How Úrvashi Was Won is a play that celebrates human love, enacting, with penetrating insight and lyrical precision, the early stages of ecstasy and fulfillment. But Kālidāsa’s greatness is in showing the ambiguity of the love relation, including the separation and madness that are part of the ecstasy; he is able to touch the ultimately tragic side of love.
HOW ÚRVASHI WAS WON

by KĀLIDĀSA

TRANSLATED BY

Velcheru Narayana Rao
&
David Shulman

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ACT TWO
\textit{tataḥ praviṣaty utkāṇṭhito rājā vidūṣakaś ca.}

rājā:
\begin{itemize}
\item ā darṣanāt praviṣṭā
\item sā me suraḷokaśundarī hṛdayam
\item bāṇena Makaraketoḥ
\item kṛtaṁārgam aḻvandhyaṁ pātena. \[2\]
\end{itemize}

\textbf{vidūṣakaḥ (āṭma/gatam)}: \textit{saṃpīḍidā khu dāva tavasini}
\begin{itemize}
\item Kāśiṁrāalputtī.\[2\]
\end{itemize}

rājā: api rakṣyate bhavatā rahasyaṁnikṣepah?

\textbf{2.25 vidūṣakaḥ (sā/viṣādam, āṭma/gatam)}: \textit{adisaṃdhido mhi
dāsie. aṇṇadhāḥa na vaasau evvaṁ pucchadi.}\[2\]

rājā: kiṃ bhavāṁs tūṣṇīṁ āste?

\textbf{vidūṣakaḥ}: \textit{evvaṁ mae nianțidā jihā, jaṁ bhavado vi sa-
hasā paḍivaanaṁ na demi.}\[2\]

rājā: yuktaṁ. atha kv’ ēdānim ātmānaṁ vinodayeṁ?

\textbf{vidūṣakaḥ}: \textit{mahāṇasaṁ gacchamha.}\[2\]

\textbf{2.30 rājā}: kiṃ tatra.

\textbf{vidūṣakaḥ}: \textit{tahiṁ paṇcaṁvihassa abbhahavārassa uvaṇṇada|
saṃbhārassa joaṇaṁ pekkhamāṇeṁhiṁ sakkaṁ ukkaṇṭhā
vinodedum.}\[2\]

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Now the king enters, full of longing, together with the clown.

King:
That beauty from heaven…
she entered my heart
at first sight, through the path
Love made with his arrow
that never fails.

Clown (to himself): I can see why the poor queen is suffering.

King: I hope you’ve kept my secret.

Clown (to himself, grieving): That damned girl tricked me.
Otherwise, I wouldn’t have had this question from my friend.

King: Why don’t you answer?

Clown: I’ve sealed my mouth so tightly that I can’t even answer you.

King: How nice. So: what shall we do now for fun?

Clown: Let’s go to the kitchen.

King: What’s happening there?

Clown: We can watch how they put together the five kinds of food.* It will take our minds off her.
Rājā: tatr’ ēpsita|saṃnidhānād bhavān raṃsyate. mayā kha-lu dur|labha|prārthanaḥ katham ātmā vinodayitavyaḥ?

Vidūṣakaḥ: ṛṇaṃ bhavaṃ tattha|bhodī Uvvasī daṃsaṇa| paham gado?

Rājā: tataḥ kim?

### Verse 2.35

Vidūṣakaḥ: ṛṇa kkhu sā dul|laha, tti samatthemi.

Rājā: pakṣa|pāto ’yam avadhāryatāḥ.

Vidūṣakaḥ: evvaṃ vaḍḍhadi me kodūhalaṃ. kim tattha| bhodī Uvvasī a|dūdiā rūveṇa, aham via virūvadāe?

Rājā: Māṇavaka, praty|avayavam a|śakya|varṇanāṃ tām avehi. samāsataḥ śrūyatāṃ.

Vidūṣakaḥ: avahido mhi.

### Verse 2.40

abharaṇasyābharanaṇaḥ, prasādhanā|vidheḥ prasādhaṇa|viśeṣaḥ, upamānasyā’ api, sakhe, pratyupamānāṃ vapaṃ tasyāḥ. [3]

Vidūṣakaḥ: ado kkhu bhavadā divva|ras’|āhilāsiṇā cādaa| vvadaṃ gahidāṃ.

Rājā: vayasya, viviktād ṛte n’ ānyad utsukasya manasaḥ śaraṇam asti. tad bhavān pramada|vana|mārgam ādeśa-yatu.
KING: I’m sure there are things you’d enjoy there. But my mind is stuck on the impossible. It’s not so easy to relax.

CLOWN: But Úrvashi saw you, didn’t she?

KING: So what?

CLOWN: In that case, she’s not so impossible to get. 2.35

KING: You’re flattering me.

CLOWN: Now I’m curious. Is Úrvashi as beautiful as I’m ugly?

KING: Mánavaka, each and every part of her is beyond description. I’ll have to summarize.

CLOWN: I’m all ears.

KING:

Jewels shine
because she wears them.
She beautifies beauty
and out-compares
all comparison.

2.40

CLOWN: You remind me of those birds who only drink water from the sky.

KING: My friend, when a person is in love, he needs to be alone. Lead me to the garden.
VIDŪŚAKAḤ (ātma|gatam): ‘kā gadi? (prakāśam) ‘ido ido bhavaḥ, (parikramya) ‘edena pamada|vana|codīdena via paccuggado bhavaḥ āantuo dakkhiṇa|māruṇeṇa,  

RĀJĀ (vilokya): upapannaḥ višeṣaṇam asya vāyoḥ. ayaṃ hi niṣiṇcan mādhavīṃ etāṃ latāṃ, kaundīṃ ca nartayan, sneha|dākṣiṇyayor yogāt kām” īva pratibhāti me. [4]


RĀJĀ: praviś’ āgrataḥ.  

ubhau praviṣataḥ.  

RĀJĀ (agrato vilokya): vayasya, na mayā sādhu samarthitam, āpat|pratīkāraḥ kila pramada|van’|ōdyāna|praveśa iti.  

vivikṣur yad ahaṃ tūrṇaṃ udyānaṃ tāpa|sāntaye, srotoljav’|ōhyamānasya pratīpa|taraṇaṃ hi tat. [5]  

VIDŪŚAKAḤ: ‘kahaṃ via?  

RĀJĀ:  

idam a|su|labha|vastu|prārthanā|dur|nivāraṃ prathamam api mano me Paṅcabāṇaḥ kṣīṇoti, kim uta Malaya|vāt’|ōnmūlit’|āpāṇḍu|patrair upavana|sahakārair darsiteśv aṅkureṣu. [6]
ACT TWO

CLOWN (to himself): What can I do? (aloud) This way, sir. (walking around). The garden itself has sent a soothing breeze from the south to receive you.

KING (looking): That’s a nice way to describe the wind. For soaking the vine of spring,
dancing with the winter jasmine
with passion and empathy in turn, the wind plays the role
of a real lover.*

CLOWN: Just like what you’d like to be. (walking around)
Here is the gateway to the garden. Enter, sir.

KING: You go first.

They both enter.

KING (looking straight ahead): I was wrong. The garden offers no solace when you’re in trouble.

Why did I want to come here?
To calm the pain of love?
The flood is sweeping me away, and I want to swim upstream.

CLOWN: How’s that?

KING:

My mind just won’t stop seeking the impossible.
Love is torturing me with his five arrows, and now, what is worse, the south wind has blown away the yellowed leaves, and the mango trees brandish
VIDŪŚAKAH: ṛalaṃ paridevedeṇa. a|ireṇa icchida|sampādaï- 
ttao Aṇaṅgo evva de sahāo bhavissadi.।

RĀJĀ: pratigṛhītaṃ brāhmaṇa|vacanāṃ.

2.55 iti parikrāmataḥ.

VIDŪŚAKAH: Ṛekkhaḍu bhavaṃ vasanda|ôdāra|sūaṃ ahirā- 
mattaṇaṃ pamada|vaṇassa।

RĀJĀ: nanu pratī|pādāpam ev’ ālokayāmi. atra hi

agre strī|nakha|pāṭalaṃ kurabakaṃ
śyāmaṃ dvayor bhāgayor;
bāl’|āśokam upoḍha|rāga|subhagaṃ 
ḥed’|ōnmukhaṃ tisthāti;
īḍa|baddha|rajaḥ|kan’|āgra|kapiśā 
cūte navā maṇjarī.
mugdhatvasya ca yauvanasya ca, sakhe, 
madhye madhu|śrīḥ sthitā. [7]

VIDŪŚAKAH: Ṛeso maṇṭi|silā|pañṭa|saṅāho adimutta|ladā| 
maṇḍavo bhamara|samghaṭṭa|paḍidehiṃ kusumehiṃ 
saṃvia kid’|ōvaāro bhavantaṃ paḍicchadi. tā aṅugeṇ- 
hīadu dāva eso।

2.60 RĀJĀ: yathā bhavate rocate.

ity upaviśataḥ.
their sharp, fresh buds.

clown: Stop whining. Very soon that same Love God will come to your aid and bring you happiness.

king: A brahmin’s blessing received with thanks.

They walk around.

clown: Look at the beauty of the garden, ready to invite spring in.

king: Don’t I see it in tree after tree?

Look at the kúrabaka, dark on both sides but light red on top, like the fingernails of a woman. The young ashóka is blood-red and ready to explode. Fresh clusters of mango blossoms are dusted with gold in the middle where the pollen has slightly hardened. Spring unfolds like a woman poised between innocence and fullness.

clown: This pavilion made of vines hanging over a slab of jeweled stone is waiting to welcome you with flowers that have fallen under the weight of the bees. Honor it by taking a seat.

king: As you please.

They both sit down.
VIDUŚAKAḤ: .FileNotFoundException

RĀJĀ (niḥśvasya):

mama kusumitāsv api, sakhe,
 n’ ṭpavanaḷatāsu namra|viṭapāsu
cakṣur badhnāti dhṛtim
 tad|rūp’āloka|dur|lalitaṃ. [8]

2.65 tad upāyaś cintyatāṃ yathā sal|phala|prārthano bhaveyaṃ

VIDUŚAKAḤ (vibasya): FileNotFoundException

RĀJĀ: ati|snehaḥ khalu kārya|darśi.

VIDUŚAKAḤ: FileNotFoundException

cintāṃ rūpayati.

2.70 RĀJĀ (nimittaṃ sūcayitvā, ātma|gatam):

na su|labhā sakal’|ēndu|mukhī ca sā,
 kim api c’ ēdam Anaṅga|viceṣṭitam
abhimukhiṣv iva kāṅkṣita|siddhiṣu
vrajati nirvṛtim eka|pade manaḥ. [9]

FileNotFoundException

jāt’āśas tiṣṭhati. tataḥ praviṣaty ākāṣalyānena’ Ōrvaśī citra-lekhā ca.
ACT TWO

cLOWN: Now that you’re sitting in comfort, you can let the vines enchant your eyes and perhaps forget about her.

KING (sighing):

Vines rich with flowers
grace the curving branches,
but my eyes don’t rest there.
They want to see nothing
but her.

Think of some way to make my wish bear fruit.

KING (laughing): I’m out of my depth in this matter. The thunderbolt couldn’t help Indra when he was in love with Ahálya, and I’m not much use to you with Úrvashi.

KING: If you’re a good friend, you’ll find a way.

cLOWN: Be quiet, I’m thinking. Don’t ruin my concentration with your whining.

Mimes thinking.

KING (to himself, indicating a good omen):

She’s not easy to reach,
that woman radiant as the full moon.
Still, the Love God is giving me a sign.
When what you most want
is about to happen, a sudden happiness
floods your heart.

He waits, hopeful. ÚRVASHI enters through the sky together
with CHITRA·LEKHA.
citralekhā: .dmūd| kahī m anidiṣṭham kāraṇaṁ gacchādi?

urvaśī: .dmūd| tā Hamauda|mihare lād|mīḍavena khaṇa| vigghid’|āasa|gamaṇaṁ maṇ ohasia kim dāṇiṁ puccha-si?

2.75 citralekhā: .dmūd| tā Pūruravassā saāsaṁ patthi- dā si?

urvaśī: .dmūd| vama m avahatthida|lajjo vavasāo,

citralekhā: .dmūd| ko uṇa sahī paḍhamaṁ pesido?

urvaśī: .dmūd

citralekhā: .dmūd| ado avaram n ’ atthi me uttaṇaṁ,

2.80 urvaśī: .dmūd| tena hi ādisadu me sahī maggaṁ, jeṇa gacchante ना antar|āo bhave,

citralekhā: .dmūd| sahī, vīsaddhā hohi. ṇama bhaavadā devalgu- runā Avarāidaṁ ṇama sihā|bhandhaṇa|vijjam uvadisa- tena ti|dasal|paḍivakkhassa a|laṅghanaṇī kada mha?

urvaśī: .dmūd| sahī, savvaṁ sumaremi,

siddha/mārgam āśādyā.

citralekhā: .dmūd| edaṁ bhaavadīe Bhāirahiṇe Jamunā|saṃgama| pāvanesu salilesu oloantassa via attañnaṁ Paṭṭhāṇassa sih”|ābharanaḥ|bhūdama rā]ēsiṇo bhavaṇaṁ uvagada mha,
ACT TWO

CHITRA-LEKHA: Hey, where are you going without telling me?

ÚRVASHI: Now you’re asking me? You laughed at me when for a moment I was caught on a branch on the Golden Peak.

CHITRA-LEKHA: Are you on your way to see Puru-ravas, that noble king?

ÚRVASHI: That’s exactly what I intend, and I’m not ashamed of it.

CHITRA-LEKHA: Who did you send ahead as your messenger?

ÚRVASHI: My heart.

CHITRA-LEKHA: Then there’s nothing more to say.

ÚRVASHI: In that case, show me the best way, one without any obstacles.

CHITRA-LEKHA: Don’t worry. Hasn’t Brihas-pati, the guru of the gods, taught us the magic art of tying our hair in the Aparájita knot, which makes us invisible to anyone but the gods?*

ÚRVASHI: My friend, I remember everything.

They follow the siddha path.*

CHITRA-LEKHA: We’re close to the palace of that noble king, the jewel in the crown of Pratishthána,* which seems to be admiring its own beauty as reflected in the purifying waters of the Yámuna and the Ganga, where they meet.

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Velcheru Narayana Rao is Krishnadevaraya Professor of Languages and Cultures of Asia, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

David Shulman is Renée Lang Professor of Humanistic Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He has also translated “Self-Surrender,” “Peace,” “Compassion,” and “The Mission of the Goose”: Poems and Prayers from South India (with Yigal Bronner).

Together Narayana Rao and Shulman have translated numerous works of Indian literature, from both Telugu and Sanskrit, as well as having authored very many books about the subcontinent (and beyond) separately and in collaboration.

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One of the three surviving plays by Kali·dasa (fifth century), universally acknowledged as the supreme poet in classical Sanskrit, How Úrvashi Was Won, like the other two, is a masterpiece of lyricism, subtle characterization, and the working through of a bold theme.

How Úrvashi Was Won is the story of King Puru·ravas and his love for an immortal, the dancer Úrvashi, who normally lives in the heaven of the gods but who has come down to earth in order to realize her passion for the all-too-mortal king. The tragic love of this asymmetrical couple was described already in the ancient “Rig Veda” and later often expanded. Kali·dasa has reworked the narrative so as to depict a goddess in the process of becoming fully, and dangerously, human—since only human beings (at their best) are, in Kali·dasa’s vision, truly capable of the depths and intricacies of loving.

This great work of love, loss, and eventual restoration speaks to the human condition generally in highly nuanced verses, accessible to any modern reader.