
what not to strangers?³³

In the first line, the reader encounters a relatively straightforward descriptive clause: “those whose nature disparages even the faults of friends.” The reader wonders about the premise of this verse and how such people should be regarded. In the second line, the verse adds complexity by introducing a question that responds to the first line: “what not to strangers?” It is only in the second line and the fifth metrical unit (*cīr*) overall that the reader becomes aware of the rhetorical structure of the verse. In drawing these two parts together, the reader follows the line of thinking suggested by the verse and wonders: what *would* a person who disparages the faults of his friends do to strangers? The verse does not take a direct stance on disparaging the faults of friends, and it certainly does not answer its own question; the reader must make an inferential judgment about what the verse intends to communicate about such behavior.

A second example will further illustrate how the *Tirukkuraḷ* uses rhetorical questions to engage the reader on a sub-ethical level:

Who indeed has the ability of defeating

³³ Verse 188: *tuṇṇiyār kuṛramu tūrru marapiṇār / eṇṇaikol ētilār māṭṭu*.

him who manages assistants that rebuke him sharply?³⁴

Here, the reader must connect the question in the first line to the statement in the second line so that the core question of the verse reads as: “who indeed” (*yārē*) is “a person who has the ability of defeating” (*keṭukkum takaimaiyavar*). The rest of the first line supplies the object of the verb “to defeat,” indicated through the accusative case ending (*ai*) on “him who manages” (*ālvārai*), a verbal form which then takes “assistants who rebuke sharply” (*iṭikkum tuṇaiyārai*) as its object. When the reader pieces all of this information together, the full meaning of the verse becomes clear; the verse asks the reader to ponder the question of who really can defeat the person who manages assistants that rebuke him sharply. The non-past verbs used throughout the verse suggest that all of the behavior described, from having the ability to defeat, to the managing of assistants, to the sharp rebuking of those assistants, occurs on a regular and ongoing basis. Thus, even though the verse contains a question, the phrasing of that question using non-past verbal forms indicates that the verse is not asking about a singular or specific historical event, but a state of existence that is fundamentally and permanently true.

A final example will further illustrate how the *Tirukkuraḷ* uses rhetorical questions as a literary strategy to engage the reader at the sub-ethical level:

“What is he through hostility
he who causes the coming of sorrow in friendship?”³⁵

The reader who encounters this verse immediately confronts the question at its core: “what is he through hostility” (*tuppiṇ evaṇāvar maṛkol*)? The rhetorical question is immediately indicated by the interrogative pronoun *evaṇ* (“what” or “which man”) along with the doubt marker *maṛkol*.

³⁴ Verse 447: *iṭikkum tuṇaiyārai ālvārai yārē / keṭukkum takaimai yavar*.

³⁵ Verse 1165: *tuppiṇ evaṇāvar maṛkol tuyarvaravu / naṭpiṇuḷ āṛru pavar*.

The remaining part of the verse incorporates further details into this basic structure so that the reader learns that the “he” referenced in the first line is “one who causes the coming of sorrow in friendship” (*tuyarvaravu naṭpiṇu! ārrupavar*). When taken as a whole, the verse compels the reader to wonder—along with the verse’s unnamed speaker—what a person who causes sorrow even in a state of friendship would do in a state of hostility.

In what ways, then, is it possible to offer a sub-ethical account of the rhetorical questions asked in each of these verses? As a starting point, all three verses raise questions about the nature of human action and behavior without explicitly answering them. The answers must be inferred by the reader through the very rhetorical structure of the question. The first verse asks the reader to consider what a person who disparages the faults of his friends would do to strangers. The question is raised, but the verse does not provide a direct answer. Similarly, the second verse asks whether anyone is capable of defeating a person who manages servants that rebuke him sharply. Again, the verse does not supply any direct answer. Finally, the third verse asks the reader to reflect upon what a man who causes sorrow in friendship would do in a state of hostility. There is no answer apart from what the reader can infer about what the verse implicitly wants to communicate. When we read such verses, we consider the range of possible answers to these questions and the range of possible choices available to us when deciding how we want to live and act in the world.

By raising questions that have an *implied* answer without making that answer explicit in the verses themselves, the *Tirukkural* engages the reader in ways of thinking that are distinctly sub-ethical. The verses guide the reader to make certain interpretive choices about what should be done in each case, but their use of rhetorical questioning as a literary strategy also engages the reader on a deeper level by inviting the reader to sit with the question and ponder it, even for a

moment. The first verse asks what a person who disparages the faults of his friends would do to his enemies. The reader must grapple with the question and infer something about what the verse wants to communicate. The second verse raises a question about the security of the man who allows his ministers to rebuke him sharply. Again, the reader must infer something about what the verse is trying to tell him. The third verse asks what a person who causes sorrow in friendship would do in hostility, again requiring the reader to make an inferential choice. The “sub-ethical” dimension of these verses is that they engage the reader in a process of asking questions about human behavior and structuring ethical choices. Importantly, none of the verses actually *answers* the question it raises, even when the answer would have significant ethical implications. Rather, each verse invites the reader to reflect upon the particular ethical quandary it raises. In this way, the verses use inference as a literary strategy to engage their readers on a sub-ethical level in which they become increasingly adept at raising ethical questions and grappling with moral choices through their engagement with poetic language.

Another way in which the *Tirukkural*’s verses use inference as a literary strategy is through the juxtaposition of two different courses of action. In each case, the two possibilities are merely *presented* before the reader without any direct indication that one option is superior to the other. Yet, the verses nevertheless *suggest* that one ethical possibility is superior to the other in ways that must be inferred by the careful reader who weighs their comparative advantages. To understand how this process unfolds, let us consider the following example:

The goodness of friendship gives prosperity;
the goodness of action gives all that is desired.³⁶

³⁶ Verse 651: *tuṇainalam ākkam tarūm viṇainalam / vēṇṭiya ellām tarum*.

The reader who encounters this verse isolated from its larger context must decide how the two statements within it correspond to one another. The first three metrical units present the claim that “the goodness of friendship” (*tuṇainalam*) “gives” (*tarūum*) “prosperity” (*ākkam*).³⁷ On its surface, this is a relatively straightforward observation that good friends can enrich a person’s life. However, the second part of the verse observes that “the goodness of action” (*viṇainalam*) “gives” (*tarum*) “all that is desired” (*vēṇṭiya ellām*). Again, the reader finds an accessible claim about the fact that good actions can yield desirable results. Yet, the presentation of these two claims, one right after the other, with their subtle yet noticeable differences, requires the audience to read between the lines and draw out a larger meaning that is only implied.

A second example, as in the following verse, further illustrates how this literary strategy is used throughout the *Tirukkuraḷ*:

For those who are pure of mind, the offspring are good;
for those who are pure of company, there is no action that is not good.³⁸

As in the example above, this verse juxtaposes two statements that are structurally similar but nevertheless contain subtle and important differences. The first half of the verse notes that “the offspring” (*eccam*) are “good” (*nanṛākum*) for “those who are pure of mind” (*maṇantūyārkkku*). This is, of course, a positive result in the eyes of the reader; mental purity seems like an obvious virtue, even more so with the promise that it can lead to good offspring. Yet, the second half of the verse claims that “there is not” (*illai*) “an action that is not good” (*nanṛākā viṇai*) “for those who are pure of company” (*iṇantūyārkkku*). Again, the verse presents another positive result by declaring that there are never any actions that are not good for those who are in pure company.

³⁷ As one can see, this verse uses a euphonic increment in the third metrical unit to increase the number of metrical syllables within it in order to align the verse with the rules governing the *kuṛaḷ veṇpā* meter.

³⁸ Verse 456: *maṇantūyārkk keccanaṇ ṛākum iṇantūyārkk / killainaṇ ṛākā viṇai*.

Again, the precise relationship between these two claims is never spelled out directly. The audience is tasked with interpreting the subtle meaning intended by juxtaposing these claims within the context of a single verse and making an inferential judgment about the larger ethical implications of that juxtaposition.

A third example will further illuminate how the juxtaposition of two different courses of action is used to engage the *Tirukkural*'s audience in modes of sub-ethical reflection:

“Speak to me if you are not leaving; otherwise,
speak to those who are alive of your speedy return.”³⁹

When this verse is encountered apart from its larger rhetorical context, the reader faces a rather difficult interpretive endeavor. Yet, through a close reading of the verse, we can see how certain interpretive strategies are nevertheless suggested to the reader. The first part of the verse states, “if you are not leaving” (*cellāmai uṇṭēl*) “speak” (*urai*) “to me” (*eṇakku*), which suggests an ongoing conversation between two people. The intended recipient of this command is only implied by the verse itself, but we as readers nevertheless recognize that one course of action has been presented as a possibility: not leaving, and thus being able to speak. The second part of the verse introduces an alternative course of action, stating “otherwise” (*marṛu*) “speak” (*urai*) “to those who are alive” (*vālvārkkū*) “of your speedy return” (*niṇ valvaravu*). The relationship between the two clauses is indicated only by the disjunctive marker (*marṛu*, here translated as “otherwise”), indicating that an alternative possibility is introduced. The verse presents a choice between two different courses of action: leaving or not leaving. Yet, the verse also makes it clear that the choice of action will have implications afterward; the person who chooses not to leave may speak to the implied speaker within the verse, while the person who chooses to leave and

³⁹ Verse 1151: *cellāmai uṇṭēl eṇakkurai marṛuniṇ / valvaravu vālvārkkū kurai*.

later return is told to speak only “to those who are alive.” The implication of the verse is never spelled out directly, and it is up to the reader to fill in the gaps and make sense of what is only implied.

Each of these verses presents two courses of action before the reader. A preference for one course of action over another is never spelled out in full, but each verse uses subtle ways of suggesting the benefit of one over the other. The first verse invites the reader to compare the different levels of “goodness” of a friend and action. The verse clearly states that the goodness of friendship gives prosperity and the goodness of action gives all that is desired; on the surface, both forms of goodness are worthy of pursuit. Yet, by upping the ante in asserting that goodness of action gives *all* that is desired, the verse implies that good actions lead to prosperity and to many other desirable things. The second verse uses a similar transition from the first clause to the second; while being pure of mind produces good offspring, having pure company makes one’s every action good. Without stating it directly, this verse suggests that pure company has an advantage over purity of the mind, even if both lead to positive results. The third verse urges readers to weigh the choice of whether or not to leave someone behind. While the first half of the verse instructs a person to speak only if he intends to stay, the second half of the verse tells the reader to speak to those who are alive when he returns if he intends to leave. The implication is that the speaker of the verse will not live if the unnamed figure decides to depart, and it falls on the reader to draw out this implication from the verse.

The sub-ethical dimension of these verses lies in the fact that they use suggestion as a literary strategy to engage the reader. None of the verses discussed above compels the reader to choose a particular course of action. The absence of imperative (“one *must* do”) and optative (“one *should* do”) verbal forms requires the reader to engage these verses in more nuanced ways.

Through the process of interpreting these verses and the implied meanings they convey through inference, the reader begins to recognize that ethics is not always about choosing between right and wrong—indeed, these verses resist such a straightforward interpretation. Instead, they show the reader that there are many courses of action available to a person at any given point in time that fall somewhere on a spectrum between right and wrong. These verses highlight the fact that ethical discourse resists neat classifications when it comes to making complex moral choices. Harpham would no doubt be drawn to the style and tone of these verses insofar as they structure different ethical possibilities without promoting one of them directly. Indeed, these verses all use literary strategies of suggestion, which I have classified under the larger rubric of “inference,” to show the reader that ethical thinking requires complex skills of reasoning and interpretation. In this way, these verses engage the reader in ways that are distinctly sub-ethical.

Part III: Suspense

A third literary strategy that shapes the reader at the level of sub-ethics is what I refer to as “suspense,” which refers to the reading experience generated when a verse withholds key information from the reader until its final line or metrical unit. I am interested in tracking the phenomenological experience that is generated within the reader when he encounters such verses and has to work through this moment of suspense. Admittedly, the *Tirukkural*’s verses are short and do not generate the kind of suspenseful reading experience that might occur in a longer poem or narrative. With only two lines to work with, the suspense that is generated will be brief and rather short-lived. Yet, even in spite of this brevity, I want to track how suspense operates as a literary strategy that conveys something about the nature of ethical deliberation and influences how the reader frames ethical questions, once again building upon Harpham’s argument that there is a sub-ethical dimension to all language use. In the verses cited below, I attempt to render

the original Tamil as literally into English as possible, following the word order of the original verse, in order to approximate the experience of reading the verses in their original language. As a result, some of the translations will seem awkward and somewhat clunky, but my hope is that translating the verses in this way will more closely capture the experience of reading them in the original Tamil and convey the suspense that they generate within the reader.

One way in which the *Tirukkural*'s verses build suspense for the reader is by withholding the identity of the person or people described until the very end. In this mode, the verse provides the reader with as much information as possible before revealing the subject's identity in the last line or metrical unit. Consider how this literary strategy unfolds in the following example:

They should avoid an action done that ruins fame
those who think of greatness.⁴⁰

While the subject of this verse is “those who think of greatness” (*āatum eṇṇum avar*), the fact that this subject does not appear until the second line fosters a brief moment of suspense in the mind of the reader. Indeed, before the reader knows who is being described, the verse tells that reader that such people should avoid doing an action that ruins fame. This moment of suspense invites readers to engage with the verse in a more active way as they wonder *who* should avoid such actions, and *why*. Even as the second line provides an answer to the question of *who*, they may continue to wonder whether thinking of greatness is an action that *everyone* should pursue, and whether avoiding actions that ruin fame is likewise something that should be attempted by everyone. Although the moment of suspense may last for less than a second, barely registering in a conscious way, this slight moment of delay invites the reader to linger over the verse a bit longer than a more straightforward reading experience would otherwise encourage.

⁴⁰ Verse 653: *ōotal vēṇṭum oḷimāḷkum ceyvinai / āatum eṇṇum avar*.

Let us consider another example of how the *Tirukkural* builds suspense by withholding the identity of the person being described:

“From my eyes, he does not leave; if I blink, he does not suffer;
he is a subtle person—my lover.”⁴¹

Here, the person’s identity is not revealed until very end, and the lack of any rhetorical context for interpreting the verse only heightens the suspense of the reading experience. First, the verse asserts that “from my eyes, he does not leave” (*kaṇṇuḷḷiṇ pōkār*). Readers may wonder at who is speaking and who is being spoken about. Whose eyes are described, and who is the person that does not leave those eyes? Building upon this opaque opening phrase, the verse adds yet another ambiguous detail without revealing the identity of either person: “if I blink, he does not suffer” (*imaippin paruvār*). The poetic imagery of the verse focuses readers’ attention on the speaker’s vision of the unnamed man who does not suffer even when that speaker blinks. The verse then communicates another detail about this man, describing him as a “subtle person” (*nuṇṇiyar*), before finally revealing that man to be the speaker’s lover, “my lover” (*em kātalar*). The suspense generated in the mind of readers invites them to engage with the verse’s content at a deeper interpretive level than a different rhetorical structure might otherwise yield. As readers move through each component of the verse, they ask questions about identity. Who is this subtle person that does not leave the speaker’s eyes? Why does he not suffer when she blinks? While readers ultimately learn that he is the speaker’s lover, suspense has already been generated, inviting readers to linger over each new piece of information as it is received.

How do these verses work upon the reader in ethically significant ways? Returning again to Harpham’s framework, these verses operate in sub-ethical ways by engaging readers in a

⁴¹ Verse 1126: *kaṇṇuḷḷiṇ pōkār imaippir paruvār / nuṇṇiyar em kātalar*.

process of structuring questions without at first providing easy answers or solutions. If language provides the means through which we develop our capacity for raising questions and grappling with them, the two verses above operate in similarly sub-ethical ways by engaging readers in a process of questioning through their use of suspense. In the first verse, readers recognize that the verse wants to encourage them to avoid actions that ruin their fame when it reveals its subject to be those who think of greatness. However, through its suspenseful structure, the verse also invites readers to ask themselves larger questions about their identity, who they see themselves to be, and their larger aspirations for how to act in the world. The second verse operates in a more ambiguous mode: as each metrical unit unfolds, the verse places pressure on its readers to engage with the verse by asking questions. As readers find themselves unmoored, their reading experience actually *mimics* the experience of engaging with moral questions. Readers thus become habituated to raising ethical questions and more adept at structuring possible answers to those questions, all while recognizing that there are many moments of ambiguity and tension that may arise throughout the process.

In addition to withholding details about *identity*, the *Tirukkural*'s verses also generate suspense by withholding details about *action*. Consider the following example:

Ministers, because they act as eyes, a king
(his) ministers should carefully select.⁴²

Suspense is generated by the fact that the action prescribed to the king—carefully selecting his ministers—is withheld until the very end of the verse. As readers move through the first line, two figures are introduced: the minister (*cūlvār*) and the king (*maṇṇavaṇ*). The verse also indicates that ministers are people who “act as eyes” (*kaṇṇāka oḷukaḷ*). The structure of the first line of this

⁴² Verse 445: *cūlvārkaṇ ṇāka oḷukaḷāṇ maṇṇavaṇ / cūlvāraic cūḷntu koḷal*.

verse invites readers to wonder about the relationship between kings and ministers, the nature of ministers who act as eyes, and how the verse will tie all of these elements together. The reading experience that is generated on a micro level by the word order of this verse invites readers to slow down and linger over the content. As they move to the second line, readers again encounter the figure of the minister, this time as the object of the final verb and verbal participle that round out the verse: “should carefully select” (*cūlntu koḷal*). It is only in reaching the final part of the verse that readers understand that *because* ministers act as eyes, they should be carefully chosen. Readers realign their expectations with the actual instruction delivered by the final verb. Though the suspense is quickly broken and may be barely perceptible to the reader, the lack of a verbal instruction until the very end of the verse requires readers to engage with its content with more depth than a less suspenseful reading experience would otherwise enable.

A second example further illustrates how the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s verses withhold information about action to generate suspense within the reader:

Always one should avoid—when it does not bring about
virtue along with fame—action.⁴³

The key to the suspense of this verse is that readers do not know what the verse is instructing them to avoid until the final metrical unit reveals that it is “action” (*viṇai*). Before that, a few different moments of suspense are generated. The verse opens with the word “always” (*enrum*), setting up a vast temporal frame for the information that follows. Suspense is thus generated from the very first metrical unit of the verse as readers anticipate what should “always” be done and prepare to think of the verse in relation to the past, present, and future. Next, the verse states

⁴³ Verse 652: *enrum oruvutal vēṇṭum pukaḷoṭu / naṇri payavā viṇai*. This verse is particularly difficult to render into legible English in a way that corresponds precisely to the word order in the original Tamil. I have taken some liberties with in my translation of certain terms, but I have tried to preserve the suspense generated by saving the word “action” until the very end.

“one should avoid” (*oruvutal vēṇṭum*) without providing an object that would complete the verb. Thus, suspense is further generated as readers wonder about *what* precisely should be avoided. Then, the verse declares that this something—readers still do not know what—should be avoided “when it does not bring about virtue along with fame” (*pukaḷoṭu nanri payavā*). Readers still wonder *what* should be avoided and reflect upon the different things that do not bring about virtue or fame. Finally, the verse reveals that it is “action” (*viṇai*) that should be avoided. At this point, the reader has the key piece of information needed to tie the whole verse together and can recast the earlier parts of the verse in light of it. Yet, the suspense generated by the verse’s syntactic structure nevertheless compels readers to linger over the content and consider this claim within the broader context of their lives.

Again, the suspense that is generated through the experience of reading these verses has the potential to impact the audience in ethically significant ways. Both verses engage readers by encouraging them to ask questions about the moral implications of certain forms of action in ways that are central to Harpham’s account of sub-ethics. How should a king treat his ministers? What type of actions should he undertake? Similarly, what is it that should be avoided? What are the things that do not bring about virtue and fame? The brief moment of suspense experienced in only two lines actually models precisely the sub-ethical dimensions of language, in which ethical reflection becomes a process of framing and grappling with moral choices. Granted, both of these verses actually *do* prescribe certain actions insofar as they are rendered in an optative mode: the king *should* carefully select his ministers, and a person *should* avoid action that does not bring about virtue and fame. Yet, at the same time, the aesthetic structure of these verses and the suspense that is generated through the experience of reading them suggests that there are more subtle sub-ethical dimensions at play. Thus, these verses operate at the level of meta-ethics,

which for Harpham consists of the designation of certain moral rules, *as well as* at the level of sub-ethics, which is a process of raising questions and learning how to think through complex moral issues.

One final example will further illustrate the suspense that is generated in the *Tirukkural*'s verses. Here, suspense is generated through a comparison in which the action elevated as morally superior is withheld until the very end:

Worse indeed than doing evil while slandering virtue is,
while slandering someone behind their back, smiling falsely.⁴⁴

In the first line, readers encounter the basic premise on which the rest of the verse turns: there is something that is worse than doing evil while “slandering” virtue. Readers immediately perceive that a comparison is being set up when the third and fourth metrical units declare “worse indeed than doing” (*ceyṭaliṇ tītē*). As readers encounter the information provided in this first line, they begin to wonder about what could be worse than doing evil things that go against virtue. Suspense is generated, even if briefly, as readers anticipate how the verse will conclude. The second line resolves this suspense, though it lingers for a moment by introducing a verbal participle, translated here as “while slandering someone behind their back” (*purāṇālīp*), before finally revealing that “smiling falsely” (*poyntu nakai*) is what is worse than doing evil while slandering virtue.

By withholding the subject of comparison until the end and thereby generating suspense, the verse works upon its audience in distinctly sub-ethical ways. As in the examples above, the verse *does* actually make a direct ethical claim in ways that Harpham would categorize in the realm of meta-ethics. The verse wants readers to know that smiling falsely at someone while

⁴⁴ Verse 182: *arāṇālī allavai ceyṭaliṇ tītē / purāṇālīp poyntu nakai*.

slandering them behind their back is to be regarded as worse than other kinds of evil actions that go against virtue. In this way, at the level of its content, the verse does communicate a moral rule insofar as it discourages its audience from engaging in such behavior. However, at the level of aesthetics, the verse operates within the realm of sub-ethics by inviting readers to ask questions and play with the suspense that is experienced from reading this verse from beginning to end. In this way, this verse has the potential to impact readers in multiple ways. At the surface level, readers understand that the verse wants to communicate a moral truism about human behavior; the verse really *does* want readers to walk away from it with an aversion to certain forms of behavior. At the same time, on a more subtle level, the reading experience generated through suspense models the complex nature of ethical reasoning more generally by encouraging readers to question what they read, engage robustly with the verse's claims, and reread the verse as a whole in light of the information that is withheld until the very end. The verse thus impacts its audience in ways that are distinctly sub-ethical.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined three literary strategies at work within the *Tirukkural*'s verses, which I have referred to as metaphor, inference, and suspense. While these literary strategies are not exhaustive of every poetic structure within the *Tirukkural*, I use these terms as heuristic categories to conceptualize the relationship between poetry and ethics in the *Tirukkural*. By examining how these literary strategies operate throughout the text and theorizing how they work upon the reader, I have shown how the *Tirukkural*'s verses generate ethical thinking not only through *what* they say but also *how* they say it. The manner in which an idea is expressed, even when it does not contain an explicit moral imperative, encourages readers to engage in a more complex hermeneutic process that invites them to raise ethical questions and think about moral

choices through a broader conceptual framework than a mere list of rules would facilitate. In making this argument, I have engaged the work of Paul Ricoeur and Geoffrey Galt Harpham in order to find a language to describe how these literary strategies operate within the *Tirukkural*. While Ricoeur helps us to better understand the role that metaphor plays in the context of the *Tirukkural*, Harpham offers a particularly helpful analytical framework through his argument about the sub-ethical dimension of language. I argue that the *Tirukkural* works on a sub-ethical level by modeling a process for raising ethical questions and mapping out ethical choices.

What unites all three of these literary strategies is an emphasis on the fundamentally complex nature of ethical decision-making and action. When readers encounter these verses, they learn to see the world as full of ethical complexity, in which human life does not always consist of a simple choice between right and wrong, of following an imperative (“one *must*”); rather, it requires nuanced modes of thinking and interpretation that are in fact cultivated when readers engage the verses of a text like the *Tirukkural*. In these ways, the *Tirukkural*’s verses further highlight the complexity of ethical reflection by pushing readers to ask questions and think more deeply about the choices they face in their lives. The ethical life becomes a process of constant interpretation, of looking back on the choices we have made in the past and looking ahead to the choices we may face in the future. The literary strategies of the *Tirukkural*’s individual verses thus work in tandem with those of the *Tirukkural*’s chapters to destabilize the vision of human life presented by the text as a whole. The *Tirukkural* presents an ideal vision of human life while simultaneously illustrating the challenges that readers face in trying to attain that ideal. All of its structural components work together to form a complex whole: the *Tirukkural* holds up an ideal and makes us want it, but it never lets us lose sight of the challenges we face in obtaining it.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

This project began with a set of two closely related questions. First, in looking for a way out of the relative scholarly impasse over issues of historical authorship, source criticism, and religious orientation, I asked: what vision of human life does the *Tirukkuraḷ* articulate to its audiences? This question was guided by the assumption that the *Tirukkuraḷ* can and should be read as a unified work of literature that, when taken as a whole, communicates something to its audiences. Second, in light of the relative dearth of information about how historical audiences actually read and engaged with the text up until the composition of the earliest extant medieval commentary in the tenth century, I asked: how does the *Tirukkuraḷ* actually convey this vision to its audiences, and how does it want to be read? This question was guided by the assumption that there is a relationship between the form and the content of the text, and that the former can tell us just as much as the latter.

Let me start with my answer to the second question, and then we will return to the first. I have argued throughout this project that the *Tirukkuraḷ* works upon audiences at three different structural levels inherent to the text: the section (*pāl*), the chapter (*atikāram*), and the verse (*kuraḷ* or *pāṭam*). In chapter 2, I examined the text at the level of its three major sections, aiming at a sense of how they work together at the level of the whole. As I engaged with the *Aṟattuppāl*, *Poruṭpāl*, and *Kāmattuppāl* in turn, I sought to get a sense of how the text operates as a whole, focusing not just on *what* the *Tirukkuraḷ* says but also *how* it says it. At the same time, I tried to move beyond a “hermeneutics of suspicion” that treats the text as an object to be plundered or a crime scene full of clues for solving a larger mystery. In chapter 3, I examined the text at the level of its chapters, focusing in particular on the interplay of verses and the reading experience it generates. In order to attend to the fact that the arrangement of the verses within each chapter

seems to have been highly variable throughout history, I developed three different approaches for reading the *Tirukkural* at this level. First, I tried to capture how readers would have encountered the *Tirukkural*'s verses before their order became fixed in modern printed editions, imagining how such a reader might approach the process of organizing a set of verses within a chapter and making meaning out of them. Second, I took the opposite approach and focused on how readers would encounter the *Tirukkural*'s verses as they are widely published today in a fixed and stable arrangement based on Parimēlalakar's late thirteenth-century commentary. Third, I turned my attention to the interplay of several verses within a specific chapter, focusing on places where the verses are seemingly contradictory, creating a moment of tension for the reader. Then, in chapter 4, I zoomed in to read the *Tirukkural* at the level of its individual verses, looking for ways to make sense of their ethical import on an isolated level. Here, I identified three different literary strategies operating within the *Tirukkural*'s verses, which I referred to as metaphor, inference, and suspense, each of which engaged the reader in modes of "sub-ethical" reflection by raising ethical questions and framing ethical choices.

Let me return now to the first question. I argued throughout that the *Tirukkural* imparts a vision of human life as marked by the inward cultivation of personal virtue accompanied by the outward expansion of human relationships, in which both of these processes mutually enrich and reinforce each other. Although this vision of human life is never described explicitly, by reading the text as a whole, thinking about how all three sections work together, I have shown that there is nevertheless a coherent vision of human life that is subtly woven throughout. This argument builds upon the work of chapter 2, thinking about how reading across the text generates an ideal image of human life as marked by practices of self-cultivation and social formation, all of which revolve around the specific end goal of a happy and fulfilling marital life. At the same time, I

argued that this vision of human life is constantly destabilized throughout the text, and that the *Tirukkuraḷ* likewise suggests to its readers that this vision of human life is anything but easy to obtain. This argument was made throughout chapters 3 and 4, in which I have shown how the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s literary strategies, through the interplay of verses and through the specific rhetorical devices within individual verses, illustrate the fundamentally complex and fraught nature of human thinking, choice, and action. While such an argument may seem counterintuitive, in which the *Tirukkuraḷ* introduces a vision of human life at one level of the text only to complicate and in some ways “undo” that vision at other levels, I believe this is in fact how the *Tirukkuraḷ* operates as a complex work of literature. On the one hand, the text wants to show its audiences a certain ideal and to push them toward it; on the other hand, the text wants the reader to grapple with the tension between that ideal and the reality of human life, in which our own limitations and forces beyond our control keep us from attaining it.

At the beginning of this project, I referred to the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s vision as “tacitly” woven throughout the text as a whole. Indeed, the word even shows up in the title of this project: “Tacit *Tirukkuraḷ*.” Beyond the sheer effect of alliteration, I have used the word “tacit” deliberately throughout the project to convey two ideas. First, much of this project has been grounded in a reading of what I have called the “literary strategies” of the text, which I have defined as a set of instructions that is revealed through the dynamic interaction between the content of the text and the form in which it is presented that guide the audience's interpretation of the *Tirukkuraḷ* and shape that audience in ethically significant ways. These literary strategies in themselves are tacit, for the *Tirukkuraḷ* never declares its intentions or goals outright; rather, they have to be discerned through a close and careful engagement with the text. As I noted in chapter 2, what this attention to literary strategies amounts to is that I use a close reading of the text to develop a method for

doing a close reading of the text. In other words, I read the text to get a sense of how it “wants” to be read—how the text instructs or guides the reader to make specific interpretive choices—and then I use those instructions to dig deeper into the text and better understand what it is as a work of literature. Of course, texts do not have “agency” in the sense that we normally use the term, and I am only one historical reader among many, one who cannot be separated from whatever preexisting assumptions, ideas, and frameworks I bring with me to the reading experience. My interpretation is at most a conjecture, but it *is* nevertheless an *interpretation*, and one that I hope does justice to the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a work of literature.

A second sense in which I use the word “tacit” is to say something about the *Tirukkuraḷ*’s overall project. As I noted above, one of the ways in which I think the *Tirukkuraḷ* is operating as a poem is to present a certain ideal to the reader and then to destabilize the very possibility of attaining that ideal. The paradox between these two dimensions of the text is another part of how the text works in highly subtle, indeed “tacit” ways. While I do think the *Tirukkuraḷ* has something it wants to communicate to its readers about human life through the presentation of such a life in its ideal form, I also think the *Tirukkuraḷ* wants to convey to its readers just how difficult it is to achieve that ideal. In this sense, it is not that the *Tirukkuraḷ* is self-contradicting or incoherent; rather, I believe that the text is actively trying to mirror the experience of human existence through the very reading experience it creates. On the one hand, we are drawn to its harmonious vision of life in which each person cultivates the virtues necessary to succeed in society, gradually expanding their circle of human relationships and contributing in a productive way to society according to their place within it. On the other hand, we are forced to reckon with the fact that this vision of human life is incredibly difficult to achieve and often impaired by the limits of our own judgment, our inability to act as we ought, and, most pressingly, by forces that

are beyond our control. In this way, the *Tirukkural* tacitly does its work by offering up an ideal and then handing us a dose of reality. As we read the text as a whole, we think we know what it is about. But when we look closer and focus on smaller and smaller details, we realize that we have to rethink what we thought we knew. This is the tacit dimension of the *Tirukkural*.

What does all of this mean, then, for the future of the study of the *Tirukkural*? I have tried to chart several new courses in terms of how we think about a much read and often studied text, though in no way do I suggest that this project has exhausted the interpretive possibilities that are available to us. However, there are several contributions that I have tried to make. First, I have tried to shift scholarly attention away from issues of the text's historical authorship or audiences. The lack of available historical information about the circumstances behind the production of the text renders any quest for the "historical Tiruvalluvar" or the "original intentions" of the author futile at best. Furthermore, although we have some sense of how audiences engaged with the text over time, I have chosen not to focus on any one historical reader or set of historical readers. Instead, I have tried to read for the "intention of the text," or the set of instructions that the text itself provides for how it wants to be read that manifest through its literary strategies. I have also tried to think about how the text works upon *any* reader, and how it foresees and actively tries to create a certain kind of "model reader" who follows the set of instructions laid out by the text and then makes a conjecture about what the text wants to communicate to its audiences.

Second, I have also tried to shift the focus away from the question of Sanskrit influence upon the text and turn instead to thinking about how the *Tirukkural* functions as a work of literature on its own terms. We can learn more about the text by thinking about what it actually wants to say to its readers than by engaging with questions of source criticism or redaction criticism, which are difficult if not impossible to answer with any degree of certainty given the

relative paucity of historical information available to us about the circumstances behind the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s composition. Instead, I have tried to read the *Tirukkuraḷ* with attention to its own inherent literary strategies. Reading the text in this way, I argue, can help us avoid methods of criticism and interpretation that “disembowel” a text and point us in the direction of treating texts as complete and integrated wholes that are unified and internally coherent.

Third, I have tried to steer the scholarly conversation away from an almost obsessive determination to read the *Tirukkuraḷ* in search of a religious ideology that is presumed to be latent within the text and waiting to be uncovered. One of the residual outcomes of this effort to reveal the text's religious orientation has been a tendency to read the text in an overly suspicious mode, in which the reader assumes the stance of an archaeologist or a detective. I suggest that a better approach to reading the *Tirukkuraḷ* is to assume the stance of a reader-as-listener; in other words, instead of asking what the text *hides* from its readers, we can ask what the text *reveals* to its readers. Such an approach is grounded in a “hermeneutics of respect” that seeks to listen to what the *Tirukkuraḷ* has to say for and about itself.

To conclude, let me summarize a few of the areas of research that this dissertation has left unexplored that remain open for future possible work on the *Tirukkuraḷ*. First, the role that the *Tirukkuraḷ*'s five extant medieval commentaries have played in shaping ideas about the text deserves much more attention than I have been able to give it here. While collected editions of the five extant commentaries continue to be published and sold today, few have engaged with them in any robust comparative way. While Maṇakkuṭavar's commentary has received some attention and Parimēlaḷakar's commentary is frequently held up as the culmination of the Tamil medieval commentarial tradition, the surviving commentaries of Paripperumāl, Kālīṅkar, and Paritīyār are scarcely mentioned today, let alone studied together. The time is ripe for a detailed

comparative study of these commentaries to better understand the various intellectual milieus in which the *Tirukkuraḷ* was read and interpreted as well as the shifting nature of the commentarial genre over time. What assumptions do the commentators make about the *Tirukkuraḷ* and how are those assumptions revealed in their commentaries? How did commentators organize the text and make sense of it as a whole? What is the relationship between the organization of the text and the interpretation of the text, and what are the different interpretive agendas that commentators bring with them to the text? What, in short, is the “project” of each commentator? These questions remain largely unexplored and deserve further attention than they have thus far received.

Second, the role that European missionaries and British civil servants played in shaping ideas about the *Tirukkuraḷ* has yet to be fully examined. Since at least the seventeenth century, in which we find scattered references to the *Tirukkuraḷ* and its author in several texts, missionaries were fascinated by the *Tirukkuraḷ*, studying it extensively with the help of Tamil scholars and producing many of the earliest translations of the text into European languages. Prominent among these translations are C. J. Beschi’s Latin rendering of the first two parts of the *Tirukkuraḷ* in 1730 and G. U. Pope’s complete English translation of the text published in 1886. What influence did these missionaries and colonial authorities have in shaping ideas about the text at the time? How did they first encounter the *Tirukkuraḷ*? With whom and under what guidance did they read, study, and translate it? There is significant future work to be done toward answering these questions, investigating the networks in which the *Tirukkuraḷ* circulated during this time and the lasting impact of these interpretations upon contemporary ideas about the text.

Finally, there is significant work to be done on the political influence of the text during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as it became enmeshed in political efforts to articulate a distinctly South Indian, Tamil, Dravidian identity. I have earlier mentioned the role that social

activists like Periyār (E. V. Ramasamy) and Pulavar Kuḷantai played by praising the *Tirukkuraḷ* as the unique product of Tamil genius and a symbol of the purity of ancient Tamil culture. In the latter part of the twentieth century, the former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, M. Karunanidhi, published a *Tirukkuraḷ* commentary and sponsored a number of projects to memorialize its author, including the construction of a large Tiruvaḷḷuvar statue in Kanyakumari. What kind of social and political capital did these thinkers and politicians acquire from their efforts to promote the *Tirukkuraḷ*? How are contemporary public figures reading the *Tirukkuraḷ* and shaping its ongoing legacy? Such projects would help to provide a clearer picture of how the *Tirukkuraḷ* was recast as a text of political resistance and a source of modern Tamil pride in the twentieth century while also looking ahead to the role that the text may continue to play in the twenty-first century.

Indeed, even this broad sketch of the sheer breadth of historical possibilities for further research on the *Tirukkuraḷ*—to say nothing of the depth that each individual possibility offers on its own—is enough to overwhelm any scholar who enters upon the study of this remarkable text. Throughout this project, I have been continually amazed at how little the *Tirukkuraḷ* has been read or even mentioned in the Euro-American academy despite the fact that it is one of the most significant works of Tamil literature in history. In taking on this project, one of only a handful of studies to have been produced in English, outside of the Tamil-speaking academy, I hope that my work has shown the depth of my commitment to making sense of this incredibly understudied text while bringing it to the attention of a new generation of readers and audiences who will carry this work, in new and unexpected ways, forward.

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