

cribed to geniuses... In contrast to 'true' fictional geniuses, who have trouble communicating or interacting with others due to their separated status, Tár is not only expert at articulating her own views... but also at manipulating others and successfully playing orchestra politics" (p. 153).

Eshelman argues that Tár's agency persists even as her social validity erodes, thus highlighting performatism's tendency to prefer subjects of structural significance to those which are fractured.

Overall, the book is a systematic and ambitious effort to understand the aesthetic and ideological shifts characterizing the post-postmodern cultural landscape. The appeal to performatism as an epochal discontinuity forcefully resists the habitual hegemony of postmodernist skepticism, proposing a coherent model through which we understand the ways belief, transcendence, and moral commitment become aestheticized. His analysis of temporality, subjectivity, and institutional transcendence is a powerful counterthrust to postmodernism's skepticism, delineating the ways in which modern narratives work through formal constraints to create a sense of imposed meaning.

However, the book's insistence on performatism as an all-encompassing paradigm could unintentionally diminish the continued relevance of other theoretical paradigms. While Eshelman provides a strong argument against postmodernism, his conceptual strategy fails to more substantively engage hybrid strategies such as metamodernism, which appropriates shards of irony along with attempting sincerity and emotional depth. The book's focus on author control and aesthetic tension also raises the question of how performatism crosses over with the more participatory logic of web media, in which narrative authority is distributed.

As an important contribution to post-postmodern theory, the book is extremely valuable; its statements, however, require empirical and theoretical investigation. Future research must explore the crossover points of performatism with emerging media modalities, including interactive narrative, game studies, and algorithmic cultural production. Comparative analysis with non-Western literary traditions can be applied to extrapolate the value of performatist theory beyond its largely Euro-American horizon. By closing such gaps, researchers can further articulate the new dynamics of the relationship between aesthetic form, faith, and transcendence in contemporary culture.

All of this notwithstanding, *Transcending Postmodernism* is a worthy addition to recent literary and cultural theory. Eshelman's characterization of performatism as an aesthetic, ethical, and historical paradigm is a compelling substitute for the postmodernist nihilism, and it offers a coherent system for understanding new narrative and philosophical tendencies in the 21st century.

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KANT AND LITERARY STUDIES. By Claudia Brodsky (Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025. 346 pp.

Kant's critical project is a milestone in philosophical thought and movement, one that has shaped philosophy, thought and intellectual movement for generations of academic scholars. While interdisciplinary currents have been common in the Kantian discipline, especially those resulting from literary endeavours, seldom do we come across a body of collective work such as Brodsky's *Kant and Literary Studies* which in place of merely using philosophy as a source for justifying literary insights and/or vice versa, carves instead into the cold and rigid footing of critique to recover frozen literary elements without which the secure foundation of Kantian philosophy would not have been as stable as we know it today.¹ Following the precision of Brodsky's editorial vision, the text has been divided into three parts.

The first of these engages with Kant's judgement of the aesthetic (Chandra), the sublime (Martyn) and the tragedy (Pippin). Chandra underscores the common appeal made by Wordsworth and Kant to the authenticity of our [aesthetic] judgement stripped of all material and immaterial, conscious and subconscious conditioning of the mind; an appeal to its universality born out of the conflict between the particulars. Martyn stresses on Kantian Enlightenment's related goal of free and rational thinking so as to carry the discourse forward from a novel perspective of the politico-religious sublime enmeshed with the aesthetic. By committing to a thorough exposition of the role played by power in the sublime, he makes a commendable attempt at efficiently highlighting and avoiding the subtle dogmatism of both purposive religiousness and purposeless secularity to preserve the dynamism of the Kantian spirit. Yet, just like anything modern, the revered mode of thinking that Kant introduced us to has a tragic aspect. Pippin artistically does the job of sketching out the unavoidable paradoxes that Kant has admitted into the prospects of his theoretical and practical ventures in philosophy. The ties between human reasoning and human actions are not always so strong, and on the not so rare occasions that they sever, a tragic event is set in motion.

While philosophy has historically had an over-reliance on civilization's rational capacities, the humility and merit of literature lies in not just recognizing but merging the limits of rationality with the boundlessness of creativity. The second part of the book gives us more than a glimpse of the kind of life one expects when the seeds of philosophical ideas burst forth in fertile literary grounds. Rüdiger Campe begins by tracing how Kleist's Kantian crisis helped stir his capacities as an author, generating a manner of narration in him that could preserve the throbbing pulse of thought in an otherwise concrete record of happenstance, just as Kant preserved the same dance of thought from either stepping into the swamps of certitude or the deep pits of chance and change. Richard Eldridge more sharply outlines this mode of existing in the modern world, this swinging between sheer confidence and utter doubt, exactly the way in which it unfolded philosophically in Kant and poetically in Wordsworth. What Gabriela Basterra does next is throw light on what makes such an existence plausible for us. She conceives our subjectivity as a site where determinism and freedom meet to determinedly prompt a free [cognitive/moral/aesthetic] action in us motivated by the 'Other'. An analysis of Kant's strong views on the origin of Christianity as interpreted separately from Judaist influences gives Karen Feldman a distinctive understanding of the form of narrative that finds flavour and favour in Kant. This part of the book under discussion opens a window revealing the persona of Kant beyond a simply towering figure in philosophy to show a man who remained – underneath the vast and weighty produce of the ablest mind – simply a man, though drenched in the complications of being one.

The third part of the book offers to cement the tough yet wobbly bridge built in the first two sections across the parallel shores of the creative, literary self and the critical, transcendental self. It commences with Mehigan, who tries to locate Schiller's 'beautiful souls' in Kleist's complex characters and see why the writer's recovery from his infamous Kantian crisis could not escape the Kantian tragedy that we acknowledged earlier in Pippin. Next, Goetschel draws an itinerary of the critical project for us in all its ruminative details. He captures what impact the works that came before it had on Kant's critique, including those that Kant had authored himself. He also measures the influence that critique itself has had on the growing convictions of established and emerging thinkers who inherited the essence of the critical way. Kronfeld takes off from where Goetschel leaves us – the junction where creativity mixes or rather collides with critique. Aligning themes from Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* with the critique's attempts at overcoming the Humean predicament of abstracting unity from a world of discrete sense impressions allows Kronfeld to account for the creativity of reflective spontaneity illustrated by Woolf in terms of the continuity of the conscious self as defined by Kant. John Namjun Kim extends the search for the fluctuating, elusive 'I' distinct from the selfhood we encounter in Kronfeld. By mapping the leftovers that accumulate in every utterance of an *I*, Kim fits Yoko Tawada's *Das Bad* (The Bath) onto Kant's transcendental philosophy as a

dovetail. Brodsky's own concluding entry negotiates with the *tertium quid* in reason's binary exchange between reality and its appearances to situate in language the freedom which cradles our moral and aesthetic possibilities. Indulging in the art of poetry for her purposes allows Brodsky to close, if not complete, the process of enquiry that started with Chandra.

Despite all its merits, the book still leaves plenty room for deliberations and improvements. While the tension between aesthetic subjectivity and artistic objectivity has been made apparent throughout the text, there remains the unfulfilled need for a direct and deep investigation into the heart of the conflict. Pairing Hume's aesthetic vision alongside Kant's could help make any literary study philosophically wide and conceptually whole. The stark exclusion of Hume has limited the scope of this book.

Notes

¹ My use of the word 'critique' implies all the three Kantian critiques: Critique of Pure Reason, Critique of Practical Reason and Critique of the Power of Judgement.

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GANDHI, TRUTH, AND NONVIOLENCE: THE POLITICS OF ENGAGEMENT IN POST-TRUTH TIMES. By Vinay Lal (Ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025. 368 pp.

No doubt some readers will ask, do we need another book on Mahatma Gandhi? Surely every educated citizen of the world remembers this hero who helped liberate India from British rule. Alas, as Vinay Lal writes in the present volume, statues, memorials and commemorations often smooth out the past, making it easily digestible for contemporary interests and tastes; statues of Gandhi "may be designed in fact to make one forget as much as remember." (2). This volume reminds us that Gandhi was, in Lal's words, a "provocation, a disruptor of the consensus, someone who ... is there to unsettle us." (3). But, as Sumathi Ramaswamy writes in her contribution "The Unbearable Lightness of Being Mahatma", unremembering has taken hold in some quarters of India, because "Mahatma's disobedient words and deeds" are too uncomfortable and inconvenient for some of the rich and powerful (173)

This is a collection of 13 essays plus an excellent introduction from Vinay Lal who is also the book's editor. The authors are mainly historians, but also include academics from the fields of law, political science and religious studies. Most are professors in the USA, with one based in England, one in Israel and, alas, only one who is based in India. Women make up a third of the contributors. As the subtitle implies, these essays speak to our time, now that democracy is threatened in India as well as in USA, Europe and elsewhere. The volume carries a dedication to US civil rights activist James M. Lawson Jr, "a member of the beloved community" and it includes a conversation between Lawson and Lal.

In Lal's introduction "The Measure of a Man: The Many Enigmas and Strange Journeys of Mohandas Gandhi" he warns that Gandhi was not only killed by three bullets in 1948, but that in today's India Gandhi has become "the target of many assassinations", the aim of which is to exorcise the Mahatma "from the nation's consciousness." (p. 1). Lal reminds us of the scurrilous attacks on Gandhi on social media and the growing tendency among some of Hindu nationalists to heroize Gandhi's 1948 assassin. Borrowing a concept from American philosopher Kames Carse, Lal suggests that Gandhi was a practitioner of "infinite games." Finite games have winners and losers. We are all contestants of finite games, be it on the sports field, building a career, or elsewhere in society. Most politics is a finite game. Trump sees politics exclusively through the lens of winner and loser. Gandhi, on the contrary,