Chapter 1

THE ETHICS OF TEXTUALITY

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries to the Tamil lands of southern India and Ceylon were appalled by Indian textuality. They encountered a world in which the social relations of the text were highly restricted in terms of person, space, and time, and a world in which the meaningfulness of the text appeared to reside somewhere beyond the word. High-value texts were largely animated—brought to life in practice—in places and times set aside by persons qualified (by gender, caste, and training) for people qualified to hear them. Literate elites among the Saivites of Jaffna, for instance, deployed Sanskrit Vedas or texts such as the *Kantapurāṇam* written in an archaic Tamil; for the wielders of such texts did not necessarily consider the denotational function of the word, or *logos*, as more important than the aesthetic and spiritual power of *nāta*, the "originary form of sound," the source of language, music, and the universe itself (Kaviraj 1992, 27–28; cf. Yelle 2003). Indic textuality appeared to emphasize the sheer aesthetic experience of linguistic sound over the denotationality of the word, states of being over states of knowing, poetic over prose forms, mood over mind (Daniel 1996).[1] For the Protestants, on the other hand, *logos* was critically important within the highest-value text, the Bible, for the salvation of people's souls depended on it

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(Kulendran 1967). They therefore translated the Bible, built schools with the aim of producing literate populations, propagated passages and interpretations of the Bible in tracts to be widely distributed, and—crucially—went out among as many people as they could to preach the vernacular Gospel in the marketplaces, *mandapam*s (outdoor halls), and bazaars of villages and towns all over the country.

Textuality itself, then, including the social relations of textual animation, was a major site of ethical evaluation for the missionaries, and they waged a campaign against what they judged to be wicked textual ethics that would deny the masses access to the Word of God. It was not only what the sermons said that was important in this struggle but also the ethics of the social—or textual—practices themselves. This Protestant turning toward a stranger-audience in tracts and sermons marked a radical departure from existing Indic forms of text, at least among men of higher status.[2] In many ways, the Protestants prevailed. Though they converted only a small fraction of the population to Christianity, the wider society was, textually, Protestantized. For by the mid-nineteenth century, schools, presses, and sermonizing had been widely taken up by non-Christian agents (Hudson 1994, 95, 123; Young and Sebanesan 1995; Grafe 1999, 69–93) in the formation of entirely new modes of religiosity that we call "religion" (Daniel 2002; King 1999) and, some decades later, into new modes of agency and political subjectivity that we call "politics" (*la politique*, in Paul Ricoeur's terms). That turning toward everyone, a turning to and calling to all, embodied a new ethic that had a great deal to do with the production of the ethical universe of strangers that we call the modern public sphere (Anderson [1983] 2006; Warner 2002; Taylor 2003, 2007; see also Chapter 5).

To illustrate this suggestion, I rely on a set of Tamil tracts on Christian preaching in common public places titled *The Bazaar Book, or, Vernacular Preacher's Companion* (in Tamil, *Kiraṇamālikai*, 1865), one of the very earliest treatises on Tamil homiletic (which we briefly discussed in the Introduction). Written by H. M. Scudder (1822–95), a Tamil-literate American missionary born to a prominent family of missionaries to the Tamil lands, the text offers a vision of the vernacular preacher delivering a sermon in that space of stranger mixing, the marketplace or "bazaar," deploying his Tamil Bible along with native texts. "Each address," Scudder writes in the English introduction, "contains, woven into its texture, a few poetical quotations, selected with great care from Hindu works" (1865, vi). Prominent

among these texts was the *Nālaḍiyār* (*Nālaḍi Nānūṟu*), one of Tamil's most famous treatises on ethical being in the world.[3] The *Nālaḍiyār* is especially prominent in discussions on language and the conditions surrounding public sermonizing. The vernacular sermon here involves a conjuncture of European and Tamil notions of text and textual animation along with a conjuncture of moral and political dimensions of being in the world. So, despite the sermon emerging as an alien textual practice in India, something was Indian about these sermons, too, for the texts that were animated in them had ancient lineages in the Tamil world. Although the artifactual (e.g., "books") and interactional (e.g., "sermons") forms of the text were transformed by Protestant textualities, a quintessentially Indic rhetorical framing of being in the world (i.e., the doctrine of *trivarga*) and the poetics of the expression of that being inhered within the new texts, including sermons.[4] We find these poetics inhering also within a whole series of practices, from worship to lullabies and dirges, riddles, proverbs, folk songs, games, and—as Anand Pandian (2009) has discussed—in the myriad, quotidian, and bodily engagements of the cultivator with the soil. In other words, that which appeals to the largest and oldest ideologies and aesthetics of being in the world as structured via mythopoeic and rhetorical forms provided an embodied ground on which Protestant textual forms would work to transform the world. Indexes of these rhetorics and poetics are the two texts most commonly deployed, even sometimes eclipsing the Bible, in the tracts of the times in mid-century Tamilagam: the sixth- or seventh-century CE Jain masterpieces of being in the world, the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, and its companion, the *Nālaḍiyār*, texts that are named for the very poetic forms they take: the couplet (*kuṟaḷ*) and the quatrain (*nālaḍi*). The Christians who wanted to capture souls for Jesus knew that their own texts must first have Tamil souls.

Nālaḍiyār and the Bazaar

The *Bazaar Book* is among the very first texts to provide an outline of Tamil homiletic and models of Tamil sermons (although individual tracts dating back to the 1840s were similarly structured in theme and tone). With the exception of a brief English introduction, the *Bazaar Book* is composed of thirteen "addresses" to a "heathen audience" on topics such as "Guru," "Sin," "God," "Man," "Expiation," "Fate," "Transmigration," "Idolatry Sinful," "Idolatry Ruinous," "Caste," "Brahmanism," and, most important for our purposes,

"Shastra" (text, textual precept) and "Mantra" (auspicious and efficacious sound, word, or phrase). The *Bazaar Book* appears to have included a number of tracts that Scudder had been preparing when he took sick leave to return to America, but the tone of the addresses is very much in line with the rather aggressive and offensive style of tract publishing and preaching that characterized the Protestant missionary engagement with South India and Sri Lanka from at least the beginning of the nineteenth century (Grafe [1982] 1992, 140–41).[5]

The tracts that were joined together in the *Bazaar Book* were clearly meant to be read aloud to a group of people, perhaps memorized and delivered by native assistants or catechists. The addresses are written in an extremely simple Tamil, somewhat more Sanskritic than today's standard in Tamil Nadu, but the sentence structure is quite easy to grasp, with quick syntactic punches perfect for oral delivery. Other features of the orality of the text include directly addressing the audience as *piriyamānavarkaḷē* (Dearly beloved) or simply *janaṅkaḷē!* (O people!). They include a great deal of rhetorical questions designed to engage listeners in situ, and the language is shot through with very simple proverbs, similes, and other appeals to oral literature:

> *Piriyamānavarkaḷē, "nīr mēl kumiḻ pōl nilaiyilā kayam" enkiṟa paḻamoḻiyai nīṅkaḷellām kēṭṭiruppīrkaḷ.* (Scudder 1865, 5)
>
> Dearly beloved, you all will have heard the well-known proverb that the "body is as ephemeral as the bubble on the surface of the water."

For complex reasons, the *Nālaḍiyār* was highlighted in the *Bazaar Book* at moments involving the animation of the text, the bringing of text to life in the sermonic encounter of missionary or catechist with the stranger-audience in the bazaar itself. Though less prominent today than the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, its far more famous companion and model, *Nālaḍiyār*, was the second Tamil text that we know of to have been printed outside a Christian context by Tamils for Tamils, in Madras in 1812 (Zvelebil 1992, 219; Blackburn 2003, 82). Its priority in the thinking of Tamil literati (at least) is indexed by its primacy in the order of publication, like the Gutenberg Bible, an index of the *doxa* of textual importance for Tamil people. The nineteenth-century Tamil philologist G. U. Pope writes that the "peculiar terseness and vigor of its style and the fidelity

with which it reflects the thoughts and ideas of the great mass of the Tamil people, and indeed of the yeomanry of India," leads it to be called the *Veḷḷāḷar-Vētam*, "the Bible of the Cultivators" (1893, viii). Its import is attested by the fact that U. Ve. Swaminathaiyar (1855–1942), one of the great universalizers of ancient Tamil literature, took it up as his very first lesson after his appointment to Government College in Kumbakonam in 1880 (Zvelebil 1992, 189). And by 1893, in G. U. Pope's famous critical edition and translation, the author asserts that it was "taught in every vernacular school in the Tamil country" (1893, viii). It was also used among Christians from a very early date and was included in the formal syllabus of the Americans in Jaffna, for instance, from the foundation of their seminary there in 1816 (ACM TR 1830). Like the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, the *Nālaḍiyār* in its simple moral counsel was—and remains—immensely attractive to Christians (and everyone else, for that matter). Even Pope, who worked zealously to purge the church of a great deal of indigenous aesthetics in the mid-century (Peterson 2004, 49–51), endorsed the texts wholeheartedly and wrote that the two together throw "a flood of light upon the whole ethical and social philosophy of the Tamil people" (Pope 1893, vii).

The *Nālaḍiyār* contains extraordinarily beautiful verses embodying a timeless ethic with universal appeal. Some of Pope's translations give a taste of their poesy and power.[6] On wealth, *Nālaḍiyār* 28:10 is profound:

> Gathering it together is trouble, and even so the guarding of resplendent wealth is severe trouble. If the guarded heap diminish, it is trouble. If it perish, it is trouble. Wealth is trouble's very dwelling place!

Nālaḍiyār 20:5 would not be out of place in contemporary humanist critiques of caste:

> When men speak of "good caste" and "bad caste" it is a mere form of speech, and has no real meaning. Not even by possessions, made splendid by ancient glories, but by self-denial, learning, and energy is caste determined.

Or who could remain unmoved by the striking observation in *Nālaḍiyār* 3:4 of a funeral procession by some sixth-century poet who transcended his time and place to capture a chilling truth of the human condition?

> They march and then strike once! A little while they wait, then strike the

> drum a second time. Behold, how fine! The third stroke sounds. They veil it, take the fire, and go forth—the dying bear the dead.

Although today the *Nālaḍiyār* is not nearly as well-known as the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, its structure is noteworthy for its artifice—and therefore for what might have been important to Tamil speakers for a very, very long time. The origin of the text itself is unknown, though most think it started with the Jains and many felt it to be among the earliest texts of Tamil literature. Traditional scholarly lore has it that prior to the twelfth century, the four hundred quatrains were organized in no particular order. It was reorganized by Pathumanar in the twelfth century according to the well-known structure of Indic didactic texts, namely, the three aims of life (*triṿarga*): *dharma* in Sanskrit (*aṟam* in Tamil), right conduct; *artha* (*poruḷ*), material gain and rule; and *kama* (*kāmām*), romantic or sexual love. To place the *Nālaḍiyār* at the forefront of sermonic practice, then, is to see it not only as the new use of a native text but one that is organized according to a much earlier and deeper pan-Indic aesthetic of human life. It embodies a vernacularization of even earlier metastructural concerns in the lives of Indian people, concerns that are quite old, indeed, formulated as a paradigm perhaps two thousand years ago. It provides, then, a perfect icon of the ways that preexisting phenomenologies of human action and textualities are taken up in the new newnesses of modern textual forms.

Perhaps the *Nālaḍiyār* was at the forefront of the *Bazaar Book* because it lent itself more easily to the Christian (and, peculiarly, the Tamil modern) exclusion of *kāmām* (romantic love) from the public world. Visible genres of Indic performance would, in previous ages, emphasize *kāmām* as an element of life in both oral and scriptural practice—for example, the *Kamasutra*—in both the home and the visible world of kingly procession (Bannerjee 1990, 127–79; Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam 1992). Entire genres of *pirabantam* (medieval verse poetry), for instance, were devoted to outlining the love life of the king (*ulā pirabantam*) (Ali 2004; Wentworth 2009), and erotic stories and songs rang out among clutches of women in marriage ceremonies all across the land (to the shock and outrage of the missionaries, of course) (Raheja and Gold 1994). Contemporary Tamil public life, however, tends to shunt such expressions either to the most stigmatized forms of theater and street performance (e.g., *karakāṭṭam*, or "pot dancing") or to the realm of

whisper and gossip regarding the multiple partners or nonstandard sexual practices of the political class. Whereas the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, for instance, gives almost equal time to *kāmām* (330 of 1,330 verses), the *Nālaḍiyār* devotes only 10 of 400 quatrains to the subject of bodily desire. Thus, the *Nālaḍiyār*, even more than the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, appears to embody a new kind of sexless publicity that becomes, eventually, the standard for nineteenth- and twentieth-century public discourse.

In taking up the *trivarga* structure, the *Nālaḍiyār* as a textual source for a Protestant ethical sermon emblematizes the overall conjuncture of Indic and European modes of textuality, as it is a Tamil text that will now be cited and discoursed on just as a Bible verse would be. This predominance of the denotational (as opposed to, say, poetic) functions of the text was a key element of the newness in Protestant textuality. At the same time, the denotational elements of these texts enabled the deployment of ancient Indic ethics that were timeless, pure, true, and almost all but absent from what the missionaries felt was a wicked and degenerate Hinduism then being practiced. Here was an Indian ethic that the missionaries could wield as Indian—a rhetorical sleight of mind caught as it was within a new ethics of textuality generally.

Protestant Textualities and Their Others

That Scudder cites the use of the *Nālaḍiyār* in the bazaar also provokes rather fruitful conjunctures and contradictions. We imagine that Scudder had in mind a public place where he felt he could address some generalized humanity, some group of "zero-degree individuals" (as Sudipta Kaviraj [1997, 90] has put it), all equal in the sight of God and all deserving of God's good news and salvation. The bazaar may certainly have looked like such a place of stranger mixing, a site of commerce between people who would normally not interact with one another at all in buying and selling—a place, in other words, of common aims. To be sure, the bazaars of the Tamil lands became the first sites of public meetings and political oratory in the coming decades and the following century (Chapter 3, Epilogue). But a bazaar is not a public place in a commonsense understanding of the term for several distinct reasons. Most striking, perhaps, is that it is not opposed to some private realm. Rather, it is the very paradigm of what we have come to understand as one

pole of a quintessentially Indic opposition between a ritually enclosed—and therefore semiotically coherent interior—space and an exterior essentially defined as a negative space, a non-interior. Rabindranath Tagore's famous opposition, "home and the world" (*ghare*/*baire*), for instance, is not strictly an opposition between the "home" and the "world"; more precisely, it is an opposition between "inside the house" and "the outside," between a space positively defined by coherent social order and an incoherent negative space defined by its value contrast in opposition to the interior (Kaviraj 1997, 93). The exterior, for which Dipesh Chakrabarty used the bazaar as a paradigm, "has a deeply ambiguous character":

> .It is exposed and therefore malevolent. It is not subject to a single set of (enclosing) rules and ritual defining a community. It is where miscegenation occurs. All that do not belong to the "inside" (family/community) lie there, cheek by jowl, in unassorted collection, violating rules of mixing: from feces to prostitutes. (1991, 25)

Again, this is where the *Nālaḍiyār* is most prominently deployed in the *Bazaar Book* and provides a sense of just how non-interior, non-ordered these spaces were from the preacher's point of view. Just over half (nine of sixteen) of the *nālaḍi*s (quatrains) cited in the *Bazaar Book* are found in a final section titled "Various Topics," all but two of which are deployed in the subsection titled "Street Opponents, Unfair Disputants, and Cavillers." Reading through the quatrains in this subsection gives us a sense of the general tone that may have greeted these sermons in the altogether non-polis-like atmosphere of the bazaar. Here the vernacular preacher offered *Nālaḍiyār* 26:6 to the "Noisy Disputant":

> No sound comes from the green leaves of the Palmyra tree, but its dry leaves rustle noisily evermore. So learned and wise men, fearing lest they be betrayed into faulty expressions, keep silence; but ignorant men are always jabbering.

To the "Abusive Disputant," Scudder suggested the use of three quatrains:

> Senseless as a ladle, which knows not the sweetness of the gruel, empty-headed fools ridicule the words of loving men, who discourse graciously

> on virtue. The wise, however, accept those words as full of substance. (*Nālaḍiyār* 33:1)

> Words Spoken by an unguarded tongue always scorch the speakers themselves. Hence, men of mature wisdom and intelligence will never hastily give utterance to harsh and angry expressions. (*Nālaḍiyār* 7:3)

> It is the duty of great men not only to forgive abuse cast upon themselves; but also to grieve, because their vilifiers must, as a consequence of their wicked conduct, fall into a fiery hell. (*Nālaḍiyār* 6:8)

And to the "Disputant Who Scorns and Rejects Truth," the vernacular preacher might deploy *Nālaḍiyār* 26:9, which states:

> Base and contemptible souls are like the fly, which, passing by the honey distilled in perfume-breathing flowers, greedily seeks everything that is foul and disgusting. Of what profit to such persons are the clear and sweet words, which drop, nectar-like, from the lips of the great and the wise?

Finally, I think the following suggests, perhaps, the most non-interior-like qualities of the bazaar by offering to the "Obscene Disputant" a universally understood insult:

> When fools, who have failed to profit by instruction, speak detestable words, wise and excellent men feel ashamed, and greatly pity the mother who gave birth to those fools. (*Nālaḍiyār* 32:6)

But the *Nālaḍiyār* and the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* are also cited positively as elements of an ethical universe to which the missionary is bound as much as he is to the Bible. The most famous of all *nālaḍi*s (14:135) offers the following against the use of Indic shastras:[7]

> Countless is the number of Sastras [*sic*], but few are the days of those who study them, exposed to a thousand fatalities. Therefore like the Swan, which separating the milk from the water with which it is mingled drinks only the former; let the wise carefully discriminating reject worthless Sastras and study only those which are valuable. (Scudder 1865, 17)

This translation, by H. M. Scudder's brother, Dr. J. W. Scudder, contains a minor

but highly motivated slippage in its translation of the term *kalvi*, "learning," as "shastra," a textual form. Pope's 1893 translation gives a better sense of the lovely and famous Tamil line, *kalvi kaṟaiyila karpavar nāḷsila*:

> Learning hath no bounds, the learner's days are few. If you think calmly diseases many wait around! With clear discrimination learn what is meet for you, like the swan that leaving the water drinks the milk. (Pope 1893, 62)

Sleight of hand or not, the *Bazaar Book* spent considerable time focusing on what the missionaries felt were evils of textual practice associated with *sāstiram* (shastras) and *mantiram* (mantras, auspicious poetic formulas). Among the most heinous elements of Indic textual practice from the Protestant point of view was the restricted social relations of the text. Scudder complains that the "Sastras" pertain only to Brahmins and others invested with the "sacred cord" but exclude women and Sudras who

> are in no case to read or even hear them read. How is this? Can we suppose that God, in giving a Veda, would deny it to Sudras and bestow it only upon those who wear a cord? Is it to these alone that he gives his rain, his wind, and his sun-shine? (1869, 19)

Continuing a long-standing theme that Protestants applied equally to Catholic priests and their Latin Bible, they criticized both the restrictions of the texts and their semiotic opacity:

> These four Vedas are written in Sanscrit, a language utterly unknown and unintelligible to ordinary people. They are rendered still more difficult by numberless transmutation, augmentation, and elisions. They have been purposely made abstruse and obscure. Not one in a thousand, even among Brahmins, can read and explain them. Such Vedas are utterly useless to the world of mankind. Hence we cannot allow for a moment that these four Vedas have God for their author. Far from being divinely revealed, they are evidently the productions of fraudulent and tricky Brahmins. (19)

In contrast, the missionaries claimed that the Christian Veda, "the true Sastra, is perfectly plain and intelligible. Anyone can read it, anyone can understand it, anyone can meditate on it. Even those, who are not readers,

may by the ear easily apprehend its truths, and discover the good way of salvation" (25).

More broadly, the American missionaries understood that they were dealing with minds that processed information darkly. In 1839, one missionary wrote:

> No one who has not had some experience on this point, can understand what is meant by the expression, the darkness of a heathen's mind, or know how difficult it is to communicate any correct notions of the Gospel to an uneducated heathen. In order to become intelligent hearers of the Gospel, they must be taught the first principles of Christianity in childhood. (ACM TR 1839, 24)

But it was not merely a matter of teaching the principles of the Gospel in childhood; more important was to transform their minds based on rationalized semiotics. Another American missionary with twenty years of experience in Jaffna wrote, in 1837:

> Their own false systems blind their understanding. For instance, I call fifty men and women of middle age to hear the following sermon:—
>
> Friends, we are all sinners. We need a Saviour. God has provided a Saviour, Jesus Christ, who will save us from hell and take us to heaven. Repent, therefore, and believe on Jesus Christ!
>
> This sermon if preached to a purely heathen congregation, means either nothing at all, or else these attentive hearers have applied the whole to the most absurd notions of heathenism. *Sinners* means those who are shut up to poverty and suffering through the influence of fate; *God* means Siva; *Jesus Christ* is some unknown deity; *Heaven* means Kailaiyam; *Hell* is the suffering of many transmigrations; and *Repentence* is some dictionary word which they cannot understand. (ACM TR 1839, 25–36)

They complained systematically in just this fashion that terms lost their referential grounding, that their denotationality was floating and unstable, that heathens could make words mean precisely what they wanted them to mean. So, in addition to referential fixity, the Protestants were focused on semiotic

transparency and the ability to deploy signs in socially universal contexts—just like, or so they imagined, the bazaar.

Thus, the Protestants encountered an entirely different phenomenology of textual production and embodiment of textual knowledge where texts were to be memorized and sung at highly restricted times and only in certain spaces such as a temple, on auspicious dates and times, and by and to people qualified to hear it (mostly upper-caste men). Recitation operated on, what I called in the Introduction, the logic of textual emblematization, where the animator embodied, became an avatar of, the text. Socially, that was the point. Ethically, Protestant textuality found an Other and a mode of seeing or epistemizing itself: to cultivate the kinds of minds that would be ready to learn the Gospel required a transformation of signs, their textual carriers, and their functionality itself. The Protestant missionaries accomplished this through schooling, publishing, and distributing tracts and Bibles, as well as sermonizing. As mentioned at the outset, though only a fraction of the population was converted to Protestantism, the entire society would, over the course of just a few decades, become Protestantized. By the time the *Bazaar Book* was published in 1865, Tamil Saivites had already begun to establish and staff European-style schools, sermonizing broadly and printing new, clear editions of sacred texts that would be simple for all to understand.

The ethics of Protestant textuality lay at the heart of the project to produce a universalizing system of signs. The missionaries recoiled at the restrictions on the animation of the text and sought new institutional means and performative spaces such as schools and bazaars to bring the text to all the people. The ability to universalize texts so that everyone could understand them—to produce vernacular texts written in the language of everyday life—was asserted as ethically superior to the Indian forms of texts that, in the missionaries' view, were ethically unconscionable, for only a qualified few could understand them and comprehend their meaning or, in fact, were even licensed to hear them.

Moreover, in terms of producing the kind of large-scale social imaginary that is the Tamil world today, the Protestant ethic of textuality was also at the

center of many of the transformations that we have come to understand as "public" in the most generic—indeed, European—sense of that term. Language came under a peculiar kind of ethical scrutiny, was recognized as a new way of knowing and being that came to be used, eventually, to imagine a population that shared a commonality in, and solidarity based on, language. This new understanding enabled language to be used in new ways, to be circulated in new textual forms, particularly in forms designed to interpellate a generalized people, a public—that is, universalized print and universalizing sermons (and, later, political oratory; see Chapters 3, 5). It was that communicative restructuring of textual practice, that new interpellation, that would eventually speak into being the Tamil people and the Tamil public sphere.

The ethical underpinning of Protestant textuality brought with it transformations in the materiality and ideology of textual artifacts and in the praxis of textual production. These transformations resulted in textual shifts from the poetic to the prosaic, from an aesthetic of the power of sound (*nāta*) to an ethic of denotational rationality (*logos*), from a sonocentric to a logocentric universe. In combination with the profound shift from restricted to universalized social relations of textuality, new Protestant forms of textuality utterly transformed the entire project of what one was to do with words and, indeed, the kinds of persons that would be licensed to do those things in new spaces and temporalities. A new kind of agency was born, that of the sermonizer, who would be licensed to speak to and transform the world according to any number of different ethical systems but on a new, mass scale. By the first few decades of the twentieth century, that same agency would come to be applied to various projects such as the human rights of lower castes, women's rights, the Labor movement (Epilogue), and eventually independence.

It is worthwhile to recognize, however, as noted in the Introduction, that although the Protestants made history, they did not do so just as they pleased. Other textualities were still operating that would be the basis on which the Tamil public sphere would be experienced. An ancient vernacular aesthetic of textual production—the poetic and rhetorical textual forms carried over from the ancient into the production of the modern—appears to have remained immanent within the transformations of Protestant textuality that yielded a qualitative difference in the nature of the formation of the public. Moreover, it

was those poetics and rhetorics that made the experience and disposition of a Tamil public sphere utterly different from the experience of, say, a French one. For texts such as these—and even the ancient ethics of Indian textuality—continued to be deployed by the new agents in their transformative projects of the coming decades and century.

Even in 1893, in his edition of the *Nālaḍiyār*, Pope provided a thorough discussion of the poetic meters of the text so that readers could appreciate its poesy. In both his editions of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* and the *Nālaḍiyār*, Pope expended a great deal of energy ensuring that readers would be sufficiently familiar with the lovely meter called *Veṇbā* (from the root *veḷ*, meaning "white, bright, clear," and *pā*, meaning "verse"). In essence, readers would be lost—unable to parse the morphemes—were they unable to scan the poem prior to understanding it (Pope 1893, xxviii, xxix).

More than that, however, readers would be lost aesthetically. Sound itself (*nāta*) was important, the sheer sound of words and music as they worked on the hearts of the hearers. Even the missionaries, in their use of Tamil texts such as *Nālaḍiyār*, knew that their sermons—however rational and denotationally explicit—would fail to move the souls of their auditors without a poesy alien to their own ethic. Consider the sense of the sound symbolism between the beating of a funeral drum and the assertion of a callow young man who claims that life is characterized by the bliss of wedded life (*Nālaḍiyār* 3:5):

> *kaṇam koṇḍu currattār kallenṟu alaṟa*
> *piṇam koṇḍu kāṭṭu uyppārk kaṇḍum—maṇam koṇḍu, īṇḍu*
> *uṇḍu, uṇḍu, uṇḍu ennum uṇarvinān cārrumē,*
> *ḍoṇ ḍoṇ ḍoṇ ennum paṟai.*
>
> To him, who, although he sees them bear the corpse to the burning ground, while friends in troops loudly lament, boldly asserts that wedded life is bliss on earth, the funeral drum speaks out, and mocks his vain utterance. (Pope 1893, 18)

Between the reduplicated echo of the two lines (lines 3 and 4), *uṇḍu*, *uṇḍu*, *uṇḍu* (It is, it is, it is) in the third line, and the onomatopoeic drum beat, *ḍoṇ ḍoṇ ḍoṇ* in the fourth line, is caught a sense of mocking irony for which the

English translation—even at its best in Pope—requires an extra phrase, "and mocks his vain utterance."

The bodily apperception of the sheer sound of language (*nāta*), the music of language, and the poetic form remained a key element of the entire project and would come to have fateful political impacts later on in the Tamil nationalist Dravidianist uptake of just such poesy as an index of their own antiquity, of the nationalists' Tamil cultural authenticity, in the new democratic order of mid-twentieth-century Tamilagam. Examples of this sort are copious in any of the major Dravidianist speakers, such as Kalaiñar Mu. Karunanidhi or Ariñar C. N. Annadurai.[8] This uptake was mediated, as we see in the next chapter, through Saivite reformers such as Arumuga Navalar.

Even the embodiment of knowledge through the memorization and recitation of text was resurrected by the Dravidianist politicians who combined the precolonial textual emblematization—indexing and iconically instantiating a consubstantiality of person and text—with the sermonic form in oratorical discourse. To cite the ancient text was to embody it, to become an avatar of the text itself and all its properties: grammatical refinement, antiquity, and civilizational authenticity. This kind of emblematization became a key element of the very character of the interpellation of the Tamil public sphere, of its leaders and its people.

This is a strikingly clear example—among many we could enumerate—of how deep vernacular aesthetics track the manner in which the new newnesses of modernity would be laid down in South Asia (and elsewhere). In this case, it was these ancient, broad, and deep Indic rhetorical and mythopoeic structures that provided an embodied ground for the infrastructural transformation of the Tamil public sphere—one based on the ethical prescriptions of textuality and textual practice associated with the Protestant Reformation and the European Enlightenment.