

The next chapter handles vegetal memory in the poetics of Louise Glück where Ryan argues that the ability to recall past occurrences and anticipate future events is not only possessed by animal-human beings. Drawing on Charles Darwin's experimentation with tendril-bearing plant cotyledons, Ryan submits that Glück's poetry "imaginatively mediates vegetal beings' memories of themselves, one another, and their ecological circumstances" (137). This is followed by Chapter 7 which discusses the temporality of plants using Judith Wright's poetry. According to Ryan, "Wright's work troubles the reduction of plant time and resists the imposition of human timeframes on plants and other beings. Instead, she strives through her eco poetic practice to responsively and dialogically attend to the time of plants—and particularly to render time in terms of her commitment to environmental consciousness, ethics, activism, and stewardship" (*ibid*). However, the lengthy accounts of philosophical notions of time here slowed me down as I read this rather poetically and scientifically rich and fascinating book. I therefore consider this as the most difficult chapter of the book.

Chapter 8 explores plant death in John Kinsella's poetry which, of course, is a sad thematic concern, but Ryan delivers it pleasurable. He draws a useful demarcation between biogenic and anthropogenic plant deaths before engaging with the manner in which Kinsella's poetry transcends the usual consideration of plant death as metaphors for human mortality and societal decay (190). Instead, Ryan asks: "Why does a tree, shrub, or herbaceous plant die? And when should the death of a plant matter to us?" (191). After astounding textual analysis of vegetal death in Kinsella's poetics, Ryan concludes that both biogenic and anthropogenic plant deaths must be taken seriously in the current age of the Anthropocene and mass species extinction. Fortunately, Chapter 9 wraps up the book on a very positive note by examining vegetal hope and the love of flora in Joy Harjo's poetry. Cognizant of the sadness and sorrow orchestrated by biodiversity loss nowadays, Ryan reminds us of the "bold claim for a vegetally-inflected form of ecological hope [which] is tacit in stories of plant resilience, recovery, and renewal that continue to surface in the public domain despite a prevailing mood of dread and helplessness over the state of the planet" (214). He contends that Harjo's poetry does not approach vegetal life "as aesthetic background or cultural commodity, but as a vibrant agent in the process of writing, composing, and valuing language" (217). Both the chapter and book conclude as follows: "As a resource for the Anthropocene, botanical hope embraces the idea of the plant as a bearer of hope for a more equitable future on earth for itself and us" (236).

It is however curious to note that for a monograph dealing with contemporary poetry in English, all of Ryan's authors come from Britain, the US, and Australia. Surprisingly, Africa, Asia, and Canada are completely missing in the book. That notwithstanding, *Plants in Contemporary Poetry* stand out in many ways, including its breadth and depth of analysis, its dazzling combination of neuroscientific knowledge and literary criticism, and its forceful poetic language, among others. Most importantly, you can never look at plants the same way you did before reading this book!

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UNFORGETTING CHAITANYA: VAISHNAVISM AND CULTURES OF DEVOTION IN COLONIAL BENGAL. By Varuni Bhatia. New York: OUP. 2017. 291 p.

Bhatia writes pointedly in the Introduction, "...this is a book about unforgetting Chaitanya and recovering Vaishnavism in colonial Bengal" (2). By the act of unforgetting, the author implies a simultaneous chiding of the *bhadralok* over forgetting the significance of Vaishnavite origins as well as a demand of a renaissance leading to recuperation, a collective process the author calls anamnesis. By locating literature that has Chaitanya as its literary axis within the larger Bengali Vaishnava traditional nexus, the author hopes to achieve another "world picture" of the anamnesis operating in relation to the "forging of a Bengali colonial subjectivity" (4).

In the chapter *A Religion in Decline in an Age of Progress*, Bhatia follows the two trajectories that general outlook towards Vaishnavism (led by Chaitanya) took in the mid to late 19th century: one was informed by "Christian missionaries, colonial administrators, and Westernized Bengali intellectuals" (21) of the Vaishnava followers who brought on the slow descent of a once rich, radical and wholesome value system into a corrupt, compromised and profligate lifestyle, while the other was informed by "Bengali literary historians, cultural revivers, Vaishnava theologians, and anticolonial activists" (26), being that of the later address to the loss of Vaishnava tradition from Hindu theism. From this point, the author follows the discourse prevalent during the time that pointed to the decline of Vaishnavism in the eyes of the late 19th century Bengali *bhadralok*. This chapter also provides a succinct hagiographical account of Chaitanya which supplements the historical-religious history of Vaishnavism.

By choosing texts of varying attitudes (Kennedy's sympathetic account, Ward's accurate/unsparring fieldwork and Wilson's background analysis of Hindu textual traditions to posit Vaishnavism within the larger Hindu framework) towards the practice of Vaishnavism, the author deftly exposes the white saviour mentality of the Evangelists as well as their rejection of the existing Vaishnava belief system as a part of the Indian theology they often wrote off as pagan-heathen traditions (the author astutely points out how one of the chosen authors is reminded of Catholicism). The section that succeeds it, explores the discourse that put into action "a program of reformative and culturalist regeneration" (41) with the two approaches the discourse takes—the cultural-nationalist and the religious-reformist. The first approach replaces the discourse of decline with that of loss, leaning towards a Romantic imagination and nostalgia for the past while through the second approach, Bhatia elucidates how Vaishnavism provided a site for Bengali nationalism and its transition into Gaudiya Vaishnavism, which involved an "Evangelical remaking" (46).

Untidy Realms explores the manner in which the *bhadralok* entrusted themselves with the preservation of the Vaishnavist traditions, a preservation which operated along the two axes of culture and religion. The author titles it so because she strives to describe the unusually plural nature of Vaishnavist traditions, which continued in perfect harmony in the face of opposites, thus giving the impression that Vaishnavism transcended all boundaries. However, Bhatia takes the reader on a comprehensive tour of the making of modern Vaishnavism by tackling the rituals in practice in Bengal (in the penultimate section), instead of simply perusing and critically examining the *Bhadralok* disciplinary discourse. Using the example of two Vaishnavas (from the Bengali middle class/indigenous cultural elite) and elite Vaishnava families, Bhatia examines what these untidy

realms were (in the opinion of the abovementioned), that needed to be trimmed from the genteel and appropriate/pure Bengali Vaishnavism. What is commendable about these sections is that there is a thorough biographical assessment of the Vaishnavas and that no fact or opinion, especially that pertaining to missionary and western influence, is presented without historical-biographical-cultural evidence. Moreover, the subsequent section on deviant sects is approached in the very same manner, leaving no room for any ambiguity.

Taking cue from the European Romantic Movement (and imagination) that subscribed to ideas like individuality, nativity and indigenous knowledge, the author introduces Vaishnavist traditions as folklore and Chaitanya as a “regional deity and devotee”. The author draws upon Bendix’s assertion of nationalism resting on “the essentialist notions inherent in authenticity, and folklore in the guise of native cultural discovery and rediscovery” and uses it as a background for the third chapter, in order to explore the other dimension (apart from the *Bhadralok* reformation/renaissance, or Gaudiya Vaishnavism) of Vaishnavist preservation, which was spurred on by a Swadeshi Nationalism. To this end are listed in elaborate detail, historians and their major theoretical contributions such as Dinesh Chandra Sen and his position on Bangla as an authentic and relatively older language (as opposed to a new and derived one) and Haraprasad Chaudhari’s looking back at the neglected Vaishnavist literature that supplied Bengali literature language and literature a sound and wholesome base not requiring Western paradigms.

Bhatia calls Sishir Kumar Ghosh the protagonist of *Recovering Bishnupriya's Loss*. His efforts at a collective that brought together diverse Vaishnava devotees through his journal *Shri Bishnupriya Patrika* are covered extensively. This gives the reader an insight into what constituted Vaishnavism (free from colonial influence) for such intellectuals and to what extent such personalities would go to perpetuate the Vaishnavist discourse. The author also skillfully situates these efforts into the overarching theme of the procedure of “unforgetting” by placing an emphasis on and by examining the tasks undertaken by the journal to acquaint the readers with Vaishnavist literature, advertisements, book reviews of hagiographies and works in progress, as well as a practice of awarding authentic texts brought in for examination. The untidy realms that the author discusses in the second chapter are revisited again to show how the journal engaged with them, by either trying to tidy them or stayed silent upon the matter.

Utopia and a Birthplace addresses the historical controversy surrounding Chaitanya’s birthplace towards the end of the nineteenth century. The purpose for the chapter is to situate this preoccupation within the larger attempt of the *Bhadralok* to resuscitate Vaishnavism and to understand it as counterproductive to the same (the author calls it an “anomaly”). Datta’s *Svalikhita Jibani* is an ideal example that not only helps the author make specific claims about the nature of Chaitanya’s birthplace, but also general claims about the humanness and the oft manufactured nature of a sacred space. Datta’s pilgrim-like outlook to Nabadwip, his spiritual dreams/visions, his geographic fixation with Chaitanya’s birth and his use of colonial tools of knowledge, all lent his claim credibility and applause. The account of Datta’s campaign is followed by various Gaudiya efforts made after his death to make his claim solid. A section on Nabadwip also finds its way into the chapter, which makes the chapter all the more informative and adds to the already meticulous research.

The author’s unique style of not letting even the minutest historical detail go by unnoticed is what makes the book an accessible and comprehensive read. Every chapter

has sections vividly etched in biographical and historical detail, making it impossible to misconstrue the purpose of the book. Several sections, such as "Women and Vaishnavism: Transgression and Patriarchy", "Between Manuscript and Print: Authenticity, Purity, and the Politics of Selfhood", "Celebrating Gauranga's Birth Anniversary" and "Nabadwip: History, Topography, Discourse", might not seem fundamental to the tone of the book at first, however, a careful evaluation is likely to impress the reader with the richness it lends to the primary and more aligned sections. The conclusions provided with each chapter are essential in outlining the main argument as well as in understanding the author's precise commentary on the chapters. The personal approach the author adopts in the Epilogue deserves special mention and altogether, the book provides a fine and comprehensive account of Vaishnavism, keeping at its centre the controversial figure of Chaitanya, and addressing the controversies and ambiguities surrounding it in a pervasive manner.

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AMBEDKAR AND OTHER IMMORTALS: AN UNTOUCHABLE RESEARCH PROGRAMME. By Soumyabrata, Choudhury. New Delhi: Navayana, 2018. 272 p.

Soumyabrata Choudhury in this book attempts to explain certain contemporary issues and questions through the texts and arguments given by Dr. B. R Ambedkar in *Annihilation of Caste*, *What Congress and Gandhi have Done to the Untouchables*, *Castes in India*, *Constitution*, "Away from the Hindu", and "A Plea to the Foreigner" etc. By discussing some main texts of Ambedkar, Soumyabrata has discussed some of the relevant debates/confusions/questions regarding many ongoing issues in recent time, which also used to be burning issues during Ambedkar's time. For example, conversion, politics over castes/identities, autonomy, appropriation, alliances and so on. He also applies the comparative method to understand the present issues and questions, for example, Alain Badiou, Gandhi, and Aristotle on the one hand and Dr. Ambedkar on the other. Therefore, I would say it's a good hermeneutic philosophical exercise in understanding Ambedkar's philosophy and current debates.

The linguistic analysis of Ambedkar is innovative in the book and in author's mind (51). For example, in chapter one, the author has used the terms from *Castes in India* and *Annihilation of Caste* – Association, Imitation, Innovation, Excommunication, Similarity, Common and Communication. In the second chapter, he has clearly articulated about the intellectual scholarly life of Ambedkar in terms of language (universal and so-called academic language sense) and on the other hand Ambedkar's engagement with the masses, their real life in a society that is pragmatic and based on ordinary language. In order to explain this language and theorization aspect, Soumyabrata has illustrated the seminal essays—*Castes in India* and *Annihilation of Caste*. The playing of ordinary language in conceptualization particularly in these essays is interesting. In order to overcome from the common name which is fit to endogamous logic (the foundation of caste and casteism), Ambedkar makes the counter move "other name" for example his conversion to Buddhism (95). This is also a pan-Indian phenomenon among untouchable communities.