

BOOK REVIEWS

PLATO'S LABYRINTH: SOPHISTRIES, LIES AND CONSPIRACIES IN SOCRATIC DIALOGUES. By Aakash Singh Rathore. New York: Routledge, 2018. 186 p.

Plato's Labyrinth by Aakash Singh Rathore makes a powerful case for reinterpretation of the Greek tradition. It revisits Plato's texts using a diverse range of methodology from Leo Strauss' hermeneutics, Derrida's deconstruction, Umberto Eco's and Dan Brown's reconstruction. Paying attention to the much neglected dramatic elements of the text, the introduction dramatically called the *parados* (the first song sung by the chorus at the beginning of Greek drama) claims to expose Plato's artistic works as layered with sophistry, lies, contradictions and controversies. The book is a unique contribution to existing literature on Plato as it explores the possibility of reading the text without using conventional philosophical method that typically pitches Plato as an advocate of reason, opposed to rhetoric, emotions, mythology and art. Contributions of British scholars (to name a few) like, Benjamin Jowett's *Dialogues of Plato* (1875)¹, W. T. Stace's *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy* (1920)², G.C. Field's *The Philosophy of Plato* (1956)³, and Indian scholars like S. K. Ookerjee's *Human Reason and its Enemies* (2009)⁴ are examples of the same. *Human Reason and its Enemies* explicitly attacks what it terms as post modernist attempts to question reasoning and advocate the indeterminacy of truth and meaning. It is critical of all positions that explain truth as that which is enmeshed in endless intertextuality, without any origin or source and that which destabilizes all claims for stable foundation.⁶ In contrast, *Plato's Labyrinth* establishes the legitimacy of philosophical approaches that challenge singular readings of texts as it alone allows for a truly democratic engagement with texts towards constructing inclusive morality.

The book has six chapters, and in a dramatic style, has a *parados* (that explains the central claims of the book), *exodus* (that acts as a conclusion in a dramatic way of offering new perspectives and reflections) and two intermissions. The *parados* explains Strauss' re-reading of the classics, his historicism, his exploration of the tension between the city and philosopher and his hypothesis that certain classical texts are written with esoteric (private) and exoteric (public) teachings. The objective of the book becomes clear: to understand the classical literature (here Plato's dialogues) as exoteric literature that speaks of truths existing, which may not always be accepted as healthy and the consequence of the articulation of these truths may lead to public or private harm. The importance of such a project being to counter forces that homogenize world politics and legitimize freedom achieved through dominance of reason which claims total conquest over social political cultural and natural

environment.⁶ It does so by revisiting and reconstructing Plato's *Parmenides*, *Republic*, *Symposium* and *Meno*. It also revisits Xenophanes' *Hiero*, Plato's conspiracy against the Sophists as intermissions to the discussions of the same and lastly, attempts to explain the conspiracy theory against Plato by reading Plato via Homer's *Odyssey*.

The first chapter titled "The Dramatic Labyrinth: On Plato's *Parmenides*" (p. 1) urges the reader to rethink Plato's dialogue *Parmenides*. The author suggests that *Parmenides* is not merely an investigation into the abstract question of what essentially exists, rather its central engagement is with existential questions of ethics and justice that seeks investigation in the public realm.⁷ Conventional discourses have emphasized the content of the dialogue, if one concentrates on methodologies, fantastic particularities and details such as choice of characters (which are the same as *Republic*, a dialogue on justice), one is able to engage with the text differently and delineate an entirely new purpose and intent. Similarly, chapters investigating the dialogue *Republic*, namely "Love of Laughter: on Plato's Republic 1.0" and "Joy of Sex: on Plato's Republic 2.0" make a radical case that questions Plato's "spirit of seriousness" in proposing the Utopian state and revisiting the dialogue by examining the relation between *eros* and tyranny respectively. The author, with precision states the proportion of laughter, absurd and comic in the dialogue. He suggests an inquiry into the same and suggests that the humour that gives us sufficient reasons to believe that Plato could not have been serious about the teachings in the Republic. It seems a tyranny of lies and deception, eugenics, murder and even more significantly (for Plato's concern) "...one where a Socrates would be a priori impossible"⁸. The intermission, the reading of the *Hiero* with the dialogue *Republic* (Chapter 3) explores the interrelation between tyranny and *eros* that provides an interesting entry point into the third chapter. By re-reading *Republic* from this perspective the author claims that moral *eros* is suggested one of the definitions of justice!⁹. Chapter 4 "How to train your Demon: On Plato's *Symposium*" makes a case of relation of *eros* with divinity. The two are identified as identical and the chapter makes a case of reading *Symposium* as a dialogue explaining erotic divinity of Socrates. The second intermission addresses Plato's conspiracy against the sophists. It deals with few obvious questions (as the author puts it), why did Plato and Aristotle set out to systematically destroy the reputation and legacy of the Sophists? In answering the same, the author not only questions Socrates and Plato's integrity (and claims of sacredness of knowledge) but also makes a bold proposal of sophists as social reformers¹⁰. Most relevant is the book's attention to thinkers like Susan Jarratt and the readings of the marginalization of the sophists (in history of philosophy) being analogous to marginalization of women by mainstream, patriarchal philosophy. Jarratt suggested that the signifier sophist and the signifier woman shared much the same fate in philosophical discourse. They were considered as disruptive, anti-logical, relativist and so forth. More striking, Jarratt posits that we might see the Sophist *Gorgias* as a proto-feminist¹¹. Making references to Socrates being charged of sophistry and Plato's attempts to set them apart in the dialogues, the book dwells deeper into the social changes that the Sophists encouraged and the political changes that Periclean Athens witnessed. The author

claims that Sophists had an important role to play within the emerging democratic power structure, and they were a critical voice against established aristocratic and traditional structures that served to strengthen democratic institutions in the process of deconstructing egalitarian social ones. Infact without such a challenge Plato could not have crafted his labyrinth!¹² The fifth chapter “The Morality of the Master: On Plato’s *Meno*” explains the relevance and the urgency of such an exercise in times when moral philosophy is equivalent to negative sophistry. The author analyses how virtue has come to play a counter productive role, by explaining the etymological meanings of the terms war, man and virtue, he explains how all are somehow fundamentally related in the so-called Western tradition. The author also explains its transnational nature as a similar understanding is observed in Hindu philosophy prescribed in *Bhagwat Gita*!¹³ Explaining the abiding significance of the dialogue *Meno*, the book explains ethics as a contentious issue, its origination closely related to politics. The sixth chapter “Reading Plato through Homer’s *Odyssey*: A Conspiracy Theory” revisits the debate between the philosopher and the tyrant, the virtuous and the *eros*. Using examples of Rodin’s *Thinker* and Myron’s *Discus Thrower* and characters from Homer’s *Odyssey*, the author explains the final conspiracy. Plato’s notion of philosopher ruler and a *polis* based on mastery of physical and intellectual pursuits is the ideal ground of thriving democracy! (contrary to conventional readings that explain Plato’s dislike for democracy). Lastly, the exodus, not only hints towards new beginnings, it also aims at getting all readers, students and teachers of Greek philosophy infected by the passion, frenzy, sophistication and excitement of the Greek times to re-examine both classical as well as contemporary times.¹⁴

Such propositions would be scandalous for people who adhere to the conventional British literature on Plato and advocates of *Human Reason and its Enemies*. *Plato’s Labyrinth* would face charges of being, a “...straight massacre or torture and mutilation...”¹⁵ of truth. Further, it would face charges of being a conceited stance that unnecessarily banishes existing body of knowledge without giving sufficient reasons for the same¹⁶. They would argue that just because one doesn’t fully understand the text, it does not permit the reader to believe that the thesis is contrary to existing explanations. The presence of two narratives also does not mean that there can be two ways of explaining a truth, it merely requires an investigation into the inadequate one. They would further argue that *Plato’s Labyrinth* clearly advocates a dangerous sort of relativism, fraud that treacherously promotes an anti-reason culture.¹⁷ Yet, the point in *Plato’s Labyrinth* seems to be exactly the opposite. It strives to legitimize all attempts that aim to establish what might seem a mystery or an impossibility from the standpoint of established norms of reason but might have a causal explanation that could reveal another type of causality. It is simply making a case of non coherence of thesis presented to us traditionally! Its “relativist” position makes the reading not only interesting but also emancipatory as it provides a more intelligible understanding of morality than the conventional Platonic epistemological theory of forms and particulars. Advocating *Parmenides* as a text concerned with ethical considerations, imagining the utopian ideal of republic as a casual hypothesis (as

Plato himself said he was day dreaming)¹⁸, proposing erotic divinity and ideal of philosopher ruler as the potential basis of democracy, questioning the legitimacy of Socrates and Plato’s claim to truth and dismissing sophists from the history of knowledge (to name few conspiracies highlighted by the author), does not destroy the text. Instead these interpretations bring in perceptions that once again open the book for critical examination. Supporters of *Human Reason and its Enemies* would strongly dismiss such claims as baseless, systematic distortions and demand reinstating the authority of reason (over emotions). Undoubtedly, the aim of *Plato’s Labyrinth* is to show the limits of reason and explain the alternate claims that can legitimately claim truth and universality. By doing so, book exposes the dangerous one sided ideologies that have brought a closure to its reading.

Yet, *Plato’s Labyrinth* and *Human Reason and its Enemies* constitute a binary, the latter privileges reason while the former privileges passions. It keeps intact discourses that construct notions of self (and abilities) by creating notions of non self (and disabilities). Thus, though there is sufficient mention of disabilities and treatment of people with disabilities in the dialogue *Republic*, it finds no mention in the book. In the discussion on education (in *Republic*) of the children of the state Plato puts emphasis on rigorous physical and mental education of potential guardians that excludes people from disabilities.¹⁹ He sanctions secret disposal of defective offsprings,²⁰ there are several references of knowledge being compared to the power of sight,²¹ also blindness and other disabilities is used to explain inferior people and state. Conventional readings of the text charge Plato of sanctioning murder and infanticide²² and justify his state as oppressive and cruel. Yet, in the spirit of *Plato’s Labyrinth* it would be interesting to discuss passages 488b-e (from the *Republic*), the famous captain ship analogy that describes the prejudice against philosophy and corruption of philosophical nature in contemporary society. The captain of the ship (analogous to the philosopher) is described as “...a bit deaf and short sighted, and similarly limited in seamanship.”²³ This could surely be pitched as a “conspiracy” and an alternate reading of the *Republic* could be attempted that does justice to the post-structuralist engagement with opening up the in-betweenness of binaries. They might, disclose spaces for resistance that create a new discourse that signifies the text and its engagement with disability in radically different ways. Though *Plato’s Labyrinth* contains this potential it falls short of radically altering the discourse as it keeps intact the stability of interior states such as intelligence, attitude, personality, disposition, attribution, social perception, cognition, emotion, ability and competence to explain notions of self and the other. Thus, it fails to address the philosopher ruler as potentially someone who breaks the conventional norms of abled/disabled bodies. In suggesting the ruler either as embodiment of reason or as personification of erotic morality/divinity it suffers from “...disablist epidermal schema...”²⁴

Yet, *Plato’s Labyrinth* is important as it provides the opportunity to explore Plato’s philosophy in a way that does not endorse a complete closed system. This resistance to closure, opens the possibility of re articulations where the unresolvable nature of contradictions do not affirm anything, nor does it cancel anything, it re-evaluates

and reinscribes the position as a problem or a question. In exposing the limits of meaningful structures, by tracing the absences and discontinuities within the systems it gets re-invented each time. Such as exercise is urgent for democracy and resisting forces of homogenization that deter all critical thinking. In times of violence inflicted by positivism, such as inquiry is not only relevant but also urgent.

References and Notes

- ¹ Jowett, Benjamin. (1875) *Dialogues of Plato*. Oxford: Clarendon. 4 Volumes.
² Stace, W.T. (1920) *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy*. London: MacMillan and Co.
³ Field, G.C. (1956) *The Philosophy of Plato*. 1949. London: Oxford University Press.
⁴ Ookerjee, S.K. (2009). *Human Reason and its Enemies*. New Delhi: Promilla and Co.
⁵ p. 16
⁶ Rathore, A. (2018) *Plato's Labyrinth* (South Asia Edition). New York: Routledge p. 7
⁷ pp. 32-33
⁸ p. 46
⁹ The author cites several instances to justify the same; taming of Thrasymachus from an abusive opponent to one who starts blushing (66-67), sex education of the guardians to build a harmonious soul that is trained in sexual moderation (73-74), mention of sexual pleasure as rewards of war and a mechanism to control sexual expressions in form of marriage fairs and family (74-75); all make a claim of sexual moderation as justice. True philosophical pursuit is described by comparing with true lovers (75) and tyranny is described as a frenzied erotic soul (78), thus the author suggest that these arguments systematically construct a case to read *Republic* as text specifying erotic justice (80)
¹⁰ pp. 101-109
¹¹ pp. 109-110
¹² p. 114
¹³ pp. 118-119
¹⁴ p. 149
¹⁵ Ookerjee, S.K. *Human Reason and its Enemies*. p 56
¹⁶ p. 68
¹⁷ pp. 335
¹⁸ Plato. (2007). *Republic*. Trans. Desmond Lee. London: Penguin Classics. para 450d
¹⁹ para 404b
²⁰ para 460e
²¹ para 507b
²² Popper, Karl. (1966) *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Vol. 1: *The Spell of Plato*. (Fifth Edition) London: Routledge and Kegan Paul) p. 51
²³ Plato. (2007). *Republic*. Trans. Desmond Lee. London: Penguin Classics. para 488b
²⁴ Goodley, Dan. "In Discourse: Poststructuralist Disability Studies" in *Disability Studies: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*. London: Sage Publications 2011. p. 101.

The author has adapted the term from Fanon, F. *Black Skins, White Masks* (3rd edition). London: Pluto Press. 1993. p.112 to explain how the interior horizon of the self and others in environment affects the "disabled" person's sense of self.

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THE UNBILLED HOUR: ESSAYS ON LITERATURE, CULTURE AND THEORY. By Bijay K. Danta, S. Deepika, Tyagraj Thakur (Eds.). Bhubaneswar: Kitab Bhawan, 2018. xxviii, 295 p.

The Unbilled Hour: Essays on Literature, Culture and Theory is a Festschrift for Himansu S. Mohapatra who taught at Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, from 1994 to 2018 and held a professorship in English for seventeen out of those twenty three odd years. The word 'Festschrift' is not used in the front cover or in the inner cover of the book. Nor is the usual descriptive epithet, 'Essays in Honour of ...' that announces a Festschrift, to be found in the book. The editors seem to have settled for the relatively milder 'Presented to ...' Perhaps they have done this so that the festschrift is seen for the scholarly undertaking it is, and not mistaken for an uncritical eulogy on a person. This is not to say that *The Unbilled Hour* is lacking in the spirit of felicitation (the meaning of the German word Festschrift is celebratory writing). The book does, in fact, combine tribute and scholarship in roughly equal measure. It is felt from the heart and thought with the head. It publicly honours a person for his academic accomplishments, using the occasion for providing fresh perspectives on the canonised and non-canonised fields of English studies in which the person himself has left some traces. In fact, the fine back cover endorsement from Chandras Choudhury, Indian English novelist, would attest to the fact of the person having credentials as a teacher and scholar. The essays in the book certainly show it.

The book certainly has a beautiful, though a somewhat intriguing title. But what is 'the unbilled hour'? If it is the hour that is not shown in the pay bill that is drawn by a professional, then it is matter of discredit to the professional. Why cannot the hour be shown? Maybe because the hour is undistinguished by any productive labour. Yet, as Bijay K. Danta explains it in his preface (which he calls 'in lieu of preface' in a spirit of playful banter), the unbilled hour is the heart of the matter in the scholarly profession. The scholar, unlike the lawyer, does not foot a bill for the most 'productive work' he/she does, because that work, as Ralph Waldo Emerson reminded us a long time ago, involves 'the slow, unpaid task of observation.' One might want to add to or derive from the hallowed Emersonian activity the other features of the mindscape like reading, reflection, analysis and writing. So, as the preface nicely puts it, the title, by its technique of reversing the expected, helps us to

understand what a teacher or a scholar makes. The word ‘makes’ has to be understood to carry the full resonance that Taylor Mali gives to it in his famous poem “What a Teacher Makes”, which Mali later on made into a nice little book of the same name.

So the book does seem to live up to its name by embodying the results of many different kinds of scholarly and critical labours within the traditionally unified field of literary studies. The rubric ‘literary studies’ must be seen in its now expanded sense as a combination of literature, culture and theory, as the subtitle of the book makes explicit. The essays assembled here demonstrate this diversity within unity. For here are lucid and thought-provoking expositions on the usual fields of literary studies: the Indian English novel (by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, New York University), Dickens (by Ellen Handler Spitz, University of Maryland, Baltimore Campus), the cinematic imagination (by Ravi S. Vasudevan, CSDS, New Delhi), Dickens and Joyce (Bijay K. Danta, Tezpur University), translation studies (Paul St-Pierre, University of Montreal, Snehaprava Das, Utkal University), literature in the 21st century (Kalyani Samantray, Utkal University), using a comparative frame to read the two most well-known autobiographical texts from Odisha and Assam (Farheena Danta, Tezpur University), the Indian novel (Tanutrushna Panigrahi, IIT, Bhubaneswar), Chinua Achebe (Iyagraj Thakur, Silicon Institute of Technology, Sambalpur, Odisha), the crime novel (Debasmita Paul, M.P.C. Junior College, Baripada), ‘bookishness’ and the rise of alternative reading culture (S. Deepika, Utkal University), and Odisha studies which itself encompasses critical essays on Odishan archaeology (Kishor Kumar Basa, Utkal University), the rise of the scientific temper in colonial Odisha (Siddharth Satpathy, University of Hyderabad), not to speak of interesting new readings of the two architects of the modern Odia novel and an iconic modern poet whose memoir is in focus here: Phakirmohan Senapati (Debendra K. Das, eminent scholar of Odia, Odisha Education Service, and Dipti R. Pattanaik, Benares Hindu University), Gopinath Mohanty (Mauricio D. Aguilera Linde, University of Granada, Spain), and Sachidananda Routray (Ashok K. Mohapatra, Sambalpur University).

A look at the list of contributors would show that scholarly efforts in the making of *The Unbilled Hour* are a blending of the international, national and local. There are seventeen essays contributed by sixteen scholars. Indeed, one is reminded of an oft-quoted remark made by Chanakya that holds good even now: “A king is honoured in his own kingdom, but a scholar is worshipped everywhere” (*Smadeshe pujiyate Raja vidvan sarvatra pujiyate*). To round off the collection, the editors, in their wisdom, have included two essays by Himansu S. Mohapatra. The two essays illustrate, at once, the scholarly and the belles-lettristic sides of the person to whom the essays are presented. The book ends with a fairly comprehensive listing of Himansu S. Mohapatra’s publications and a carefully selected photo gallery telling the life story of the person in pictures.

If one was looking for one thing that threads the essays together in *The Unbilled Hour*, it has to be the warmth of the essayists for the subject-object. This is reflected not only in their pleasing style but also in their scholarly expertise. These essays are genuine contributions to their respective fields. It is not possible within the scope

of a short review to show how every essay in the book breaks new ground in its chosen area. But mention may be made of a few path breaking essayistic attempts like Rajeswari Sunder Rajan’s refutation of the ‘national allegory’ theory (advanced by Fredric Jameson) in the Anglophone novel of India, Ellen Handler Spitz’s seamless interweaving of Dickens, Freud and John Dewey, Ravi S. Vasudevan’s fine analysis of how cinema is not only invaluable resource in the literature classroom but also is a classroom in its own right, training the senses in explosively new ways as only it can. Mention may also be made of Debendra K. Das and Dipti Ranjan Pattanaik’s brilliant demonstration of the early intimations of Phakirmohan Senapati’s late style. But of course the most fetching thing about *The Unbilled Hour* as a work of scholarship and criticism in the field of literary studies must be, as Harish Trivedi pointed out, its adding of ‘some new localized dimensions which can be called postcolonial.’

This obligates the present reviewer to talk about these ‘localized dimensions’ in the book. In fact, Odisha and Odia literature constitute the focus in seven out of the seventeen essays in the book, thus helping to balance the global concerns with the local ones. Three essays, in particular, stand out for the sheer weight of archival research on display. One is Siddharth Satpathy’s historiographic essay which masterfully exposes the links between the language of science pedagogy and the middle class morality against the backdrop of missionary education and conversion history in colonial Odisha. The second is Paul St-Pierre’s superb staging of the history of translation in Odisha, especially during 1855-1879, in order to highlight the unfolding of Odia identity through shifting choices of texts to translate. The third, however, deserves a special mention because it is outside the domain of literary studies considered even in its expanded sense. This is Kishor Kumar Basa’s critique of Odishan archaeology through a postcolonial lens. Besides being a moving tribute to a childhood friend, his article touches upon the heart of the matter—Odishan knowledge systems and their representation in colonial Odisha by giving a brilliant reading of Odisha’s temple architecture and the overarching politics of representation surrounding it. As the senior-most editor puts it in his preface, ‘for the students of postcolonial representation politics, this essay is a must-read.’ The volume has, in fact, done full justice to one of the key ideas of Raymond Williams—that of culture being a whole way of life. It would not be out of place to note here that Raymond Williams has been the engine of Himansu S Mohapatra’s critical engagements.

A festschrift, as we know, is a public acknowledgement of debts owed to persons when they leave the stage either of career or life. As such it is an important way in which academic genes can be passed. Although a staple of intellectual life in the West, festschrifts are, unfortunately enough, not so common in India. Some notable Indian names in this genre in the recent times would include *New Bearings in English Studies: A Festschrift for CT Indra* (2008) and *India and the World: Postcolonialism, Translation and Indian Literature: Essays in Honour of Professor Harish Trivedi* (2014). (In fact, a nice comment from Prof. Trivedi is also found to adorn the front inner flap of the book.) Thus, coming as it does in a situation of scarcity, *The Unbilled Hour* is a refreshing new development. A showcasing of scholarship and collegiality, real and imagined –

the latter in a Coleridgean sense – the book is certain to be cited as a precedent for future attempts in this field in the academic world of India, Odisha more particularly.

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DOCUMENTING CITYSCAPES: URBAN CHANGE IN CONTEMPORARY NON-FICTION FILM. By Iván Villarrea Álvarez. New York, Walflower Press, 2015. 258 p.

Documenting Cityscapes is a book written by Iván Villarrea Álvarez that pursues “to avoid theoretical frameworks that lock researchers in a sole field of study” (Villarrea 2015, 10). In order to do so and give his study an interdisciplinary character he makes use of a vast variety of sources: from sociologists to architects, urban theorists, film makers, philosophers or artists. Amongst them we find Alain Touraine (sociologist interested in the postindustrial society and the social movements), Daniel Bell (Sociology professor), Saskia Sassen (sociologist and writer), Paul Virilio (cultural theorist and urban planner) Manuel Castells (sociologist, economist and urban planner), Rem Koolhaas (architect), Francés Muñoz (urban planner), Gilles Lipovetsky (philosopher and sociologist), Jean Serroy (writer and film critic), Henri Lefebvre (philosopher and intellectual), Michel de Certeau (historian and philosopher), Edward Soja (urban theorist), Marta Traquino (artist and contemporary art researcher), David Harvey (geographer and social theorist), Mike Davis (sociologist, historian, urban theorist and political activist), Richard Koeck (professor and chair of Architecture and the Visual Arts), Kevin Lynch (urban planner and writer), Ewa Mazierska (professor of contemporary cinema), and many others.

The book has an introduction of ten pages titled “Place, Images and Meanings”, followed by two chapters: “On City and Cinema” and “Documentary Film at the Turn of the Century”. These two chapters function as an introduction to the rest of the book. After that there are seven more chapters grouped into three sections dedicated to “Landscaping”, “Urban Self-Portraits” and “Metafilmic Strategies”. The first and second sections contain three chapters and the last one, “Metafilmic Strategies”, only one. The volume also includes a four page conclusion titled “Cinema as Agent of Urban Change” and an Appendix with a map where all the film locations appear.

In the introduction of his book, Villarrea explains that the way we perceive a city in a film has more to do with the evolution of the cinema itself rather than with that of urbanism. That is the reason why he decided to focus on the formal device chosen by the filmmaker, the dispositif (Villarrea 4), as the tool to analyse the films.

By using his main interests, i.e. contemporary history, urban geography and non-

fiction films, Villarrea chose to concentrate on the crisis that followed the 1973 oil shock until the present economic crisis that commenced at the beginning of the 21st century. This was characterised by the destruction of cities by private developers with the aim to get rid of rundown areas and obsolete infrastructures, the final result being the destruction of people’s references to their past and the loss of urban identity in both, North American and European cities.

Immediately after the Introduction, in Chapter One, “On City and Cinema”, the author explains concepts such as the post-industrial city, the postmetropolis, the social production of space and the difference between place and space. Besides that, he distinguishes between the different points of view that have traditionally been adopted by urban documentary makers: the voyeur, the walker, and the driver.

In Chapter Two, “Documentary Film at the Turn of the Century”, the author explains the reasons for the return of documentary films. Villarrea distinguishes between observational, participatory, reflexive and performative documentaries and explains how the inner tensions existing between objectivity and subjectivity have had an undeniable impact on non-fiction films over the last few decades.

In “Landscaping”, the first section of the book, Villarrea explains three categories of his own creation: “Observational Landscaping” (Chapter Three), “Psychogeographical Landscaping” (Chapter Four) and “Autobiographical Landscaping” (Chapter Five). In the first category (Chapter Three) he refers to James Benning’s *One Way Boogie Woogie/27 Years Later* and his *California Trilogy*, and concludes that even in the case of the most detached filming category, that of observational landscaping, we can find subjective, emotional and lyrical traces that reveal a way of looking at the world (Villarrea 61).

In Chapter Four, Villarrea explains that in Psychogeographical Landscaping there are historical references that are missing in the Observational one. In order to explain both concepts further he compares Fabrice Ziolkowski’s *L.A.X.* and James Benning’s *Los*. Although both films use Los Angeles as the main setting, Ziolkowski’s version displays the historical exploitation and corruption behind the city’s growth. This concept is also studied in William Raban’s *Thames Film*, a documentary about London produced in 1987 where the history of the city is narrated from the perspective of the river Thames.

Chapter Five, “Autobiographical Landscaping”, deals with different types of films where autobiography is the key. Their authors are all interested in showing the historical world through their own subjectivity. Villarrea particularly analyses Chantal Akerman’s *News from Home* and Jem Cohen’s *Lost Book Found*, where New York’s cityscape is exhibited.

The second section of the book deals with “Urban Self-Portraits”, a subgenre defined by Villarrea as the one “that places the author at the centre of the discourse without necessarily following a narrative logic” (103). Villarrea states that there is a clear connection between the evolution of academic discourses and documentary films, the rise of individualism and narcissism, the separation between public and private spheres and the emergence of neoliberal policies. To compensate for this trend the author explains that

there is also an increasing tendency to produce documentaries that contribute to the construction of a common identity looking for social transformation.

Next, the author analyses six films from the 1980s to the 2000s that address the emotional relationship between the filmmakers and a city of their choice that is especially meaningful for them.

Within this section, Chapter Six, titled “Self-Portrait as Socio-Political Documentary” Villarrea analyses Michael Moore’s film, *Roger & Me* as an example of an autobiographical approach to filmmaking and highlights Moore’s strong relationship with Flint, his hometown, during the 1980s economic crisis. Another example of an autobiographical documentary is Tony Buba’s *Lightning Over Braddock*, where the filmmaker presents Braddock as a bankrupt town.

Chapter Seven, “Self-Portrait as Essay Film”, is dedicated to a hybrid type of documentary that usually contains all kinds of visual material guided by the filmmaker’s subjectivity. The two case studies chosen are *Les homes du port* (Alain Tanner, 1995) and *Of Time and the City* (Terence Davies, 2008), both using an essayistic approach to explore what happens when port cities (Genoa and Liverpool respectively) are threatened with the loss of their local identity. Both documentaries are about recovering the traces of old rituals and both recreate memoryscapes.

Chapter Eight, the last chapter of this third section, presents two case studies within the category described as “Self-Portrait as Self-Fiction”, *Porto da Minha Infancia* (2001), by Manoel de Oliveira and *My Winnipeg* (2007) by Guy Maddin. Both films use fictional sequences but they can still be considered documentaries because of their filmmakers’ intention to document their memories and those of their inhabitants. For his part, Maddin presents a subjective description of the decline of Winnipeg, one of the main industrial centres in Canada, by offering a “docu-fantasy”. In Maddin’s own words, this is a technique quite appropriate to portray the love/hate relationship he has with his hometown. In fact, both, Oliveira and Maddin’s works are closer to fiction than to documentary since the cityscapes they describe become mindscapes in both cases.

The last section of the book has only one chapter, chapter 9, titled “Metafilmic Strategies” that makes reference to several Hollywood Films about Los Angeles and Hollywood to finally concentrate on two films: *The Decay of Fiction* and *Los Angeles Plays Itself*. The first one recounts the story of the Ambassador Hotel, demolished between 2005 and 2006 while *Los Angeles Plays Itself* consists of a series of interviews with some blacklisted screenwriters, most of them communists.

Villarrea concludes the book by stating that “Cinema is an Agent of Urban Change”. As in many non-fictional films it conveys a critical perception of late-capitalist urban planning and draws public attention to the politics that filmmakers want to question and change. Therefore, current urban documentaries have evolved into political weapons. Also according to the author, the triad formed by cityscapes, memoryscapes and mindscapes in films where feelings are as important as facts, can explain as well the recent popularity of film tourism, with an increasing propensity to visit popular film locations.

All in all, Villarrea’s volume is indispensable for all those trying to imagine the city of the future as well as for those interested in the city of the past. As he

promised he would do in the introduction of this volume, he deals with aspects in connection with urban planning, architecture, history, sociology and of course, cinema, his great passion. This makes the volume truly interdisciplinary and useful for any all-rounder postgraduate student or even an experienced professional interested in cities. Furthermore, there is plenty of space for those who prefer to keep on walking along the same path, as the point of view chosen by Villarrea to revise both, cities and films, the “dispositif”, proves to be a useful analytical tool.

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FOU LEI: AN INSISTENCE ON TRUTH. By Mingyuan Hu. Amsterdam, Brill Publishers, 2017. 251 p.

In her book *Fou Lei: An Insistence on Truth* (2017), Mingyuan Hu meticulously sheds light on the life of Fou Lei (1908-1966), who is considered to be the “most accomplished translator of French literature in China in the twentieth century” (Hu 2017, 1). In the prologue she lays out the fundamentals of her “investigation” of Lei’s life as she compartmentalizes it in two dimensions: intellectual and linguistic. In his short life span Fou Lei witnessed his father’s imprisonment in Xinhai Revolution (1911), partook in the May Thirtieth Movement (1925), survived through Mukden Incident (18 September 1931) and Shanghai Incident (28 January 1936). Eventually he chose not to survive the Anti-Rightist campaign and killed himself with his wife during Cultural Revolution in 1966. In Hu’s investigation we see a man whose life was immersed in the world of literature, art, politics as he also dealt with the issues of belonging in the binaries of Orient/Occident. Through his correspondences and translations Hu exhibits a portrait of Lei both as a translator and as a person.

The book examines Fou Lei’s life in three parts and nine chapters. Its organization is predicated not on chronological life events but on Lei’s journey in writing. Part one “Shanghai in Revolution: An Unlived Youth” consists of one chapter entitled “Everywhere a Stranger”. Hu gives an account of Fou Lei and his family. As a kid he witnessed the death of his father, who was imprisoned by “local powers” (Hu 7), his mother’s mourning and the death of his siblings. He received a thorough education, a combination of both private tutoring and school education in Shanghai. His affiliation with literature started to manifest itself during his studies at College St. Ignace Zi-Ka-Wei, where he had a curriculum in French. As Hu depicts the early stages of Lei’s life, she also describes the intellectual landscape that surrounded Lei at the time: A China in between the New Culture Movement (1915) and the May Fourth Movement (1919). A common denominator of these two movements is dilemma between East and West, a struggle of binaries

and epistemology around individualism, progress, liberty, science, morals. In this environment, at the age of nineteen Lei decides to leave for France to continue his studies. The chapter ends with Hu hinting the beginning of some of the themes she will delineate in Fou Lei's life: anguish and dilemma between between Orient/Occident.

Part two of the book entitled "The Spleen of Paris: A Bildungsroman" unfolds in five chapters. It starts with Chapter two "Crisis: What Bruges Did not Appease", which depicts his Parisian years and exhibits the development of Fou Lei's character both as a person and as a translator. His Paris years starts with his studies at Sorbonne, which he does not follow until the end. Hu delineates Lei's relationship with religion—or lack thereof—and with his friends. In Paris Lei joins an "intellectual hub" (37) called *La Maison Jeunesse*, guided by his friend Daniélou, where he read and discussed authors such as Henri Bergson, Charles Péguy, André Gide, Hippolyte Taine, until it closed in 1929. Hu also offers us a glimpse of Fei's meticulous work as a translator. She draws our attention to linguistic details and characterizes Fou Lei's interest in translation as "cultural translation" (45). In this chapter Hu also presents us a crisis of cultural identity among the educated Chinese, who strive to learn from the West while preserving their own cultural identity.

In chapter three "Malady: Child of the Century by Lac Léman" we find Fou Lei as a solitary character during his stay in Lac Lemman in Switzerland. In this chapter Hu offers an account of Lei's own *mal du siècle* which she claims to be "paramount importance to our understanding of his youth" (73). She makes connections between Lei and his choice of texts to translate. Delineating Western romanticism, she points to the "catastrophic" occurrences (61) in China in a comparative spirit with the West.

In chapter four "Remedy: The Promise of Tainean Scientism" Hu continues with Lei's time Paris and dedicates this chapter to his translation of Hippolyte Taine's (1828-1893) *Philosophie de l'art* (1865-82). Initially he translated only the first chapter and then went back to translating it twenty-nine years later. Taine is an author with whom Fou Lei had an affinity. Hu details Lei's admiration of Taine and his method of determinism. In this chapter Lei's dwelling on China vs. West occurs again as Hu offers an account of Lei's own interrogation into science and truth in the modern China.

In chapter five "Fever: From Werther to Beethove" Hu moves onto Lei's translation of Romain Rolland's (1866-1944) *Vie de Translation*, which was published in 1946 and which had two versions, one in 1934 and one in 1942. As if undertaking the task of another translator in between Lei's translations, Hu details the discrepancies between the poetics of these two translations. A prevalent theme of comparison between China and the West as well as a theme of personal ennui still follow Fou Lei. He forms an emotional bond with this book, which Hu characterizes as a "temporal extension of a spiritual event" (96). However, this spiritual moment was interrupted in 1942 with the Japanese invasion of Shanghai which leads Lei to call for moral heroism. Again, a prevalent sense of a man trying to find a salvation in the midst of crisis hovers in this chapter.

In Chapter six "Light: A Willed Metamorphosis" Hu undertakes the theme of Orient/Occident binary in Lei's thoughts through his article "La crise de l'art chinois modern" published 1931 in *L'Art Vivant*, and in his letters to his son. This time

through the optics of aesthetics, we encounter Lei pondering about the questions of Chinese philosophy, metaphysics and art as opposed to their Western counterparts.

Part three unfolds in three chapters. Chapter seven "Moralising in Times of War: A Critic was Born" focuses on Fou Lei's personality as a moralist, a critic and on his short academic career at Shanghai Art Academy in the background a brief war between China and Japan and a civil war. Here, we see Leias a political commentator with his articles in newspapers. In 1931 Fou Lei encounters Mukeden Incident and a China in upheaval. In this chapter Hu also touches upon the journey of the classical and vernacular Chinese. According to Hu, Fou Lei's "the maturation of style" is linked to the way in which he exerted the languages at his disposal, making him a quadrilingual translator (142).

In chapter eight "Translating, or the Search for a Brother" Hu continues to explicate Fou Lei's linguistic abilities as she gives more space to his family life in Shanghai. Lei is a father of a daughter and a son named Fou Min and Fou Ts'ong respectively but we read more about his relationship with his son. In the footnotes Hu mentions how Lei paid more attention to his son's education believing in his artistic abilities and deemed his daughter not as talented. When Fou Ts'ong goes to Europe for education Lei tries to anticipate his son's emotional needs during his studies and tries to console him in the face "low-spiritedness" (173). In regards to Lei's identity as a father Hu draws a parallel between Taine's and Lei's life, pointing out how both writers didn't have fathers. Hu also claims that in 1950s Lei was happy both as a father and as an intellectual. Content under the communist regime, he was "engaged in helping the party rebuild the nation" (177). However, this peace was interrupted with the commencement of Hundred Flowers Campaign in 1956. An Anti-Rightist Campaign began in 1957, unleashed a Left-Right labelling and wrongfully labelled him as a rightist. Nonetheless, amidst all the national and personal turbulences Fou Lei gained a loyal, generous friend for the rest of his life: Rene Etiemble, the chair of Comparative Literature at the Sorbonne at the time. One day he pays a visit to Fou Lei during his trip to China and starts a friendship of a lifetime.

In the final chapter "Creatures of Prometheus, or Unresolved Grief" Hu offers us more window to Fou Lei's personality and draws parallels with Lei's childhood and of the authors he had translated. Here we witness that Fou Lei had to give up on reading and writing due to his poor health. We also witness how Red Guards raid their house, throw accusations at Lei and his wife. Thus, refusing to live under accusations they hang themselves on September 2, 1966.

Mingyuan Hu organises Fou Lei's life around his work. She does not merely confine him to textual practices but also depicts his personal journey in between languages. This book can be considered as one of the fundamental sources into Fou Lei's life and work. It may also serve as a crucial source for the investigations of cultural exchanges between France and China as well as translation studies and studies of life-writings in general.

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MOUNTAIN TRAVELOGUES ON THE HIMALAYAS AND TIBET.

By Vijay Prakash Singh. Varanasi: Pilgrims Publishing, 2012. 260 p.

Surprisingly when travelling has become so common because of the globalisation, travel literature as a genre has suffered a decline. Once a popular genre, travelogue has now become a path less trodden by.

Mountain Travelogue on the Himalayas and Tibet by Prof. Vijay Prakash Singh is a recreation of the magic of the mountains. Inspired by the awe inspiring beauty of the Himalayas, Singh undertakes a soulful journey to the hills. His childhood fascination with the Himalayas and frequent visits to the hills lay foundation for this book. Six years of exhaustive research into the book is part of his mission and an earnest plea in conservation of the Himalayan ecology.

The narrative is infused with the Wordsworthian romanticism, Singh clarifies in the introduction that his book is not an anthropological survey of the Himalayas but rather a traveller's account of the society, culture, history, myths and the politics of the region. Singh draws his understanding of the travelogue in the words of the Italian travel writer Fosco Maraini as "There are two ways of travelling. One is to cover a long distance in a short time, taking in the general outline of mountain and valley and the most obvious characteristics of the people. The other is to stop, go deeper, strike root to some extent, and try to imbibe from the soil the invisible spiritual sap which nourishes the inhabitants of the place"

Undeniably, the book arrests the reader's interest in the Himalayan territory not only with the exquisite account of its myriad flora and fauna and picturesque serene landscape but also with the symphonies and echoes of the mystical and ethereal spirituality, especially the chanting of *Om Mani Padme Hum* inscribed on the stones.

Singh neatly divides the book into two parts. The first part which is titled as 'Romancing the Spirit', is a challenging review of the existing Himalayan Travelogues and the second part is 'The Roof of the World' which is a critical insight into various perspectives on Tibet.

The first part invokes H. D. Thoreau's *Walden* as Singh poetically traverse, halts and ponders over the curves and crevices of the hill. Extrapolating a rich and varied scholarship on the Himalayan landscape, Singh presents a critical appraisal of the existing travel accounts of the region. Their success and failures in depicting the Himalayan sojourn becomes Singh's main concern. Among many travel writers, the one who shaped Singh's pristine love for the summit is Bill Aitkens. Singh identifies with the Aitkens's spirit of a devout and not a mountaineer's zeal of conquering the summit. Singh uses Aitkens's *Footloose in the Himalayas* and *The Nanda Devi Affair* as a guiding light to his exploration of the Himalayan region. Situating the travelogue in the geographical, historical, and cultural ethos of the Himalayas, Singh delineates a rich travel scholarship like Hebers's *Himalayan Tibet and Ladakh*, Janet Rizvi's *Ladakh Crossroads of High Asia*, Andrew Harvey's *A Journey in Ladakh*, and Percy Brown's *Picturesque Nepal* to name a few. Unencumbered with theoretical framework, the book focuses

on the lived experience of the people. Singh's notes minute gastronomical details in the preparation of tea "with fresh butter added to a well boiled infusion and is kept hot in copper pot". The large intake of tea amounting to thirty to forty cups a day in the Mountains is a daily source of "warmth and nourishment"

At one place, Singh describes the practice of polyandry in Ladakh as "sharing the wife means a collective paternity that ensures a small family" in the face of limited resources and livelihood, polyandry is a practical strategy of limiting the family size also limits patriarchy by providing more options to the women, as Singh quotes Ladakhi women chuckles "I am never a widow".

As a cultural historian, Singh recounts various myths and rituals that are deeply embedded in the Mountains. The ritual of the Oracle with the elaborate performance of the one who is being possessed for the prognostication is described by earlier travelogues as "bone-chilling spectacle" is contextualised by Singh as ancient Hindu feminine energy which is often misinterpreted by the western travellers in their travelogue as frightful. Singh reveals another peculiar ritual common in the Bapsa Valley of Himachal Pradesh where Devi is honoured when the harvest is good but is also punished when the harvest turns bad by locking the idol in the tower. The book is interspersed with such unknown and intriguing myths and rituals. Gara Devi legend in Kullu, where a Thakur, impressed by a mason's work granted his wish of marrying his beautiful daughter Gara, while Gara dutifully agreed, later not happy in her marriage made a *jal samadhi*, and hence elevated to a goddess with a temple and a beautiful *pahari* style carved statue. Singh also explains in detail the *gaddi* occupation of sheep rearing and shearing as part of folk culture and tradition and makes a passionate case to preserve these historically culturally and ethnically rich groups.

The book will appeal to any traveller, nature lover and students of travelogue literature. It is an indispensable account for researchers in the Himalayan region and also a timely contribution to the eco criticism, making a clarion call for action in preserving the fragile ecosystem of the Himalayan region. Implicit in the book is the deep faith and longing for the unadulterated nature. Despite his spiritual approach parallel to a devotee searching for inner peace, Singh cannot be accused of platitudes as herring out the contradictions and the existing anomalies in his analysis. Nepal, a confluence of Hinduism and Buddhism, practice some of the most brutal slaughtering of animals like buffaloes as part of religious rituals, according to Singh, it deserves condemnation rather than reverence. Also Singh highlights the problem of stray dogs in Bhutan where as per the Buddhist philosophy, taking life of any sentient being is prohibited, yet in the contemporary Bhutan, stray dogs are kicked and beaten routinely. The paradox remains, while maimed and sick stray dogs are not allowed euthanasia because Buddhism prohibits taking of life, they are made to die slow painful death.

The second part of the book entitled 'The Roof of the World: Perspectives on Tibet', focuses on historical, cultural, and political life of Tibet. Singh assiduously divides his account of Tibet between the pre-1950 Chinese occupation of Tibet as

old remote and idyllic past and post-1950, as the land mired with war and bloodshed along with rampant materialism.

Singh analysis of Montgomery McGovern's *To Lhasa in Disguise/ A Secret Expedition through Mysterious Tibet* explores Tibet as a cultural centre with their unique customs and rituals. Singh revels in small details about the food and meticulous tea culture and its elaborate servings in the monasteries where tea is kept warm under the clothes. Singh conscientiously debunks the Utopic image of Tibet as how it is often projected in many travelogues and critically examine various rituals and practice like death ritual where the dead body is hacked methodically and fed to vultures, despite its altruistic purpose of being useful in death to vultures, yet the unseemly sight appears bizarre and irreverent. Adding to this ritual is "post mortem cannibalism" where it's an act of consecration to eat of the corpse of spiritually elevated person. Widely prevalent practice like *rolang*, a mouth to mouth resuscitation of the corpse until it gets animated and rises indicative of the hidden and macabre aspect of Buddhist rituals and beliefs. And Monks are not just ascetic, apostles of compassion and tolerance but can be capable of violence and hatred as observed by Singh and also works as moneylenders with high rates of interest akin to the clergy of the Middle Ages in Europe. The latter narrative on Tibet takes a form of political critique as Singh enumerates the devastation and large scale destruction caused by Chinese aggression in Tibet through account of living cannibalism and poignant personal stories. Singh says "Any claim of China that Tibet is culturally a part of China is their untenable and only a convenient argument to justify its occupation of Tibet"

Far from the land of mystics, after the flight of the XIV Dalai Lama from Tibet to India, under China's hegemony, Tibet's cultural and spiritual life is fast dwindling and is now reduced to tourist consumption. In what Singh describes as "cultural genocide" is crass commercialisation and rampant modernisation where many Tibetan women are systematically employed in prostitution. Singh laments the materialistic hegemony of China which has subsumed the spiritual and cultural life of Tibet.

From an exotic Shangri la to a vulnerable land of trauma under constant threat of annihilation, Singh critically delineates the multilayered perspectives on Tibet and its rich legacy. Just as Singh begins the book with a dedication to the XIV Dalai Lama, it closes with his quote forming a circle of life. The book remains a laudable effort in bringing the forgotten Tibet back into focus.

Although not the scope of the book, with such vast knowledge and lived experience of the terrain and people, we do expect Singh to suggest probable solutions at ground level as well as at the level of planning to preserve the fragile ecology and vanishing culture.

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics, begun in 1978, has accumulated an enviable repertoire of cross-cultural and inter-disciplinary readings from some of the best minds in the fields. As the journal prepares to publish its forty-first issue under a new Editor, we deem it fit to introduce a new feature that will make the journal more viable to the newer generation of readers and scholars.

From this point forward, the journal shall carry a 'From the Archives' section where an essay, previously published in JCLA, shall be reprinted, based on its content and its communicative potential. It will hopefully serve the purpose of opening up a dialogue between the journal's present and its past by integrating the old with the new, and the contemporary with the archival.

As we commemorate the Birth Centenary of Prof. John Hospers (1918-2011), who was for long a Member of our Editorial Board, one cannot think of a more auspicious occasion to flag off this new venture. 'Art and Morality', a seminal essay by the author published in the very first issue of the journal, is reprinted in the present issue.

We welcome suggestions from readers and intellectuals about other measures to be taken to enhance the appeal of the journal.

– EDITOR