

Book Reviews

Mario J. Valdes (Ed.), *Toward a Theory of Comparative Literature* (Selected papers presented in the Division of Theory of Literature at the XIth International Comparative Literature Congress), Peter Lang, New York etc., 1990, pb, pp. 275.

Theory of literature, as any other theory of any other branch of human learning, is "a system of assumption, accepted principles and rules of procedure which have been devised in order to explain the nature of a specific set of phenomena" that is called literature. As such, any serious theoretical approach to this set of phenomena called literature must be based on rigorous logical rules applied to demonstration, evidences and internal coherence of the phenomena concerned. Theory may mean also an abstract speculation. But the editor of the present volume interprets "theory" in the former sense, i.e., in the sense of a system of enquiry with its rigorous tool of application.

The papers collected in the volume are arranged under three distinct sections according to the issues they address : i) *Response to Comparative Problematics* deals with the nature of

relation between literary theory and comparative literature, ii) *Theoretical Models and Reflections on comparative Literary Study* works toward a theory of comparative literary study and iii) *Toward a Theory of Comparative Literary History* reevaluates the premises and foundation of comparative literary history. The volume contains twenty-four papers in English and French and the list of authors includes prestigious scholars like Lubomir Dolezel among several others.

Anna Balakian in the essay "Literary Theory and Comparative Literature" opposes the dichotomy between literary history and literary theory and observes that in recent years the most prominent approach to literary study by the comparatists has been foundations of literary theories. Cross-cultural influences have been more effective than intracultural influences in signalling larger perspectives and framing methodological strategies for both literary history and criticism. But the author argues that although theory is a formidable and respected branch of learning, it should not be the sole aim of the

comparatists: its function should be referential in relation to comparative literature - those "who use the text out of context as a pretext for theory are dubious fellow travellers in the discipline of Comparative Literature until they learn to use theory as a means and not an end in the study of literary relationship which regards literature as a holistic entity".

Similarly, Haskell Block admits that recently literary theory has been a cultural preoccupation of Comparative Literature, so much so that the autonomous view of theory dissolves the difference between literature and philosophy. Theory as a genre of comparative literature, because of its limitless spatio-temporal perspectives, pleads for a critical pluralism. It can help redefine both comparative literature and the literary theory itself. But Block is not happy with Eagleton's "touchstone" method by which he rejects the merit of Iser's *The Act of Reading* since it does not work "too well" with Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*. This is not certainly the proper way that any theory can be validated. Gurbhagat Singh offers an enthusiastic suggestion for formulating an international literary theory by

confronting the Western and Eastern (Indian and Chinese) literary signifiers. By a sweeping survey of both the traditions (obviously through secondary sources only) he observes that both the traditions are "haunted by the Other, i.e., an individual community, cosmic laws or the boundary situations (Jaspers) in which various beings are locked. The Eastern signifier makes its way to the Other through spontaneous bodily energy and the Western signifier through blocking this energy though it remains disturbed and engaged throughout". Therefore an integrated literary signifier can evolve out of the unification of both blocked and flowing libidinal energies of Desire - out of unification of Tantra, Freud, Marxism, the philosophical anthropology of Martin Buber and the semiotics of Saussure and Jakobson. But without any concrete outline for any such unification Singh's ideas appear only as an ineffectual angel flapping its wings in vain. His essay is written in the vein of a schoolmaster assigning a task to his students rather than as a critic addressing himself to the learned community of scholars.

Refreshingly original is the paper by Professor Lubomir Dolezel who works out a thesis which both illustrates the methodology of comparative literature and formulates a theory of fictional reference that explains the relationship between reality and its representations in both verbal and non-verbal arts. It is a solid contribution that both argues for and illustrates the merit of comparative literature in theory and practice and appears to be the best among all the contributions in English.

A. C. Sukla

Motilal Banarasidass (Delhi)
Series on Performing Arts
Vol. I : F. P. Richmond et al (eds.), *Indian Theatre : Traditions of Performance*, 1993, pp. 487; Vol. II : R.V.M. Baumer and J.R. Brandon (eds). *Sanskrit Drama in performance*, 1993, pp. 318; Vol. III: J. S. Hamilton, *Sitar Music in Calcutta : An Ethnomusicological Study*, 1994, pp.310; Vol. IV: Natalia Lidova, *Drama and Ritual of Early Hinduism*, 1994, pp. 141; Vol. V: Tarla Mehta, *Sanskrit Play Production in Ancient India*, 1995, pp. 446.

Under the general editorship of Professor Farley

P. Richmond (Chairman of the Department of Theatre Arts University of New York, Stony Brook) a committed researcher on the Indian theatrical performances for the last twenty-five years, M/S MLBD Publishes have made heroic ventures in bringing out expensive volumes on various aspects of Indian theatrical performances from the classical period till date. Each volume is a collection of essays by different international teams of scholars who have expertised in both the theoretical and practical aspects. The editor's manifesto in the Foreward of the first volume indicates the aims and objects of this series : "India is one of the great repositories of performing arts, particularly those of the classical folk/popular, devotional and modern traditions. The sheer enormity and diversity of its cultural expression in music, dance, dance/drama and theatre are the envy of many nations around the world. This series intends to assemble some of the best books now available on these subjects". First three volumes of the series are the Indian editions of their original publications by the University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu 1990 and

1981 respectively and the 3rd one in Calgary, 1989. But the uniformity that brings all the volumes under a single series is notably their style which is meant for both the specialist scholars and common readers. All of them are remarkably comprehensive, based on data meticulously collected, grounded on arguments both traditional and modern and understood and interpreted with a sense of great devotion and adoration for the cultural heritage they reflect.

The miracle of the first volume is its integrated approach to the whole range of theatrical performances- from the classical Sanskrit tradition to the contemporary regional practice ; in its six parts the volume highlights the origins and characteristics of Sanskrit theatre, the ritual traditions, the devotional or the *Lila* tradition, the folk tradition such as *Nautanki* and *Tamasha* and dance dramas/dramatic dances and the modern Indian theatre. The most impressive feature of this volume is that all the accounts offered are based on both library works and data collected by extensive tours and practical investigations all over the country. The venture is undoubtedly

pioneering and the treatment is accurate, authentic and uncontroversial.

The second volume in its four parts offers more a theoretical account of the Sanskrit drama in performance based on critical texts and some examples found in the dramatic and poetic texts as well. Raghavan's essay is an authoritative demonstration of such treatment. Edwin Gerow and Eliot of Deutsch write on *Rasa* theory, Swana compares *rasa lila* with Sanskrit drama and besides two articles on the performance of Bhasa's *Vasavadatta* by Gandhi and Cravath, Richmond offers useful suggestions for the modern directors of Sanskrit plays. Both the 1st and 2nd volumes offer chapters on *Kuttiyatam* tradition that transgressed Bharata's rules.

Hamilton's account of the musical instrument called *Sitar* is an exhaustive one both in its historical survey and aesthetic analysis. The birth of *Sitar* from *Tambura* as projected by the author with its ethnological history is highly enlightening and the techniques of playing *ragas* on *Sitar* and its cognate instrument *Sarod* adopted in different Muslim and Hindu traditions or *gharanas* are explained with

masterly insight and wisdom.
Lidova's marvellous
volume correlates the dramatic

tradition both in its theoretical
and performative aspects with
Vedic ritual traditions.
Unwilling to accept F.B.J.
Kuiper's theory that the
Natyasastra rituals were
equivalent to the Vedic
sacrifice, the author argues
that Bharata does not apply the
word *Yajna*, but the word *Puja*
to the theoretical rites. She
further observes that the
different forms of drama such
as *samavakara* and *Dima* are
the stage versions of some
myths such as those of
"Churning of the Ocean" and
the "Burning of Tripura" rather
than any transformation of
Vedic sacrificial rituals.

Mehta's researches are
based on both literary texts
including Sanskrit plays and
texts on dramaturgy by
Bharata, Dhananjaya and
Nandikesvra etc. as also on
empirical findings such as the
"remnants of the ancient
Sanskrit theatre design as still
being presented and practised
in the traditional and village
theatres of India and South-
East Asia, China and Japan".
In the 1st four parts containing
ten chapters the author
elaborately deals with all the
aspects of a Sanskrit play

production such as the text,
performer, auditorium, audience
and performance as a whole
and in the last part offers
directions for producing some
Sanskrit plays, which she
collects from the plays
themselves. A work of this
design requires vast experience
about a wide-ranging socio-
cultural situation and the
author aptly displays such
qualifications as needed for
such a venture.

Motilal Banarasidass
publishers deserve our
sincerest thanks for producing
this series the volumes of
which enlarge our intellectual
and aesthetical dimensions
about India's performing arts
and their tradition.

K.C. Dash

*Possible-Worlds in Literary
Theory*

Sture Allen (ed.), *Possible
Worlds in Humanities, Arts
and Sciences : Proceedigs of
Nobel Symposium 65*, Walter
de Gruyter, Berlin, 1989
pp.453 ; Ruth Ronen, *Possible
Worlds in Literary Theory*,
Cambridge University Press,
Cambridge, 1994, pp. 244.

From Aristotle to
Auerbach understanding and
interpretation of the fictional
world have been based on a
mimetic model, i.e., the

fictional world has been matched either to actual particulars or to actual universals. In 1957 Ian Watt replaced mimesis by pseudomimesis. When he wrote sentences such as "Fielding lets us into Blifild's mind" or "We are given a highly detailed description of Grandison Hall", he did not match the fictional particulars with a represented actual object or category, he assigned the fictional world rather to a source of representation, i.e., the author, presupposing that fictional worlds pre-exist the act of representation - in other words, suggesting that a fiction writer is a historian of pre-existing fictional realms.

But a systematic non-mimetic approach to the world of fiction has been attempted recently by the philosophers of logic and cultural semioticians drawing upon Leibniz's concept of "possible worlds" which evolves out of his analysis of necessity and contingency: a possible world is a world which God could have created. Since he created only the actual world, the world of our empirical experience, all other possible worlds exist only as ideas or conceivable worlds, and truths of reason which are necessary

hold all these conceivable worlds. Leibniz distinguishes between necessary and contingent truths; "One is absolutely necessary, for its contrary implies a contradiction.... the other is necessary only *ex hypothesi*, and by accident, so to speak and this connection is contingent in itself when its contrast implies no contradiction. A connection of this kind is not based on pure ideas and under the simple understanding of God but also on his free decrees and on the sequence of events in the universe". Geometrical truth is necessary because its contrary implies contradiction. But the Roman general Caesar's crossing the Rubicon is not a necessary truth, because its opposite "Caesar did not cross the Rubicon" is not contradictory and therefore is not impossible. It is not necessary in the sense that the complete concept (under the proper name) of Caesar might have chosen not to cross the Rubicon and yet would have been Caesar, although he would have been defeated by Pompey in that case. Therefore, according to Leibniz, there could have been a different world (from our actual world where Caesar crossed the Rubicon) where a person like Caesar would not

have crossed the Rubicon and would have therefore experienced its attended consequences, i.e., defeat by a man like Pompey. Geometrical concepts are both possible and necessary whereas historical facts are possible but contingent. The other such worlds as counter to our factual world are possible; and God could have created such worlds. Interestingly, Leibniz, justifies his ontology of the possible worlds by citing the worlds of literary fiction- "Nobody could deny that novels.. are possible" and he maintains that the different possible worlds are independent of each other. According to him, therefore, each possible world being an alternate to the other, there is not mutual interference, and as such, the characters and events of one possible world are not compossible with those of other possible worlds. In other words, the characters, events and objects of the literary possible world (as those of the worlds of other arts) are not compossible with our actual world and should therefore not be understood and appreciated by any method of correspondence. Since it is impossible to assert the chronology of the possible worlds, the meaning and truth

of one possible world are not to be determined by those of the other possible worlds. This rationalistic epistemology of Leibniz is a revolutionary attack on both the classical tradition of realism and the romantic tradition of mysticism. In understanding and appreciating the arts and literature if the age-old mimetic method is rejected, the mystic and genetic aspects of the romantic concept of poetic imagination is also replaced by the rationalist epistemology and logical ontology of Leibniz.

Leibniz is also responsible for discarding the one-world semantics in favour of a multi-world semantics for a successful interpretation and understanding of the art worlds. Although anti-referential proposals were offered by the critical concepts such as Russell's "empty terms", Frege's "pure essence", Saussure's "self-referentiality" and Richards' "pseudo statement" it was Saul Kripke who articulated the Leibnizian ontology and epistemology in modern times in interpreting the entire system of formal logic on the assumption that "our actual world is surrounded by an infinity of other possible worlds" and during the 1970s a number of

critics such as Lubomir Dolezel, Umberto Eco and Van Dijk attempted for the first time at interpreting the fictional worlds in terms of possible-worlds semantic. In August 1986 the Swedish Academy organised the 65th Nobel symposium on the Possible Worlds in which for the first time a galaxy of scholars from different disciplines focussed on the multidisciplinary aspects of this revolutionary area of knowledge : among others Thomas Kuhn and Jaakko Hintikka from philosophy, Barbara Partee and Ulf Teleman from linguistics, Lubomir Dolezel, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Samuel R. Levin, Arthur Danto and Umberto Eco from aesthetics, literary criticism and semiotics, J.S. Bell and Marteen J Rees from physics. The first volume under review is the collection of their contributions where Sture Allen the Editor recalls that the present symposium originated in an earlier Nobel Symposium on "Text Processing" concerning the problems of communication such as text representation, text analysis and generation, and text typology and attribution. Since there are various media of communication in our Actual

World such as natural languages in speech and writing, formal languages of mathematics and logic, programming languages, and the languages of the fine arts and music, the related point of significance that now emerges is the established relationship between man, the medium, the actual world and the possible world. "This includes", the editor writes, "the problem of representation or mimesis versus self-relativity or autonomy, as well as the fundamental question of whether a possible world created by art can be an instrument for understanding the actual world and, conversely, whether scientific theories and models can also be regarded as fictional in some way." This is a challenge to the age-old mode of human understanding of the world he lives in and its states of affairs he confronts in his day-to-day life.

Pinpointing the session on literature and arts, Professor Dolezel's, paper is an extraordinary one for its clarity of thought and for its skill of analysis. He distinguishes between a theory of poeticity and that of fictionality : self-referentiality is characteristic of poetry or of *langue*, not of fictionality; and

the theory of mimesis the oldest version of fictional semantics is a one-world semantics to be substituted by the possible worlds semantics which is a multiple-world semantics. A comprehensive theory of literary fiction will arise from a fusion of possible-worlds semantics with text theory of cultural semiotics. Dolezel formulates three fundamental theses of literary fictional semantics which can be derived from the possible-worlds model frame : (1) fictional worlds are sets of possible states of affairs, (2) the set of fictional worlds is unlimited and maximally varied, (3) fictional worlds are accessible from the actual world. The principal merit of the possible-worlds fictional semantics lies in its concept of fictional reality which is determined not by reference / correspondence to the states of actual world affairs, but by its own logical structure, i.e., it should not be selfcontradictory. "The possible is wider than the actual", but "Worlds which imply contradictions are impossible, unthinkable, 'empty'. Fictional worlds are accessible from the actual world not physically but through the semiotic channels - by means of information processing, i.e., in the

formation of the fictional worlds actual world participates by providing models of its structure. But the actual world material undergoes a substantial transformation in being converted into non-actual possibles with all the logical, ontological, semantical consequences.

Dolezel further observes that the fictional worlds of literature are incomplete, semantically unhomogeneous and constructs of textual activity. There are two kinds of texts - descriptive and constructional. The former represent the actual world which pre-exists any textual activity, whereas the latter are prior to their worlds and these texts are called fictional texts in the functional sense : "they are actual texts with the potential of constructing fictional worlds".

Professor Wolterstorff, while discussing Dolezel's paper, comments that "a fictional world need not be merely possible ; it may be actual. It need not even be possible; it may be impossible". While he is unwilling to treat the worlds of fiction in terms of the possible worlds, he argues that the essence of fiction lies not in the world projected but in the

mode in which it is projected. He, however, appreciates Dolezel's emphasis on structure - worlds of works of fiction are structured in a wide variety of significantly different ways. But it seems self-contradictory to state that "even impossible worlds are not without significant structure". Dolezel's ideas, if correctly understood, imply that no world that lacks a logical structure (of uncontradiction) is possible. An impossible world, therefore cannot have any *signifiant* structure. Can an impossible world be possible?

Ruth Ronen in her title *Possible-Worlds in Literary Theory* makes a pioneering venture in accounting systematically the influence of philosophical logic and aesthetics in formation of the concept of fictionality in literary studies in terms of possible worlds semantics. The work traces the sources, route and function of this influence. She acknowledges the influence of Dolezel on her present work as "immeasurable" and accordingly she defines and interprets the concepts of possible worlds and fictional worlds, discusses the possibility of fictional worlds, analyzes the ontological, logical and

epistemological features of fiction and elaborates upon the ideas of fictional events, fictional perspective and fictional time - the domains of the fictional world. Her meticulous researches have been absolutely successful in turning fiction into a legitimate topic of philosophical discussion and making a "radical shift in a long tradition, from Plato to Russell, that viewed fiction as a sequence of proposition devoid of truth value or simply false."

"My primary concern..." writes the author, "is not doing things but exposing inadequacies which emerge when interdisciplinary things are done with texts". She has intended to deduce a pragmatic theory of fiction from the theoretical works by philosophers and literary critics rather than drawing upon the literary works (fiction) themselves. What the reader gains from such theoretical analysis as this is a refreshingly new approach to artworld in general and literary fiction in particular. The relation between reality and art has been thoroughly reviewed. The postmodernist slogan for antifoundationism has been raised from altogether a different corner of

our intellectual world, i.e., we can understand and appreciate art without our search for a stable actuality as a reference point. Modes and degrees of reliance of art worlds on the real world reflect different representational conventions and not a fixed similarity.

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Horace L Fairlamb, *Critical Conditions: Postmodernity and the Question of Foundation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, pp.XI+271.

The author pinpoints his observations : "Postmodern anti-foundationism misidentifies the foundationist error, a misunderstanding which takes secondary problems for the essential problem" (p.16). An examination of Derrida, Foucault, Habermas, Gadamer, Rorty, Lyotard, Fish and other postmodern critics reveals that these anti-foundationists are themselves victims of an "unidentified heterological foundationism, an operation of necessary *Critical Conditions* that subverts both the error of strong foundationist closure and the totalisation of strong conventionalist relativity" (p.13). The only error of foundationism, according to the author, is its hope to "reduce the condition of

knowledge to one kind of foundation instead of explaining the different but equally necessary conditions of knowledge and meaning" and he suggests that the foundationist theory is to account for three kinds of epistemic conditions- formal, objective and conventional, which he calls "heterological" ; and in the main body of the book, he examines how (a) the traditional reductive model of epistemology infects both the supporters and critics of foundationism, (b) the anti-foundationists criticise the traditional notion of foundations without having any clear notion of their own theoretical presupposition and (c) a "heterological" model of critical conditions avoids these problems.

Coming to the American critical situation Fairlamb notes that during the 50s critics like Crane, Frye, Wellek and Warren needed theoretical foundations. During even the mid-sixties various American critics responded to that need while structuralism was officially imported from the continental culture. But this optimism about foundations was first challenged by Derrida's debut in the Baltimore seminar on Structuralism. But Derrida's

deconstruction is simply an illusion of novelty for the Americans since it is merely the New Critical "close reading" had the New Critics understood their own practices with greater regard. Deconstruction is therefore not the "result of new methods, but of more thorough uses of old methods" of Brooks and Warren and hence is not necessarily an antifoundationalist critical programme. The failure of these antifoundationalist proposals is variously noted by Fairlamb : "Fish's radical hermeneutics condemns universalism, but constantly practices it (p.40) ..." Gadamer's vision of philosophical hermeneutics must have non-historical authority lest it reduce to *his historically bound prejudices*" (p.127). Finally he proposes a heterological foundationism which is "able to account for both what changes and what stays the same and thereby accounts for the both reductive

foundationism and relativism" (p. 263).

Fairlamb's fold observations might appear conservative for the followers of the popular antifoundationalism and critical iconoclasts. But the logical strength and common sense basis of his arguments sufficiently warrant our attention to identify both the truth and the illusory aspects of the influential critical fashion today. It makes us aware of the dangers that are sure to emerge in one's unconditional surrender to the absolute denial of necessary critical conditions. The book is a powerful antidote to the critical epidemic that breaks out to infect the whole range of human knowledge and experience. *Critical Conditions* is a timely publication to guard one's genuine critical interest against the possible intellectual heresy of any pseudo invention in aesthetical cognition as well as critical practices.

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