

BOOK REVIEWS

Simon Goldhill and Edith Hall (Eds.), *Sophocles and the Greek Tragic Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 336.

The present volume is dedicated to Professor Pat Easterling as a token of honour for her life-long studies in Greek literature as also for her guidance to a generation of scholars over decades active at Cambridge in exploring new horizons in the Greek literary traditions. Pat's efforts in publishing the *Cambridge History of Classical Literature* and the *Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* remain a source of encouragement and enlightenment for the generations of students, scholars and even common readers of the Greek literary history and criticism.

The thirteen essays collected in the present volume are distributed under four sections: an introduction followed by a section that looks at the relationship between the audience and the actors on stage, each of the three essays presupposing as also delineating Sophocles' understanding of the tragic genre as a democratic behaviour, i.e., Sophocles' idea that tragedy involves at once four factors such as acting, audience, deliberations and judgements all portraying the political character of the genre called "tragedy". The next section focuses upon a single, but the key Sophoclean figure, Oedipus. The fourth section is devoted to theoretical discourses that emerge from the tragic texts themselves constructing the tragic tradition through the three great tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides who concentrated on the state of human life as conditioned by the interplay of divine authority and human inabilities, stretching this tradition also over a long time-scale — to Plutarch and Shakespeare.

In the introductory essay the editors offer an historical account of the Sophoclean scholarship starting with Richard Jebb's commentary on *Antigone*. During this phase of the early twentieth century literary appreciation in general and appreciation of the Greek tragedy in particular were heavily drawn upon the Hegelian model of the German critics who were in search for 'ideal beauty' and 'truth to human nature' the qualities suitable for the Victorian model of social ethics and human character. A number of Greek scholars such as Gilbert Murray, Von Wilamowitz, Karl Reinhardt, H.D.F. Kitto, Pietro Pucci, C.M. Bowra and R.I.P. Winnington-Ingram are discussed with a view to highlighting the growth and construction of a tradition of tragic criticism (adopted by A.C. Bradley in his studies of Shakespearean tragedy). Appearance of New Criticism in the Anglo-American literary culture rejected German idealism, Victorian sentimentalism (of Ruskin and Pater) and historicism of Wilamowitz, and instead, the critical terms that governed the studies of (Greek) dramatic literature were 'form', 'pattern', 'coherence', 'integration', and 'meaning'. The main function of criticism is the interpretation of individual works of art. The overall intention of the editors in compiling this volume is, however, to focus "the degree to which contemporary criticism at the beginning of the twenty-first century relates to the criticism at the beginning of the twentieth century" and to examine if this contemporary criticism can/ should/ will escape the agendas established during the last two centuries.

The editors trace four areas where contemporary Sophoclean criticism develops: political sphere, performance of the plays, tragic (Sophoclean) language and the tradition that picks up on elements in each of the previous three areas. The first one is initially hinted at by the French critic Jean-Pierre Vernant who argues that Greek tragedy emerged at a particular historical point, at a point where there was a clash between a Homeric world of mythic norms and a civic world of legal norms – a key way of viewing the tensions and ambiguities within fifth century democratic ideology – the relationship between divinity and humanity. Human beings act within a democratic norm where they are responsible for their own action, not guided by divine beings. Performance of the tragedies has been an important determinant of the tragic genre that distinguishes it from the visual representation of the tragic actions on pots. The difference between the stage performance and painting of the same action points out tragedy as a distinct genre. Concerning the language of Sophoclean tragedy Vernant's reading of sophisticated linguistic ambivalence and ambiguities has been strongly debated: "How do we bring together the powerful emotions tragedy releases, the lasting images it creates, the political impact it has revealed, with the more evanescent ironies and doubts of its shimmering poetry?" (p. 19) Finally, the tradition of Sophoclean criticism has been a tradition of repeated recreation through performances, critical readings and imaginative networkings.

To the second section of the book (Part One) three scholars contribute: Simon Goldhill, Ismene Lada-Richards and Edith Hall. Goldhill suggests "that Sophoclean theatre is an excellent place to think about the audience of democracy...how Sophocles dramatizes the process of being (in) an audience: how does Sophocles put the audience on stage." The audience does not refer to the spectators in the auditorium only, the dialogues uttered by the characters on the stage are also addressed to other actors on the stage: "every speech is addressed to someone who could be said to be its audience; even monologues are spoken before a chorus..." (p. 29) Lada-Richards analyzes Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and explores "performance" not as an outer frame only, but the very inherent structure that makes the play itself: action of the play is structured by acting. Aristotle says, tragedy imitates serious human action, and the present writer says that this action is not or cannot be presented independently of the performance: it is the performance that makes the play, not the verbal text without performance. Edith Hall studies *Trachiniae*, a tragedy about sex and destiny, as also displaying the importance of deliberation that reveals its intimate relationship with the Athenian democracy: The citizen-audience of the play was also the community's executive body. The audience does not simply enjoy the performance, it also participates in or is engaged with the democratic process of decision-making, attending a sort of training in the democratic policies. Hall exemplifies this element through Deianeira's deliberations with the chorus in sending the robe smeared with Nessus' blood to Heracles. The story is not simply narrated. There are enough material in the play to prove how Sophocles was anxious to reveal to his democratic audience the importance of deliberations in avoiding hasty decisions that cause irreparable damage to both personal life of the citizens and

the policies of a democratic government. Hall has successfully countered the arguments of August Schlegel that the play falls short of intellectual profundity of Sophocles and hence it should not be counted among his plays. She asserts that the Sophoclean tragic tradition is constructed within the genre itself and also within the intellectual and artistic environment of the Greek world as a whole.

Peter Burian, Chris Carey, Michael Silk and Fiona Macintosh contribute to the third section (Part II) of the book. Burian and Carey concentrate on two plays of Sophocles *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. While contemplating on the ending(s) of *OT*: “The tension between ending and continuity in *OT* belongs to a complete interplay of temporal fragments.” (p. 116) Past continues to the future through the present, and tragedy mediates between past and present in many ways. Its language mediates between the high styled Homeric past and the contemporary vocabulary of the spectators, between the heroic age and the democratic Athens. Burian reads that the ending of *OT* is inconclusive because, although Oedipus declares that he would go for Cithaeron finally where his parents planned to kill him, there is a sense of ambiguity in his announcement, taking his speech, “But let my fate go wherever it is going” into consideration. In fact all great works of literature end in ambiguity. Burian says, “Ending need not bring closure: it is not necessarily the same thing as resolution. An open ending, one that leaves significant strands of continuity in a state of uncertainty, produces tension between the narrative trajectory and the divergent possibilities opening out beyond it.” (p. 116) All temporal arts (should) end in an endless continuity of time itself. Carey discusses the third stasimon of *OC* and the other two contributors attempt at a comparative assessment – Silk highlights semantic diversion in Sophocles, Yeats and Virgil whereas Macintosh studies six reworkings of *OT* in their performance during 1919-1936.

There are five chapters in the fourth section (Part III) titled “Constructing Tragic Traditions”, written by Kortas Valakas, Angus Bowie, Richard Buxton, Olive Taplin and Christopher Pelling. Valakas offers theoretical views of the fifth century Athenian tragedy, Bowie presents pictures of Athens and Delphi in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, Buxton depicts feminized males in Euripides’ *Bacchae* and Taplin deals with the character of Hector in a fourth-century tragedy of the same title by Astydamas (the younger). Pelling, on the other hand, rather quite relevantly, adds an interesting chapter on the continuity of the Greek tragic tradition as he explores in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. He argues that the structural elements such as plot, character and unity as theorized by Aristotle are all manifest in this Roman play of Shakespeare making the play, therefore, more Greek than Roman.

While pointing to a number of cognate terms of mimesis as the key term in explaining the nature of tragedy as the *mimesis* of serious human action (Aristotle) Valakas states: “although we simply cannot know how and where a technical usage of terms about art and theatre was introduced, in the case of the vocabulary of *mimesis* and *eiko(n)*, as in other cases of Presocratic theoretical language and themes, Plato and Aristotle seem to have reflected and responded to the terminology used by the fifth-century intellectuals rather than to have invented it.” (p. 188) This statement sounds nothing new since the

present reviewer elaborated all these points long ago in 1977 (*The Concept of Imitation in Greek and Indian Aesthetics*). Tragedy (theatre) as the visualization of epic narrative has long since been explained by several critics. Stephen Halliwell has also recently focused much on this point (*The Aesthetics of Mimesis*). Besides, Richard Hunter in his *Critical Moments in Classical Literature* (2009) has analyzed Aristophanes’ *Frogs* as the origin of Greek critical evaluation.

What the contributors to the present volume have univocally observed is the correlation of epic mythology with the contemporary historiography of the fifth-century Athenian democracy. By and large this is what Pat Easterling has tried to project all through her critical career that her disciples have followed in the present volume. The Sophoclean tragic tradition institutionalized the tragic genre, both in its verbal and theatrical forms, by transforming the *mythic* ‘reality’ into the contemporary *historical* ‘truth’ that contributed to the growth of intellectual awareness in the members of the Athenian democracy. This historical approach might stand as a strong counter to the Platonic dismissal of the epic falsehood, although not stronger than the Aristotelian philosophical counter to Plato. On the whole, however, the insight and efforts of the contributors in their interpretation, re-interpretation and reviews of the Greek tragic tradition continuing from Sophocles till date promote our understanding and rethinking of this outstanding aesthetic contribution of human culture.

Arvydas Sliogeris, *The Thing and Art: Two Essays on the Ontotopy of the Work of Art* (Translated from Lithuanian by Robertas Beinartas), Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009, pp. 153.

This eminent Lithuanian philosopher proposes a new approach to determine the mode of existence of an artwork that opposes the mass of literature developed by a group of the twentieth-century Euro-American scholars who name this mode of existence as “ontology”, i.e., search for the ontic entity or the very nature of an artwork. Considered materially, there is no difference between an artwork made by a human being (of physical/material object) and an object of nature, both being physical/natural/material in character. But, then, what exactly is the criterion (or criteria) to distinguish them from one another? This has remained a puzzling issue, in spite of rigorous efforts by the philosophers since Plato onward for settling it. Both Plato and Aristotle use the word *mimesis* (imitation) for both defining and describing an artwork while distinguishing it from a “mere” object of nature (*physis*). This difference is made on the basis of transformation or “transfiguration” (as Arthur Danto holds it) of a physical object. Artwork is a man-made transfiguration of a “mere” natural object. The epithet “man-made” is called by the author of the present book under review – “hominized” as distinguished from “non-hominized” or natural/ mere real things.

That all man-made or hominized things are artworks has been already decided by the classical masters Plato and Aristotle who counted only the imitative-man-made things under what we call “fine arts” (eighteenth century use, see Paul Kristeller’s

foundational essay “The Modern System of the Arts”, 1951) or recently “artworks” (Arthur Danto). The Greek category *mimetikai technai*, as Aristotle has devised, refers to the man-made transfigurations of the physical objects that represent or/ refer to the physical objects that may not actually exist in nature, but might or might have existed somewhere sometime, i.e., the “probable” existence, not the “possible” as Aristotle’s judgment dictated. Therefore Danto’s “transfiguration” must be understood not as a mere transfiguration, but a representational one. But, again, this representation is not also an object of verified or verifiably empirical existence. The ghost of Aristotelian “probability” haunts the modern theorists in their formulating the notions on Intentional attributes and fiction to include the avant-garde arts of the twentieth century modernism that superseded the nineteenth century realism.

In an effort for accommodating the avant-garde arts that expand the horizons of “fine arts” Nelson Goodman proposed a dualistic ontology of art – autographic (painting and sculpture) and allographic (literature and music) whereas Gregory Currie, rejecting this dualistic ontology, proposes a common ontology: all artworks are “acts” or performances (of the artist), a proposal that virtually goes back to the Greek theory of *poiesis* or “making”. The artist is a “maker” and his art is a “making” in general, and again, this “making” is not just any making or act, it is an “imitative” making or action. Under such circumstances the contemporary debate over the mode of existence of a physical phenomenon whether an object or an act that should be distinguished as art, ends in futility – only beating around the bush.

Arvydas Sliogeris now replaces the term “ontology” altogether, and, instead introduces a new term “ontotopy”, that should, he thinks, solve the problem of the mode of existence of artworks. He suggests that we should not search for any “ontology” of artworks, but for their “ontotopy” that distinguishes between the hominized and non-hominized things. The term ontotopy (Gk *ontos* + *topos*), as it is coined by the author, means real status of a thing that does not change in its transfiguration – a piece of paper smeared with paints remains unchanged even when it is *interpreted* (or even *enjoyed*) as a picture of a man or an animal. This thing, the painted piece of paper is neither responsible nor bothers for its being enjoyed or interpreted: “If the work of art itself could speak, it would probably tell me this: at least I did not tell this, at least I think I am not liable for arousing, exciting, and stimulating anything. I am, and this much is enough for me; may be someone needs me, may be indeed I arouse catharsis, but all this does not depend on me and I do not give a damn; I am a thing, I simply *am*. First we notice that the work of art is a thing that has being-in-itself. And only afterwards we start with our stories about catharsis, emotions and the like.” (pp. 23)

The New Critics rejected the relevance of artist-art relationship in art criticism. But the present author, going a step further, proposes to reject the audience-art relationship as well in his venture to study artwork *in itself*. He calls this approach a *philosophical* one or otherwise an *ontotopical* one as opposed to the *aesthetical* one that investigates *ontology* of art. Although *aesthetical* approach is also a *philosophical* inquiry, the author argues that his approach is somehow *philosophical per se*. Apparently he

distinguishes between a real or phenomenal (or empirical) thing and a metaphysical thing and seeks to investigate this metaphysical thing in artwork: Real things exist, ideal or metaphysical things (i.e., words) subsist, but in both cases man is tied to sensibly predicated reality. Therefore even *thinking away* the horizon of real things, man remains tied to them. The contact of man and thing is a primordial ontotopical given, the ontotopical constant of man as a finite being. “Everything that happens to man in this world, everything that he himself executes, that he does or does not, thinks or does not think, directly or indirectly, is a dialogue with things. And namely things are the only real *Transcendence*... There is no event in general, event-by-itself and in-itself. Every event is an event among things and with things, and everything that happens, happens in the thickness of things.” (p. 9)

Precisely the author rejects *aesthetical* approach to art as it is an anthropocentric approach. In his view man himself is also a thing, then why should art be considered in terms of its relation to man, i.e., his reactions and responses to it either emotional or intellectual? He further writes: “The theoretical gaze at the thing brings back to the primordial contact of man and the thing, and in this kind of contact the thing, as a phenomenon of being and a monolith of beyond-human being, is senseless. Consequently, being is senseless not accidentally, but essentially, ontotopically. The thing, as a phenomenon of being, i.e., as an object of theoretical contemplation, is substantial, it is itself substance or is made up of substances. And what is substance? It is primordial, absolutely monolithic, opaque, materially predicated reality out of which all diversity of things of the sensible world originates. It explains everything, all sensible entityhood, but cannot be explained itself, it can be only stated... Human mind can only state its being.” (p. 19)

There is nothing controversial so far, nothing to disagree with the author that everything in the world, including human beings are substantial existing spatially. In other words, the ontic-entity of the whole world is a spatial existence or topical – hence everything is onto-topical. Then how to distinguish between a thing that is not considered art, and the other thing considered an artwork? The author states that so far, in considering the ontology of art, critics have viewed it in terms of the audience’s attitude without focusing on the very being of the work of art *as a thing* — thus the prevalent search for the reality/ being of the work of art is ontological whereas there should be a search for the being of art without any reference to the subjective attitude, the search being an ontotopical one, or the search for the ontotopy, the spatial form of art. This search is possible theoretically (if not possible practically?). The author finds the classical theory of art as mimesis of nature on the fact that for the Greeks there was no difference between the objective being of the sensible things and their sensible form as presented to the subjective sense – “they were directly interchangeable with the sensible equivalent, they not only were akin to the work of art, but also could be easily transferred to the space of the work of art *senser stricto* and acquire the status of a work of art.” (p. 104) Thus the work of art is nature transferred to a different space, though ontotopically nature and art are not only akin to each other but also the same in

substance. Similarly, referring to Rieke's poetry, the author observes that "first of all Rieke saw things, their independent individualized being-in-itself and for itself. The thing is the main hero of Rieke's poetry and philosophy. Not man, but the thing, and man insofar as he is a thing. This does not mean that Rieke diminished man but by comparing people to things, the artist exalts man, for he is a friend, mentor, and poet of things. (p. 47)

It seems clear to note that Sliogeris argues against the Renaissance anthropocentric humanism, which, he thinks, dominates the ontological theories in contemporary aesthetics, and seeks a shelter in Rieke and Cezan for opposing these theories that he thinks are anthropocentric. But, strangely, he misses the vital point that these modernistic artists in their symbolist world view do preach the theory, as against their realist predecessors, that man is *homo symbolicus* – he creates a world of symbols out of the phenomenal world he senses around him.

Symbolism, the very core of modernism is certainly not Renaissance anthropocentrism. But a creative man never senses a thing as it is there in nature. Thus the thing-in-itself, or say a tree-in-itself, is not the same for all the creative men. Modernism is certainly founded on subjectivity, if not on anthropocentrism. It seems Sliogeris's major premises are misguided. By substituting "ontotopy" for "ontology" he hardly achieves any success for solving the problems concerned in contemporary aesthetics.

Sara Upstone, *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel*, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009, pp. 216.

"This book", the author clarifies, "offers a reading of the postcolonial novel that is centred upon an alternative concept of spatial politics: one that is rooted not solely in a politics of the nation, but instead reflects the diverse spaces that construct the postcolonial experience." (p. 1) Harnan experience/ knowledge is determined by two categories, as Immanuel Kant has demonstrated long since, time and space. For Kant and later, for Gotthold Lessing the influential art theorist and critic of Germany, space is a stable concept, determined by time, putting phenomena in a temporal and linear sequence. But the tangibility of space has been questioned since the publication of Michel Foucault's English translation of "Of Other Spaces" in 1986 along with a number of other events in the global environment of critical thought such as the emergence of neo-Marxism leading to a new philosophy of power politics stimulated by Edward Said's *Orientalism* followed by the "sub-altern" movement led by the intellectuals of the colonized cultures. Jacques Derrida's deconstructionism challenged the very concept of tangibility – nowhere nothing is tangible, not only space, whole of the cosmic phenomena undergoes constant dissemination, shifting endlessly and indeterminately. Space as a tangible presence was considered an endless series of representations. The rise of multiculturalism became more a political necessity than a genuine cultural phenomenon – a need for tolerating the unavoidable imposition of the "other" (cultures) rather than a happy welcome and cordial brotherhood. The issue of originality of any

culture in a space-bound geography such as English, Indian and African has been questioned. Colonization has brought a hybrid notion of culture in the postcolonial period. Sara Upstone rejects Homi Bhabha's concept of a "third space", because, following Derrida, if deconstruction is an endless process of disintegration and re-integration, how could space be counted or identified in any homogenous model? If a text or what is written is erased by a new text, then Upstone argues, all texts are "overwritten". The colonizers' claim that they have put an order on the colonized space is simply a myth, as is also the colonizers' "order" a myth. Foucault suggested a specific kind of space: one that encapsulates the postcolonial space of interrogation and multiple interpretations – what he calls "heterotopia", blending the real and unreal (Derrida's absence and presence). But the present author coins a new term "post-space" "where a chaotic sense of the spatial on all scales becomes a resource towards the revisioning of the postcolonial position in society and consequent issues of identity, the possibilities inherent in postcolonial space as a direct result of their hybrid histories."

The author, in five chapters, presents case studies of postcolonial novelists such as Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison and Wilson Harris for exploring their complex and varied relationships to colonialism and their experience of postcolonialism in different locations of this culture, in the imperial cities of the colonizers as also in the metropolitan cities of the colonized culture. Rushdie and Morrison embody the postcolonial reactions of Asian and African-American geographies whereas Harris represents the Caribbean postcolonialists. American writers like John Cullen Gruesser and Timothy Powell also provide the postcolonial situations – for Powell 1776 being a postcolonial moment.

Upstone studies of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as the rejection of an absolute colonial-influenced nationalism without rejecting India as a state. He does not imagine India as a nation to mean a cohesive and homogenous geographical space. Instead of any spatial homogeneity Rushdie pleads for a cultural unity dispelling all sorts of religious (Hindu/ Muslim) disparity that was created by the British colonizers in the garb of so-called nationalism. Rushdie avers any idea of purity in terms of divisionism or difference. Thus he scorns the spatial politics of the colonizers who identified space as the location of culture rather than create a space for homogenous social existence, a location where the inhabitants live with cultural ambiguities building up psychological and metaphysical defenses against cultural invasions. Division of India in terms of religion has failed precariously when one experiences difference between the Indian Muslims and Pakistani Muslims. The true foundation of an Indian nation would have been the tolerance of multiplicity, acceptance of culture as a phenomenon in the continuous process of dissemination where the notion of any "origin" or "originality" would have been only a false myth. But Rushdie's idealist view of "tolerance" appears itself a false myth when one goes back to the medieval India, to the severe Islamic intolerance of the Hindu and Buddhist "Kafers", the Islamic invaders aiming at Islamizing the whole world, by force. All our speculations and critiques about the misdeeds of the European colonizers appear meaningless, as only repetitions of the events of invasions of power – right from the Romans through the Turks and the Mongols. It has always

been the power, maybe physical or otherwise that has determined the fate of human beings all over the globe, the question of freedom or independence being always a false myth, may it be religious, economic or administrative. The present crises of the postcolonial countries are not only due to their colonization, but mostly to their inherent character, to their severe lapses in moral conduct. It does not matter whether India is a “state” or a “nation”, whether Indian “nationalism” is a pre-colonial or post-colonial phenomenon. The very geographical space called India by the Europeans was indeterminate and flexible from time to time – from Brahmavarta to Aryavarta till the first attempt of the Maurya Chandragupta at constructing an integrated empire consolidating the city states. Thereafter Bharatavarsa is pictured as a space in between the Himalayas and Vindhya. Puranas composed during the Guptas and their successors till the advent of Islam early in the 12th century named this area as Jambu Dwipa. Islamic rulers expanded this area which was expanded further by the European rulers. The precolonial Bharatavarsha is not indeed the colonial “India”. Then what harm if this space is again subdivided as Hindustan and Pakistan? The Vedic religion was already hammered by the Buddha, and the post-Buddhist Brahmanic religion, struggling for its survival throughout the Islamic rule, could envisage its inevitable fall, as they were aware of the necessary rise and fall of all religious systems. The mythical aeon called Kaliyuga may historically be identified with the Islamic period culminating in the present day globalization that has destroyed the rigors of Brahmanism altogether.

The midnight-division of India based on religious difference is only natural, the British being instrumental. The present day Hindu-Muslim dichotomy is only a small bubble in the ocean of cultural hybridity. No space, no culture is original or permanently determined. It is only natural to say that future is uncertain. This division of space may further be divided, and the divisions might resist to be identified as either Indians or Pakistanis. The debates over the spatiality of culture, therefore, appear only topical and contextual, their texts being ever *overwritten*. Rushdie’s treatment of Pakistan as an unnamed locale or the location of a fable is itself a fictional treatment of historical truth, quite interesting and enjoyable. Rushdie is a fiction-maker, neither a metaphysician nor a historian. Viewing from a metaphysical angle, all nations are imagined communities. The very concept of a nation being only a fiction, and their cultures being fictional. Upstone writes, “Rushdie’s sense of *hopelessness* that the nation cannot be reformed, *cannot be in any sense other than the fictions* drawn away from a totalitarian path: that in terms of critiquing Pakistan the only entrance remaining in the backdoor of magic; that realism is impossible.” (p. 49)

The author highlights the intertextuality of William Harris’s *The Guyana Quartet* where the colonial journey encompasses both fiction and travel writing, the same intertextuality being continued in his *Heartland*. Colonial journeys typify the idea that every boundary line is a myth in the same way that the colonial adventurer declares empty space to aid and legitimize colonial expansion. “It is a common scenario that all the colonial adventures have been a quest for a space unknown hitherto, mysterious and therefore coveted for ownership: The journey in this sense is a microcosm of the

nation as it mimics the colony, an unstable construct fixed as natural and eternal even as it reveals the trace of its instability. The same is illustrated in *The Far Journey of Oudin* where “Oudin materializes in Ram’s world in order to found a conception of empire”, an anchor of imperial expansion. Starting from Shakespeare’s “brave new world” the imperial journey of the British has repeated the adventures of the Roman emperors for colonizing the whole world discovering the ever-newness of the entire globe. A reading of these texts stimulates the reader’s imagination for an endless journey to the wonderland, that is the world as such, forgetting the boundaries of the political consciousness altogether. One can enjoy a great sense of wonder in reading this travel stories ignoring its underlying political irony. One feels, so to say, there is no *spatial politics*, only man’s quest for newness, may the leader be an Alice, or a Donne or Oudin. Why politicize literary enjoyment? The Marxist intervention with an admixture of Foucauldian “Power” or Saidian anguish destroys the reader’s aesthetic experience in the puzzle of Derridean dissemination or deconstruction. One feels, no such political motivation is necessary for understanding and enjoying a literary text or intertext. One might read *Midnight’s Children* as a historical fiction or an intertext of fiction and history. Truth is not certainly determined by any political intention or intervention.

The author treats Toni Morrison as a counter instance to Harris’s allegory of travel that suggests the colonial occupancy and mapping the space: “a pattern of abuse and trauma that results not simply in travelers whose identities reflect the colonial legacy of mapped and totalizing journeys, but also in journeys that still mean confronting colonialism directly.” (p. 62) This the author illustrates in her study of *Beloved*. With Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* the journey metaphor “shifts to be related to the migrant experience, cast in a contemporary setting that initially seems very different from the kinds of travel and effects its implications. What may be seen as subtle motifs in Morrison and Harris – images of geometry and restriction – are for Rushdie the guiding images through which he translates the significance of the character’s movements. (p. 64) By cross-examining these three novelists Upstone deconstructs the images of journey, adventure and travel into an intertext that illustrates the symbolism of colonial concepts of space, territory, boundary and mapping that lead to explain the origin of the myths of nation, nation-state and finally nationalism. The current slogans for multinationalism, multiculturalism and globalization end in garbing the very core of colonial politics. Upstone’s detailed analysis of the seminal texts with reference to several subtexts manifests her ability and sincerity in intellectual exercises that she undertakes with an admirable sense of responsibility.

A.C. Sukla

Bishnu Charan Dash, *Mystic Eros Troubadours and the Vaisnava Poets of Medieval India*, New Delhi : Abhishek Prakashan, 2010 pp. 292.

Primarily designed as a cultural document on comparative medieval poetry, philosophy, religion and esoteric thoughts, the book *Mystic Eros* (Troubadours and the Vaisnava Poets of Medieval India) by Bishnu Charan Dash is a significant

contribution to medieval scholarship. It is also an invaluable contribution to comparative literature precisely because the main focus of this book is a comparative analysis of the concept of Eros and Kama, the god of love in Western and Indian traditions respectively. Eros as longing of the sickening soul in Neo-Platonism is metamorphosed into *Mystic-Eros* in the Middle Ages, and while ascending the various steps of the *chain of Eros*, the soul experiences a constant oscillation between the sacred and the profane. With the Troubadours of medieval France, Eros is viewed as a binding force that tends to bridge the gap between sense and spirit within the periphery of courtly love (*amour courtois*) – a powerful plea for refined sensuality. Passion, often treated by preachers and theologians as a notorious element, is viewed as a pure and purifying emotion by the Troubadours.

Dash tends to argue that like the Troubadours, the Buddhist-Tantric-Sahajiya Vaisnava poets metamorphosed *kama* into *prema* and devised an elaborate erotic-mystic ritual of *ragasadhana* (culture of love). Further, he has successfully juxtaposed the Troubadour technique of *donnoi*, deification of courtly lady (*domma*) and esoteric progression (*Eros-Amor-Jois*) with the Vaisnavite ladder of *kama-prema-mahasukha* after a deep comparative analysis of the lyrics of Trobadours and Vaisnava poets of medieval India.

The *Mystic Eros* is written with the remarkable felicity of language. Moreover, for easy understanding of the readers, the author has divided the book into five full-length chapters. The first chapter of the book traces the geneology of Eros in Greek mythology subsequently followed by its many-sided manifestation in classical philosophy, poetry and drama, medieval philosophy and religion ranging from the doctrines of St. Augustine, St. Boethius, Origen, Erigena, Proclus, St. Bernard to the theory of Gnostics and Minne-mystics. The profane dimensions of *pagan Eros* combined with the platonic theory of ascent of Eros and the Neo-Platonic concept of Eros as mystical longing and sickening of soul for union with God, not only confronts the Christian concept of Agape, but also takes a reconciliatory turn in the Augustinian *Charitas* which is further assimilated into *Christianized Eros* ending finally in an identification of God, Eros and Agape. Obviously, God's identification with Eros prompted the medieval poets, mystics and singers of minne-piety to take an amorous view of the human longing for God which was further assimilated into the idea of worshipping 'woman' as Divine – an idea that gave birth to the cult of veneration of the beloved (*domna*) as the viaticum of spiritual union between the lover and God (*Amor*).

Chapter two is devoted to Kama, the Indian Eros that changes from its Vedic concept of 'creative energy' to amorous passion in erotics and classical Sanskrit literature, and from erotic-amorous longing for union, *kama* is metamorphosed into *prema-bhakti*; and the assimilation of *kama*, *prema* and *bhakti* tends to resolve the duality between sacred and profane thereby paving the path for non-dualistic unity which is the *summum bonum* of life in Indian tradition.

The third chapter under the title Courtly Love: Passion and the Poetry of Troubadours tends to analyze the origin and elaboration of the medieval concept of courtly love as developed by the Troubadours of the high Middle Ages. Passion which

was branded by the rationalists and Christian theologians as the most irrational and condemnable element in human nature carrying for the posterity the tragic burden of the *Original sin*, was glorified by the Troubadours as noble and ennobling experience that purifies as well as spiritually elevates the courtly lover. The Troubadours professed the doctrine of Eros, and at the same time expounded the aesthetics of pain. Denis de Rougemont therefore aptly observes that in Troubadourian scheme of the ritual of romance, *passion* means *suffering*. Physical union being an anathema in courtly love, the Troubadour lover is thrown into the purgatory of passion in protracted separation from his *domna*. The fire of passion annihilates his baser desire; passion kills passion and in the process sensuality is metamorphosed into a refined emotion, a sublime and ecstatic experience. The courtly lover is transformed into an initiate, a practitioner of the mystic-erotic technique of *donnoi* that emphasizes observance of chastity and restraint (*mesura*) while serving the deified *domna* as the embodiment of divine wisdom and spiritual illumination.

While adulating adultery, the Provençal poets took a revolutionary and anti-christian stand on the ground that marriage presupposes carnal possession which is detrimental to the spiritual growth and elevation of the lover-initiate. It is not physical possession, but humility, courtesy, service, wholehearted surrender and sacrifice for the sake of beloved *domna* which the courtly lover can claim to be his proud and precious possession. The Troubadours like Guillaume IX of Aquitaine, Bernart de Ventadorn, Jaufre Rudel, Marcabru and Arnaut Daniel emphasized the culture of *cortezia* (courtesy), *jovens* (youth), *mesura* (restraint) and *jois* (joy) and established woman as a religion and the *domna* (beloved) as the sole source of goodness and the fountain source of all virtues and joys on the earth.

Chapter four under the title *Kama, Bhakti and Prapatti: Love Lyrics of the Vaisnava Poets of Medieval India* is designed as a confluence of *kama* (love), *bhakti* (devotion) and *prapatti* (whole-hearted surrender), and provides a detailed analysis of their combined continuation in the love lyrics of Jayadeva and Candidasa centering round the amorous relationship of Radha and Krsna. At the same time, a conceptual analysis of Sahaja has been offered to trace the influence of Tantric-Buddhist-Sahajiya erotic-esoteric practices in the Vaisnava lyrics. The concept of *sahaja* as such signifies spontaneous and easy realization of the self and the ultimate Reality through the path of natural exercise of passions and emotions. The *Sahajiyas* break away from the traditional unnatural yogic practice of bodily torture and repression of natural propensities and recommend the transformation of *kama* (profane) into *prema* (sacred) that culminates into a sublime feeling of bliss (*mahasukha*). The ultimate aim of the Tantric-Sahajiya-Vaisnavas is to seek the underlying oneness (*advaya*) of everything through the natural union of male and female symbolically suggested by the union of the divine pairs – of Siva and Sakti, Prajna and Upaya, Radha and Krsna. Human body being the microcosmic representative of the macrocosmic universe, every man and woman must realize, according to Tantric-Sahajiya thought that their spontaneous and pure love and union tends to the supreme state of non-duality and bliss.

Similarly, the Sahajiya Vaisnavas realize that human love in its noble and ennobling intensity can be treated as divine. They prescribe the theory of attribution (*aropa*), and

envisage behind the physical form (*rupa*) of every man and woman the real nature (*svarupa*) of the cosmic non-duality i.e. Siva and Sakti, Radha and Krsna. Thus, the sacred and profane, divine and human love are amicably reconciled in the Vaisnava lyrics of Jayadeva, Vidyapati and Candidasa. While differing from the orthodox vaisnavite distinction between *kama* and *prema*, the Sahajiya Vaisnava poets argue that *kama* forms the very basis of *prema*; and they stick to the old homoeopathic principle that poison is destroyed by poison only. Once the poison is destroyed through the ritual of chastity and love (*ragassashana*), humanity becomes divinity; man becomes a superman.

Chapter five constitutes the core of the book in so far as it attempts to institute a comparative study of the Troubadour concept of courtly love and the technique of *donnoi* and the Tantric-Sahajiya erotic-esoteric theory of the cult of passion (*ragasadhana*) and the culture of *parakiya* as adumbrated in the lyrics of Jayadeva, Vidyapati and Candidasa. Troubadour scholarship over the years has been profuse and right from C. S. Lewis (*The Allegory of Love*, 1966), Roger Boase (*The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love*, 1977), A. J. Denomy (*The Heresy of Courtly Love*, 1947), Dennis de Rougement (*Passion and Society*, 1951), L. T. Topsfield (*Troubadours and Love*, 1978) to Simon Gaunt (*Troubadours and Irony*, 1989), Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (*The Troubadours: An Introduction*, 1999). Scholars have sufficiently highlighted the historical, rhetorical, thematic, philosophical and cultural perspectives of this celebrated literary tradition. But, none has presented systematically the significant Indic influence on the Troubadour erotic-esoterism. Dash has taken much pain in reading the original texts/authors and then assimilating them into the framework of his book in a heroic manner. However, D. Rougement, O. V. Garrison (*The Yoga of Sex*, 1964) and Ezra Pound (*Literary Essays, 1954 and The Spirit of Romance*, 1952) are the pathfinders who have pointed to some oriental connection, particularly of Tantricism, with the Troubadourian erotic-mysticism. He frankly states that the present work is prompted by Ezra Pound's observation about the Troubadour erotic-esoteric ritual in which the *domna* is mystified as a hymn (*mantram*). Subsequently, Garrison's emphatic remark that "William of Poitiers, one of the first Troubadours, unequivocally spells out the Tantric nature of *donnoi*" (*The Yoga of Sex* p., 126), has remained a booster for him throughout the research work for finding out some viable connection between Troubadours and Tantric Sahajiya thought. The book testifies the author's vast reading and mature thinking, his wide range and depth, critical insight and comparative outlook, analytical bent of mind and logical rigour, and above all his assertive argument and critical style characteristic of a 'seasoned writer'.

Needless to say, the work under review would surely serve as a valuable source book for writers, readers, teachers, scholars and academicians who want to be fully acquainted with the Troubadours and the Vaisnava Poets of Medieval India.

Indu Swami
Department of English
Assam Central University, Diphu Campus
Diphu, Karbi Anglong, Assam