Book Reviews

Ananta Ch. Sukla. *Art and Experience*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003, 302 pages.

Critical in its approach, comprehensive in its vision, and instructive in its impact, this anthology is an important contribution to the study of the concept of experience in art, science and religion. What does it mean to experience an artwork? How does this sort of experience differ from the experience of nature or the religious experience? This anthology is an exploration of the foundation of aesthetic appreciation and judgment. A large number of philosophers in the second half of the twentieth century practically banned the concept of experience from the analysis of the nature of art and the aesthetic as such. But this censure has lost its hold during the past few years; it has become clear that "experience" is indispensable for the analysis of the basic aesthetic concepts, views and methodologies. The question which cannot escape our attention is: can we theorize on what makes an object art or whether an artwork is good or tragic or the role it plays in human life if we do not in some way perceive or feel, i.e. "experience", the work? Ananta Sukla has rendered a great service to the contemporary analysis of the concepts of art and the aesthetic by restoring the category of experience to its proper place. It is, as Sukla says, an epistemic concept; as such, it is a principle of explanation. The philosophers he has invited to study the concept of experience and art are distinguished scholars. The topics which they discuss are: scientific and religious experience, the experience of language, the experience of nature and the experience of art, pictorial experience, the experience as art, the experience of literary works, the experience of music, the experience of dance, aesthetic experience nature and the experience of art in Indian aesthetics, the experience of photography and film. I shall in what follows throw light on some of these topics.

In chapter one, "Scientific Experience and Religious Experience", Keith Yandell begins his discussion of scientific experience and religious experience by pointing out that not all experiences have objects. Those which have objects are structural in character. Yandell calls them intentional. Thus we may distinguish two types of experience, intentional and non-intentional. Scientific and religious experiences are intentional in structure. A scientific experience is a perceptual experience of a physical object; it refers to "sensory experience within certain constraints, roughly, to visual, tactual, auditory, olfactory, and gustatory experiences of a sort that can be had under predictable conditions by any appropriately gifted or 'normal' observer...an experience is scientific only if it is sensory and public" (p. 4). Scientific experience is the basis of propositions; it alone warrants scientific claims and justification. Like scientific experience, religious experience is intentional. Here the experience of the intentional object is evidence that the object exists. Accordingly, "intentional religious experiences—centrally experiences in which people seem to experience God—are evidence that God exists" (p. 16). But in order for these experiences to be valid, Yandell argues, they should be accompanied by a "successful version of the cosmological or ontological argument" (Ibid.).Though interesting, this account of religious experience leaves much to desired, for a critic might insist: regardless of how valid or convincing a cosmological or an ontological argument might be such an argument cannot establish existence. This point was made amply clear by Kierkegaard sometime ago.

In chapter two, "Experiencing Nature and Experiencing Art," T.J. Diffey argues that although the dichotomy between art and nature "must increasingly be called into question" (p. 45), our experience of them is basically asymmetrical, though not necessarily antithetical: what it means to experience an artwork is different from our experience of nature. Diffey starts his discussion of this thesis by rejecting the Kantian account of aesthetic judgment, because it distorts our experience of the artwork. It treats the work "as if it were a natural object" (p. 43). But artworks are not anymore imitations of nature and they do not have to be "beautiful" to be art. The creation of beauty is not the end of art: "the traditional continuity between at and nature, to be found in Kant's aesthetics, is in terms of their beauty; the modern discontinuity between art and nature is in terms of art" (p. 50). The art work is a creation of the human imagination; nature is given. This does not mean that an artist may not create beautiful artworks; no, it only means that "beauty is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition

of art" (p. 44). Accordingly the judgment of beauty does not apply indifferently to artworks and nature. Consequently the symmetry "between the aesthetics of art and the aesthetics of nature" (Ibid.) would be disrupted, because what used to unite them, viz., beauty, does not exist anymore. It would, then, be more appropriate to speak of the experience of nature and the experience of art. And if this is the case, then we should dissociate the concept of art from the concept of the aesthetic. We can experience a work as art without necessarily experiencing it aesthetically. This is a problematic conclusion for at least two reasons: (1) can we experience an object as art without necessarily experiencing the aesthetic properties which make it art? Is Diffey willing to say that "art" is a neutral concept? (2) For Kant and others philosophers, nature is not only beautiful; it can be colossal, horrible, dreamy, peaceful, exhilarating, and so forth. We do not experience nature; we experience parts of nature, even though these parts are always clearly delimited. We should grant the distinction Diffey makes between art and nature, but still we can experience both aesthetically.

The distinction between art and nature reaches its highest articulation in Hegel's philosophy of fine art. For Hegel, the beauty of nature is generically different from the beauty of art; the latter is superior to the former. He, moreover, asserts "that artistic beauty stands higher than nature. For the beauty of art is the beauty that is born—born again, that is—of the mind" (p. 51). The recession of beauty from the domain of art has made the break between art and nature complete; it has established, on Hegel's hands, the superiority of art over nature. It has led to the contemporary view that "the notion of the aesthetic is conceptually dependent on art" and without it there would be no concept of the aesthetic (p. 52).

In chapter seven, "The Experience of Music," Stephen Davies discusses the experience of music from the listener's point of view, the listener who is literate or skilled in listening to music, the listener "who is aware of where bits begin and end, of prominent melodies and motifs, of repeats, variations, and developments, of the waxing and waning of musical tension...and, where appropriate, of the music's expressive tone, its symbolic character, and its referential or quotational nature" (p. 109).This sort of listener does not have to share the musical knowledge of the composer, the musicologist, or the musician in order to understand the music she hears. The truth expressed in the music is unique, but not ineffable, and what makes it unique is not the truth it expresses but the way it expresses it. But, Davies asks: "can we experience music as the composer's contemporaries did "(p. 111)? Yes, to a good extent. Listening to music is historically contextualized; accordingly the contemporary music lover may not experience, let us say, a Baroque piece the way a Baroque music lover did, mainly because the whole cultural context has changed. But this does not prevent today's music lover from enjoying the formal qualities of the Baroque piece—"the waxing and waning of musical tension, the music's melodic and tonal telos and closure, and so on" (p.112).

Now why do, or should, we listen to music—for the pleasure it gives or for its own sake? Is music a means to an end, where the end is pleasure? No, because the pleasure we derive from the experience of music is an integral part of the experience itself. Davies says that not all musical works are pleasurable. However he agrees with R.A. Sharpe that it is somewhat odd to hold that we are driven to music by the expectation of pleasure. The musical experience is richer than this. We may say it is a human, or life enhancing, experience; it can change one's way of thinking or looking at the world. It can be a moment of self-realization.

Much emphasis in the philosophy of art during the past two centuries has been on the aesthetic experience of the artwork or what makes the artwork an aesthetic object. This emphasis reveals, it seems to me, either some kind of prejudice or an oversight or a neglect of the experience of the artwork *qua* art. What *Art and Experience* does is to direct our attention to the concept of art. Could it be that the starting point in our study of aesthetic appreciation and evaluation should be a clarification of the concept of art not as an aesthetic concept but as an *artistic* category?

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Ramesh Chandra Dash, *The Renegade* and *The Golden Deer*, Bhubaneswar: The Renegade Publications.

Bees' Overview of Man

In the postmodernist era classification of texts as creative and critical has been eroded as have been all the binary relationship in man's thought process. The present works, the first in prose and the second in verse are striking specimens in the postmodernist genre.

In the ***The Renegade*** the protagonist is a country boy, who rises to positions of power from the background of rural innocence - to sacrifice the very virtues he had held once dear. Lured by the glitz and glitters of civil service, he incurs friendship that ultimately proves fatal for him as depicting the rotten condition of the Indian civil service. But when an incisive reader turns the pages, he deciphers the ideology the author seeks to battle with and the comment he makes on human beings as a whole. The anger of the protagonist with which he closes the book is eloquent of the will to struggle than what despair would have led us to conclude. The author grapples with the erosion of values, especially traditional values that had at least ensured a sort of predictable and fair disposition from his fellow human beings as against the changed scenario in the aftermath of freedom, where man is pitted against his very representative and scornfully calls him politician – the potential social redeemer playing foul with him left and right and he is undone; and the instrument of the State is utilized more to cause harassment than usher in him hope of progress, so that one who sticks to traditional value systems is either made to succumb or perish: honesty being talked of in terms of relativity. Man is a renegade on earth - ineluctably, as it were. And here the will to be free is pitted against the mechanism of control and dominance already set for him. If the bondage of childhood is indispensable against man's incipient fragility so also the birth of freewill is ineluctable. The young protagonist seeks to surmount the sphere of maternal affection in the wake of adolescence – seeks to enjoy operatic shows – and pays deaf ears to the words of his mothers that seeks to provide an antidote to his ardor for art. But she fails to counter him and sits speechless: "... the mother perhaps sensing that the son had slipped into the seraglio of individuation and the son, as it were presentient that too much of externality might dislodge him from his new settlement." Puberty makes every man a renegade according to the author and turns him purposeless, even for a while. Here beauty of the fair sex is the devil. Arrayed against a group of young girls are a group of young boys – both to enter upon a song contest, where the young protagonist, the leader of the male team, undergoes a Freudian slip when the girls comes out of their cabin into the hall., " Mr. Gopalkrishna is completely captivated at the approaching caravan of beauties. .... The contest had not then started but the warrior was feeling heavily battle-scarred." An obedient and only son - still bathing in filial affection of parents – yet takes a vow before a bridal altar to marry a general if she is alive when he comes of age. And fate contrives so, when a negotiation takes him to her and he does not change his mind, even if the whole world goes against him. Love is fulfilled in marriage runs everyone's idea.

But the young man picks up friendship with a young man – both being married – become as thick as thieves as soon as they meet. Madan, as the friend goes, is licentious knows the other, yet he is unable to part from him. There is a will to change him when he smells omens from a bad friendship, for example when he counters a dissuading wife with, "Do you think, darling, my distance from him would debar him from doing his wont?" But he is gradually overpowered by the so-called friend's motivation. The words of Madan are redolent of the dialogues between Mephistopheles and Faust. By trying to paint a grotesque picture of the civil service, where negligence is rewarded and honesty and sincerity are recoiling, Madan counters the other's traditional version that duty is divine, with, "Your sense of duty will make a donkey of you: other's duties will be dumped upon you too!" And Gopalkrishna ultimately succumbs to the extent when he lands in a private brothel with Madan and is ineluctably dragged towards the denouement. The lover is a renegade again. There must be deeper psychological theory the author has in his mind in presenting a bad friend as the alter ego in opposition to the beloved-turned wife.

At last Madan betrays and sends irreparable grief and shock to the other's heart. But the author never inculcates despair in the protagonist about the fallibility or culpability or incorrigible delinquency of a human

creature. There is anger at what goes astray; there is the will to revenge no matter what that will carry one to and not resignation or helplessness or stoic withdrawal from life to lament - pine away and perish.

But at every stage of the apparent slip, when a reader places himself in the position of the protagonist, he would irresistibly find himself doing or saying the same thing as does or speaks the protagonist. *The Renegade* becomes a veritable burlesque on man, as if deviation from the set path is his fate, if he is free to choose as he does.

As Nietzsche ordains Zarathrustra to survey human affairs from above or Guenter Grass, a pick of rats, so does Ramesh Chandra Dash ordains a swarm of bees in his *The Golden Deer* – 'honey poets' he calls them – to survey man-woman relationship on this earth. In fact a Superman is a figment of the imagination, and if there is any, His view of man is most likely to be one-sided: so also rats – of whatever denomination – they have no right to survey humans, without thinking for a while how to pilfer what humans are keenly preservative about. But this is certainly different in case of bees that pass on what is conducive to life and vitality of mankind – not only in the ingredient of life but also through their organization – a hive of bees being the first example of a republic. The 'honey poets' instinctually perceives the scenario behind the Love – Marriage – Divorce - of a young couple and build up an intellectual edifice on man-woman relationship - to conclude in fine that woman is not the human female and man is condemned to cross with woman, that is a different species altogether – to end with an outrageous conclusion that man is a cross breed.

In one of our great myths the Lord and His Consort are born in human form to kill the demon king and reorder religion on earth. By a stroke of bad luck they are banished from their kingdom and made to lead the life of saints, though they lived together. The demon king sets a golden deer in their trail, and unable to see through the illusion, the Lord chases the golden deer and the demon abducts His Consort by taking advantage of His absence. So Dash depicts the golden deer as the objectified illusion of the repressed sexual impulses of a man and woman who stay together but "do not click". Taking a thread from this part of the epic, Dash builds up a profound psychological, anthropological and social edifice in his intertext *The Golden Deer.*

The 'honey poets' proceed with a profound scorn for extreme rationalism into which mankind has been ineluctably sucked, by a remark, "Every child of logic is but a bastard." There is the same Rousseau-type eulogy of the primitive equality and fraternity between humans *inter se*, when the human female was truly eternal feminine. As in every other species estrus was periodical in woman and there was no barrier to how many males joined a female in the process of reproduction. But with the disappearance of estrus from the human female, a new species called woman came into being, continuous sexual receptivity becoming the *sine qua non* of femininity. This was bound to ordain far-reaching changes in human life. As in other notable species, there is no difference between the outward shapes of a male and female, except in the organ for functional differentiation, so was woman before the disappearance of estrus, but with disappearance of estrus woman underwent profound changes in her organism – she became an idol of beauty and an object of enjoyment. The growth of artificial organizations became indispensable to safeguard her from unpredictable and erratic infiltration of fellowmen. The concept of brotherhood became uterine and reproduction became a process of pleasure in man. All those artificial growth proved spurious for man and put fetters on mankind. To the 'honey poets' a man is not that indispensable to woman as a woman is for man, because it is man who tried to make himself indispensable to her – outwardly to safeguard her fragility, but inwardly he felt pitted against his own anticipations about her. The citadel of all such artificialities called society is a manacle that restricts man more than insinuates anything good in him. To the 'honey poets' most problems of men and woman lies in the willful restraint they undergo being together with a woman they cannot avail. This distorts reason and martyrs man under the temptations of passion. Their natural impulses are atrophied, and with increasing liberation of woman in the days to come, man is simply to be increasingly robotized. The 'honey poets' perceive beauty of woman as the devil that erodes the so-called rational stuff in man and accounts for many of his slips and falls. "Woman is the blight of man" they pronounce and prove in a very artistic way,

> "Suffer a torture really he greater,
> Who keenly in him posting a stunner

Fails to express or smoother
And feeling deterred for either
Flounder in the fallout of infatuation."

It is because man is a cross breed there is nothing certain or predictable about him, combines as he in his veins traits imperceptible. The genes, the chromosomes and the nucleus together constitute – to use a famous phrase of Churchill's, "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma." That is why the ancients never expected anything prodigious or great from a human creature unless he was a cross between a god and a woman.

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