

## BOOK REVIEWS

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason : Towards a History of the Vanishing Present*, Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 449.

At the very first sight the book exhibits its author's imagination in wilderness. The dedication page is itself symbolic of the author's academic detour from Taraknath Sen of Calcutta University (a legendary teacher of English literature during the 1950s and 60s) to Paul de Man (a legendary literary critic of Yale University) from Bengal (India?) to the United States (World?). In its critical bewilderment the book desires to leave no area of humanities untouched - it covers philosophy, literature, history, culture with an appendix on the dying intellectual illusion of deconstruction. The author writes :

My book charts a practitioner's progress from colonial discourse studies to transnational cultural studies.... Based on my own uncertain scholarship, I sometimes conjure up a lexicon-consulting reader for the new cultural studies. The book tries also to address the 'sanctioned ignorance' of the theoretical elite and of the self-styled academic 'practitioner'... The chapters do not stand alone. They are loosely strung on a chain that may be described this way: the philosophical pre-suppositions historical excavations and literary representatives of the dominant — in so far as they are shared by the emergent postcolonial also trace a subliminal and discontinuous emergence of the "native informant", *autocritique and/or subaltern*... This is a feminist book. Feminist issues are "pre-emergent" (Raymond William's word) in the first chapter. They are the substance of the rest. In the fourth, a critique of contemporary culturalist universalist feminism is offered.

Out of her many wise perceptions in the text just one critical judgement might be taken for consideration: her focus on the *Gita*. She differs from Hegel, Kosambi and Motilal who considered the text from three different perspectives- viewing Indian concept of history as a recurrence of the static principle, reading a politics in instructing the lower class to listen to the dominant Brahmins, a dialogue of the past and the present as the continuous past respectively. But Spivak proposes to read the *Gita* in terms of the play of Law and History. In the fourth chapter, when Krsna says that the wisdom that he wanted to impart Arjuna was not to be imparted for the first time in history, rather it was rotating through the ceaseless operation of natural law in course of the moving history. He first communicated it to the Sun god the symbol of natural law. Sun instructed it to Manu who imparted it to Ikshvaku a human descendant of the divine solar energy. Thus Spivak reads that in such a circulation history as timing is subordinated by law as the graph of time. Krsna's purport is clear: one cannot obtain sequential verification by means of the rotation of life and death which defines (the movement of)

history. Krsna knows this because he is immutable spirit "born" only metaphorically, since inhabits his own nature through his own phenomenal possibility. Finally, Krsna represents both law and law giver. It is possible for him to avoid logocentrism because he gives *logos* outside the historical temporality since he carries the phallus outside the physiological obligation. "The graph of Time is a devouring of time as timing" (p. 55). Correlation of the chapters 4, 10 and 11 would annul Hegel's misconception of the Indian concept of history.

In the third chapter Chakravorty correlates the concept of history with Imperialism and the colonial subject: "If the project of Imperialism is violently to put together the episteme that will "mean" (for others) and "know" (for the self) the colonial subject as history's nearly-selved other, the example of these deletions indicate explicitly what is always implicit: that meaning knowledge intersects power. (p.215). The chapter on culture proposes to study the history of the present, i.e., "our culture" as a differanting event – a conflation of poststructuralism and postmodernism performed most brilliantly by Fredric Jameson in "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism". The present author shares the contradictions in Jameson's text. Jameson's linking postmodernism with multinational capital is queried by the author.

This big book is also a difficult one. A reader wonders at the author's ambition for a wild harvest of unworldly wisdom as the book exhibits or proposes to exhibit the whole range of scholarship attained by the ancients and moderns of both the hemispheres – eastern and western. The author's intellectual awareness is undoubtedly unchallengeable; but a reader surely misses the threads that unite the author's central proposal for making the book a "feminist" work. Perhaps the author has tried to interpret the whole range of a woman's experience of life in terms of intellectual gambling. Her success and failure are both only relative.

Michael H. Mitias, *What Makes an Experience Aesthetic?* Pp. 154; (ed) *Aesthetic Quality and Aesthetic Experience*, pp. 176 both published by Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam, 1988.

Professor Mitias' pinpointed programme is to distinguish a kind of experience which is called aesthetic from another kind of experience which is not aesthetic. Experiencing any object or event aesthetically is to perceive the same *in a certain/different way*. An ordinary natural object or event such as a flower, a quarrel or an artwork such as a picture of a flower or battle given to our sense- perception has an identity or history of any other category than *aesthetic*. In what way does an ordinary perception differ from a perception called "aesthetic"? Thus there are three basic questions: (1) What makes an object a work of art - what is the essential nature of art, (2) What makes an experience aesthetic – what is the essential structure of the aesthetic experience and (3) How is the judgement of aesthetic evaluation possible – or under what conditions is an objective aesthetic judgement possible? Precisely speaking – what is the uniqueness of an object the experience of which can be called "aesthetic"?

Critics like T.J. Diffey have extended the aesthetic beyond the experience of the work of art – aesthetic can be extended to moral, religious, mathematical and metaphysical works or even to any other

ordinary natural objects and events. But Mitias is a traditional thinker who wants to analyse only the structure of aesthetic experience as an experience of *artworks only*. So Stolnitz's points come first – he means whatever the object may be, if we perceive it in specific way and enjoy it. Roger Scruton calls this way(s) attitudes which are distinctively called aesthetic attitudes expressed in judgements like “lovely”, “beautiful”, elegant, hideous – and these attitudes, determine the structure of aesthetic experience. But the question is why should these attitudes be called *aesthetic*? and how these external factors be responsible for determining the internal structure of a thing to which aesthetic is attributed? Therefore some inherent factors/qualities must be there in the object/event for which the term aesthetic be used. So the present author argues that “it is intelligible to say that the distinctive feature of any object or artifact *qua* art in possession of aesthetic qualities; that is, an art work is a potential aesthetic object, and this object is actualized i.e. acquires structure and concreteness, in the process of aesthetic perception or in the aesthetic experience.” (p. 6) The qualities inherent in the objects which Mitias calls aesthetic must be sensory in the Kantian terms - of ~~some~~ *sensory* category, different from other sensory qualities of other objects. All sensory qualities of all objects are certainly not aesthetic. Then what are these sensory qualities peculiarly called aesthetic? Two realities are assumed-the objects concerned must have qualities called aesthetic and the experience must be also of a distinct mode to perceive these aesthetic qualities – if any quality is not an aesthetic one, any experience is not also properly qualified to perceive this specific quality in the object. This seems a rational presentation of the whole problem. Now the question is how to qualify both objects and experience as the aesthetic?

Many philosophers like Hospers, Dickie and Price have denied the existence of a specific experience called “aesthetic”. An attitude called “aesthetic” has also been denied, because the so-called aesthetic attitude is so subjective in character that it presupposes any/every objects’ being aesthetic – ultimately eliminating any sense of aesthetic whatsoever it may be. On the other hand, Mitias has been maintaining an organic view of aesthetic experience – an encounter between the audience and the artwork. Drawing upon phenomenology, he defines an aesthetic object as an object of complex qualities construed in the process of aesthetic perception. His concept of aesthetic qualities is identified on ontological considerations.

The second volume contains ten essays by distinguished philosophers such as, John Fisher, Goran Hermeren, Robert Ginsberg and Mitias himself. The authors discuss different aspects of aesthetic qualities and experience, the locus and value of these qualities and experience. In the first volume Mitias offers an excellent account of the unity of aesthetic experience – he discovers also a single identity of this aesthetic experience counting the experience of different artwork under this single rubric. But in accounting for the unity of aesthetic experience, he warns that one should not look for some mental state or relation which “relates” the mental data which the work generates in the course of aesthetic perception. Interestingly enough, Indian philosophers of classical period have tackled the same issue in a different way. They do not identify any particular experience under which the experience of a varieties of art and natural phenomena can be enumerated.

According to them there is no common structure of any experience so as to count all these varieties under it. Even experiences of various kinds of art are different from each other depending upon the ontological status of these arts. What to speak of experience of nature? For example experience of dramatic experience which they call "Rasa" is not the one that defines the experience of visual arts. Further more, generation of Rasa in reading poetry is of different origin although in kind they are the same. Indian philosophers have been highly phenomenological in explaining aesthetic experience. In fact, as I have explained in another essay of mine, they have not worried themselves regarding a common rubric for all the kinds of experience of all the kinds of objects – art or non-art. Simply because, they reject the very idea of such a common experience. When they speak of the singleness of Rasa, they meant that the kind of experiencing all the emotions in a dramatic performance or poetic narration is the same, though they appear different only as they are tinged (*uparanjita*) or triggered (*rsita*) by difficult emotions.

Professor Mitias has devoted a long span of his scholarly life to almost this single issue of aesthetic experience. Therefore, he is much more judicious, perceptive, and convincing in analysing the issue than many other philosophers who have been one-sided sometimes even callous.

**Gautam Biswas, *Art of Dialogue : Essays in Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, New Delhi: D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd. in collaboration with Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1995, pp. 155.**

As Kapila Vatsyayan writes in the foreword :

Dr Gautam Biswas endeavours to comprehend art experience as dialogic in the sense of the pre-linguistic, linguistic and trans-linguistic aspects. Pertinently no closed theory of art is being propounded. Only the ideas of modern philosophers as also of Tagore and Radhakrishnan are being examined within the framework of phenomenology of dialogue. (P. IX)

In the chapters 2, 3, 4 Biswas outlines the phenomenological theories of aesthetics in several philosophies like Martin Buber and Michael Polanyi, and in the last two chapters he applies these views to the study of Tagore and Radhakrishnan. The design of the work is undoubtedly self-rewarding. In the theoretical chapters he deals with basic questions such as – what is our relation with works of art, what is the relation between man as an artist and his creations, what is the nature of the creative process, how is the meaning of a work of art determined and what is the ontological status of a work of art. But it seems, Biswas, in dealing with these issues, has not been directly acquainted with the founder authors in this area – particularly Roman Ingarden and Michael Dufrenne as also with some outstanding critics like Michael Mitias and Gregory Currie. Therefore his second chapter has not been a successful one. But the third chapter is a substantial one in its elaboration of Buber's concept of art as a dialogue : "... all art is from its origin essentially of the nature

of dialogue" (P. 51). Art is real only in the context of its relationship with the audience. "Its ontology is the ontology of this relation". Obviously, from the phenomenologist's views the one-sided approaches of Benedetto Croce and Ivor Richards are now-a-days outdated.

In fact the dialogic nature of art and its experience had long been expounded and explicated by the classical Indian philosophers of art, who, particularly with the Kashmirian Saivists believed the work of art as a part of the world consciousness. Dramatic performance, according to both Bharata and his commentator Abhinavagupta is basically a dialogue. No Rasa will be generated on the stage in the absence of the audience and by the same token, no Rasa will be generated in the audience in the absence of the performance on the stage. Thus the performance – audience dialogue is virtually the work of art. This is precisely what the continental phenomenologists have been trying to demonstrate. There are of course a great deal of differences in the technological analysis of the principal views but a number of similarities are traced in the structure of aesthetic objects, aesthetic qualities and aesthetic perception. Both Tagore and Radhakrishnan were indigenous in their aesthetic formulations. Tracing their phenomenological affiliations is rather an anachronical approach since during their time European phenomenology did not come to the forefront of the intellectual environment as now they have come up. Even then, Biswas' interpretation and correlation broaden the scope of our understanding and intercultural reciprocation. We therefore welcome Biswas' contribution most unconditionally.

Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (eds), *The Troubadours: An Introduction*, Cambridge: The University Press (ISBN 0521 574730), 1999, pp. 330.

The Troubadourian poetic tradition has been extremely influential in the European literary history – from Dante to Ezra Pound through Cavalcanti, Patrarck, Chaucer, Spenser, Donne, Keats, Rossetis and Browning. These medieval courtly poetic tradition had an established contact with the Indian courtly tradition in its mystic aspect pertaining both to the Hindus and non-Hindu Buddhist. In a recent research I have co-authored with Dr. B. Dash this established cultural reciprocation unknown hitherto.

The present book collects sixteen essays on different aspects of both classical and later Troubadours highlighting the historical, rhetorical, philosophical and cultural perspectives of this celebrated literary tradition. Naturally, as it occurs in such anthologies, no particular perspective has been pinpointed, nor is there any attempt at discovering a new cultural perspective, although there are two essays on hermeneutics, intertextuality and dialogism in troubadourian writings. The editors have clarified the nature of this book in their prefatory note: "This book is both a collection of self-contained essays and a text book. The first three chapters offer an introduction to the historical context of the Troubadour lyric, and then to the two main genres of the Troubadour tradition, the *canso* and *sirventes*. The next five are broadly speaking literary-historical and offer an overview of the Troubadours with chapters on the three main periods of Troubadour production, on the women Troubadours, and on Spanish and Italian Troubadours, the aim being to show how the tradition evolved both in Occitania and abroad. The following five chapters give an account of the critical preoccupations of

recent Troubadour scholarship. The final three chapters deal, albeit selectively, with medieval reception". The editors also offer a brief history of Troubadourian studies till date, omitting surprisingly some of the cross-cultural approaches particularly by Michael Thomas who has been continuing some of the basic comparisons independent of Sukla and Dash (unpublished yet). That way, an essay on the intercultural perspective of the Troubadourian tradition would have added greatly to the value of the anthology.

But as it is, the book provides an excellent modern introduction to the Troubadours for both common readers and advanced researchers.

Noel Carroll, *Philosophy of Art : A Contemporary Introduction*, London : Routledge, 1999, pp. 273.

The Routledge Series of "Contemporary Introduction to Philosophy" is intended for introducing the topics concerned for a contemporary reader. All the books of this series treat the subject with updated information and remarkable comprehension. Apart from its being an excellent textbook for the graduate students, Professor Carroll's book presents the major issues in contemporary aesthetics most attractively for general readers as well as researchers. About the several arms of this book Carroll writes, "The first is informational. A great many of the theories reviewed in this book are what might be called canonical. They are theories that anyone who cares for art should know about. They have, in some cases, influenced art making and art appreciation for centuries and, in other cases, their influence has extended at least for decades....In addition to supplying information, the book also attempts to be an introduction to techniques of analytic philosophy... how to go about analysing concepts, how to investigate proposed definitions critically, how to think about exceptions to theories, how to argue on behalf of positions you believe in.... Many of the skills that this book exercises involve ways of showing that theories and viewpoints are mistaken". (pp. 15-16). The criticism-oriented approach does not lead to any cynicism or scepticism. As the author rightly comments "There is still a great deal of room for improvement in the philosophy of art, and inevitably it is up to your generation to move the discussion to the next stage of philosophical development." The book therefore presupposes a constant and continuous growth of ideas in the intellectual world.

Among the topics dealt with there are issues of representation, expression, definition, identification, aesthetic experience and artistic form. Each chapter is provided with a summary and annotated reading list. By way of assessing the author's style of treatment, we may pick up the chapter on representation. The author classifies that he has considered only the pictorial representation or representation in pictorial art extending the area of this art beyond painting to film, photography, video and T.V. The controversiality in treating film, video and T.V. as (wholesomely) pictorial arts apart, for a theorist of art, it is really difficult to understand representation in pictorial arts without understanding the representational aspects of other arts- particularly literature. Since a major part of contemporary scholarship on pictorial representation (including the types of conventionalism and neo-naturalism as the author names) is founded upon or is related to theories of linguistic

and semiotic representation, correlation of verbal representation with pictorial representation is extremely relevant in any discussion of representation in the arts. Particularly, the author has most significantly commented that there is no unique form of representation in each kind of art. The same kind of representational strategies can be exploited by different kind of arts. In a way the author, subscribes to the Aristotelian hypothesis of mimetic theory that forms the ground of the sister arts theory. But viewed from a different angle, each art form maintains its individuality and distinction by the distinct medium it uses. A critic of the sister arts theory therefore rejects any comparison between pictorial art and theatrical performance. The difference lies in the very ontological status that distinguishes these two forms of art. As Abhianvagupta the celebrated Sanskrit critic (10<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.) has noted, both the art forms cannot exploit the same package of representational strategies because of their ontological differences. Theatre is not a pictorial art. Its audio-visual form cannot be called representational the way a picture is representational. Representational qualities of a theatrical performance is far more comprehensive and sophisticated than those of pictorial arts. To the annotated reading an excellent item might be added – Dieter Peetz, “Some Current Philosophical Theories of Pictorial Representation”, (*BJA*, 27: 3: 1987) which has classified the principal pictorial representation theories most convincingly.

A.C. Sukla

**Gregory Currie, *The Nature of Fiction*, 1990, pp. 222 ; *Image and Mind : Film, Philosophy and Cognitive Science*, 1995, pp. 301. Both the titles published by Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.**

In the first title Professor Currie has offered an account of fiction grounded upon Grice's theory of meaning. He observes that a comprehensive study of fiction needs an intersection of three disciplines : aesthetics, philosophy of language and philosophy of mind. “The problems I choose to deal with”, he writes, “and the manner in which I deal with them, make this book rather heavily weighted in the direction of the last two of these disciplines”. Currie's analytical ability was sufficiently evident in his earlier Macmillan book *An Ontology of Art* (1989). Since then Currie has been making steady improvement in his intellectual career as evident in the titles under review. His seriousness in choosing the areas of study and his sincerity in probing the issues he studies involve are both noteworthy in contemporary critical theory.

While grounding his work on Grice's theory of meaning Currie has also considered the areas of possible world, counterfactuals, proper names, definite description and conventions. But he confesses that he has avoided any comprehensive account of these areas for two reasons : to avoid the increasing length of the book and presenting a poor substitute for the founder philosophers of these areas – Kripke, Lewis, Stalnaker.

In the five chapters of the book the author considers the vital issues of fiction such as the concept of

fiction itself, the story structure, interpretation, characters and their names, and finally, the nature of response of fiction. The book is wonderfully planned and the author has taken almost all the theoretical developments made in the twentieth century into consideration, and has critically analysed these issues for formulation of his own ideas. He makes it sufficiently clear that fiction is as much a logical issue as it is linguistic. Obviously he differs from the new critics, formalists and structuralists who have been wholly linguistic in their approaches. The idea that fiction is an autonomous verbal structure is considered as vague because the concept of autonomy is not adequately defined. It seems that the author is not in favour of any so-called autonomy of a fictional text, because, he argues undoubtedly most convincingly, that fictionality is a complex interaction among the text, its author and the reader. Each one constitutes its vital role in the world of phenomenon called fiction. In the light of his threadbare analysis the theories of reader response, structuralism post-structuralism appear, only partial. If for the constitution of fiction each of the three elements text, author and reader are equally important, then the status of fiction is inevitably a relative one. For example, he argues that the fictionality of Doyle's novels require a qualified reader who must be informed about the late Victorian British society. The world of Holmes as fiction will be thus interpreted and appreciated relatively according to the qualification of the readers concerned, though he never says that it is the reader who creates the fiction. The author is never dead for Currie, nor is the text all in all. Inevitably, in his rejection of the new critical approach, he does not agree with critics like Wimsatt and Beardsley that reading fiction is only a cognitive experience without any kind of emotional affect or involvement: "We read novels not only to find out what is true in them.... We read them because we hope they will engage us..." An emotional response/participation/engagement is admitted by him, and therefore he offers a brilliant analysis of the nature of emotion that engages a reader— it is neither purely subjective nor cognitive. "On the view I propose, emotions are much closer to actions in their logical structure than they are to feelings."

The second book of Currie is on the film medium. His exploration about this medium are dealt with in three parts: Representation, Imagination and Interpretation. He asserts that all representational media are not necessarily representational arts. In addition to its being representation a medium must fulfil some conditions in order that it may be a representational art. But he is not clear about these extra conditions "because the notion of art is itself unclear." One may not agree with Currie's scepticism; but his honesty is certainly praiseworthy. He makes some sensitive observations regarding the relationship among painting, photography and film. All of them are representational media as well as representational arts. Film is a pictorial medium the movement of images in which is real rather than illusory. In painting an object or event is represented by something other than them, i.e., the medium — lines and colours. But in film, to follow the Aristotelian dictum, the medium and the object of representation are the same. But film is different from photography because in photography, to see a photograph of x is to see x; whereas both in painting and film it

is not necessarily so, because both the arts are necessarily fictional. Photography is necessarily a representational medium, but not necessarily a representational art. Its use as the medium in film is more pictorial than photographic. Similarly he argues for an ontology of film which rejects any psychological impression of the audience. In the third part of the book Currie provides a general theory of narration and its interpretation, and distinguishes cogently the ways film, painting and literature narrate differently.

Both the books are obviously fresh in their approaches and analyses of the topics that absorb the attention of a reader most creatively. One may not agree with all that he says, but one must highly enjoy the ways he says what he wats to say. Well-informed, unpretensive and fearless are Currie's texts.

**B.C.Dash**