

BOOK REVIEWS

Stephen Davies and Ananta Ch. Sukla, *Art and Essence*, Praeger Publishers, 2003. pp. xix + 253

This is the fourth in a series of volumes being spearheaded by Professor A.C. Sukla. The first two volumes, *Art and Representation* (Praeger, 2001), *Art and Experience* (Praeger, 2003) were edited by him, and a fourth volume *Art and Expression*, edited by him and Michael Mitias, is in the press. The object of this series is to put together the contributions of contemporary international scholars to the age-old questions relating to the theory of art. This volume, ably introduced by Stephen Davies, deals with perhaps the most vexing of all aesthetic topics, namely, the question of the essence or defining property of art. Is there an underlying nature or defining characteristic to art, understood both as a term in English and as a concept. In other words, is there a common quality shared by all art forms and all instances of what we designate as artworks, such that where it can be identified something could be called art. The discussions included here traverse a whole range of views—from those that deny outright an essence to art to those that allow it a “qualified” essence, or assign to it a historical, functional, or relational determinant, or that offer a synthetic/hybrid definition of art. Traditional theories have worked for long with the concepts of imitation/representation and expression. Or they relied on formal criteria. But contemporary aesthetics has brought these concepts under intense scrutiny and called them into question as defining terms. The two most influential factors in contemporary speculations in aesthetics have been (i) the Wittgensteinian philosophy of language and his theory of family resemblances, arguing against the possibility of definition, and (ii) the emergence of nonart, anti-art, or conceptual art, which presents a stumbling block to any definition advanced of art by denying stability to that concept—every example given of art being faced with a counterexample (driftwood or Duchamp’s readymades). It is in this climate of opinion that most of the discussions in this volume take place.

There are 13 essays in the volume and they are grouped under four broad headings: theoretical, historical, cross-cultural, and contemporary perspectives. In his Introduction, Davies provides convenient summaries of the chapters, as well as illuminating background information about each of the major perspectives. Some of the contributors, like Davies and Robert Stecker, have already written incisively on the subject.

In Chapter 1, “Essential Distinctions for Art Theorists,” Davies makes some valuable points. He argues against the neo-Wittgensteinians, like Weitz, who oppose essentialist definitions, and shows that even artworks grouped together in terms of family resemblances must presuppose a conceptual unity among the objects so grouped. And further, resemblance must imply some perceptual unity in the objects that are said to resemble one another. And to spell out this unity is to propose a kind of definition after all! Davies does not of course say that artworks possess a “real essence” like natural kind objects. But neither do they have purely “nominal” or cultural essences since they answer to widely shared human needs and interests. (They are more like “weeds” than like “gold” or “parking tickets.”) For the very reason that it derives directly from innate mechanisms embedded in human nature, art does have an objective nature independent of personal or cultural variations. Aesthetic functions and properties are thus universal in their appeal. Davies, thus, offers a synthesis of the “psychological” and “cultural” theories, in terms of Dickie’s classification. He admits, though, that a formal definition of art by necessary and sufficient conditions may not be a wise move. Drawing a distinction between “theorizing” and “defining,” he suggests that a theory of art is still a possibility—one that discusses more generally what is typical or normative for works of art. But here one might ask: How can you say what is typical or normative for art without some notion of its central or essential characteristics, which will count as definitional features, and of the concept’s extension?

Arguing from the Wittgensteinian position, Graham McFee, in Chapter 2 “Art, Essence; and Wittgenstein,” urges that the search for a definition of art, in fact, of any concept, is neither feasible nor philosophically useful or revealing. According to him, neither the “open concept argument” nor the argument based on family resemblances among artworks, rather than a common denominator, which Weitz deployed against the essential definition approach to art, would be the correct characterization of the Wittgensteinian position, although these ideas are rooted in Wittgenstein’s writings. Rather, it is that “having a formal definition cannot be a requirement for understanding a concept.” “What is understood cannot depend on a definition” for

essence)." (p. 28). The point of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language as use is that words and concepts are understood by the common user, in spite of their vague boundaries, even without analysis and a formal definition of them—simply by their contexts of use, not by searching for the essence of the world behind them. Even like words, such as "meaning" and "value," "art" too requires contextualizing to determine what sense is at issue in a particular instance of use, for the term covers a wide range of uses, including things such as "the womanly art of breastfeeding"—each use calling for a different set of defining properties. Therefore, McFee says. "The demand is simply for contextual differentia, not for essences" (p. 33). McFee does not of course deny that artworks could have a bunch of necessary properties in virtue of being artworks. But they cannot serve as defining properties in the sense either that they are exclusive to that class of objects or that wherever they are present, those objects can invariably be identified as art objects. We can generalize about an artwork's essential properties, but without expecting our statements to be exceptionless. "In discussing what is essential for art staus, then, we are not offering specific conditions . . . but a contextual background...."—of the artwork's being the product of a certain period or genre, etc. Further, art status, according to him, is "logically prior to the properties" that artworks qua artworks necessarily have (p. 36).

On this view, it appears that art staus is first granted to certain objects quite arbitrarily, whereas there must be some reasoning, or a "theory," if you will, behind the granting of that status, and this could only be based on a property or a set of properties that an object possesses intrinsically, which gives it the name of art. Then, again, granted that words are always context-specific, yet they do possess core meaning properties (in some languages, derived from their etymological roots), which then are extended to a range of contexts that bear at least a remote relation to their original senses, thus setting a constraint on the senses in which they can be applied. But according to the Wittgensteinians, language use seems to be a blind ritual.

In "Nature, Gardens, Art," Stephanie Ross discusses the distinction between Nature and Art. Art stands in sharp contrast to Nature by being an artifact that is an utterly "shaped" and "bounded" object and by possessing representational and emotional properties, which Nature lacks. Emotional properties may be attributed to Nature only metaphorically and any kind of design that we may see in natural objects is imposed on it. "Art appreciation is one thing, nature appreciation quite another" (p. 42). The Japanese gardens, with their look of natural inevitability, are still art: they "use art to imitate the look of nature" (p. 50). Remarking on the aesthetic properties, discredited by many nowadays, Ross says that a reference to an object's perceptual properties is unavoidable in judging the aesthetic value of that object.

Part II of the book contains three essays spanning the history of aesthetics from antiquity to the 18th century. In "Art and Beauty in Antiquity and Middle Ages," Santaro-Brienza goes over the familiar territory of the theory of mimesis and verisimilitude. A well-known but important implication of this theory is stressed in this connection, namely, that the art-maker doesn't invent new things, but copies a pre-existent order of things. This lesson will often be lost sight of in subsequent eras, but it is this that ensures art's objectivity and sharability. Even medieval aestheticians, like Aquinas, with their transcendental reference, preserved the classical principle of the objectivity of aesthetic perception. Beauty, for Aquinas, was a natural and ontological property. Two other essays, one by Dabney Townsend, "Hume, Kant, and the Essence of Art" and the other by Robert Hicks "Hegel and Nietzsche on Life and Dramatic Characters" examine the work of these philosophers to see if they have anything to offer on the problem of the essence of art. They arrive at the conclusion that none of these philosophers provides an account of the nature of art. Neither Kant, with his theory of beauty and aesthetic judgement—which no doubt laid the foundation for modern aesthetics and philosophy of art—nor Hegel and Nietzsche, who viewed beauty and art, one as part of his grand metaphysical and world-historical scheme and the other in light of his philosophy of life, offered any definition either of fine art or of the concept of art.

Presenting the Indian views on the problem of definition, Sukla shows, in his essay "Abhinavagupta's Definition of Art: Ontology versus Essentialism" (Part III), that, according to Abhinavagupta, each art form has to be judged on the basis of its medium, the mode of its existence, and the mode in which it is apprehended by the audience. Hence there cannot be an essence common to all art forms—pictorial, verbal, and performing. This is also the impression one gets from the Sanskrit texts on the arts. While every text starts with the problem of definition, it confines its discussion to the discipline on hand—poetry, drama, music, or dance—and never ventures to offer a global theory of art per se. The Sukraniti discusses 64 arts, crafts, and sciences, defining the character of each of them, but leaves the general term *kala* (art) itself undefined, with the remark

that a unified definition of the various arts is not attempted here because the distinction between the arts is born of the different activities involved or the kinds of things done in each.

Sankuka, too, who, in arguing his imitation-cum-inference theory of theatrical experience, introduces the analogy of the “painted horse” (*citra-turaga-nyaya*), does not attempt anything like a general theory of art. He does not, as Sukla thinks, appear to equate the stage art with the pictorial. He is only comparing the representational illusion of the theatre to the illusion created by a pictorial representation. This is an analogy limited to that one place—*ekadesa-anvaya*. Even Abhinavagupta allows the primary illusion of the theatre, although, phenomenologically, an illusion is not cognized as such at the moment of perception though it may be sublated at a subsequent moment. Is not Sankuka also saying as much in his analysis of the theatre experience? In speaking of the verbal and the presentational components of the theatre, Abhinavagupta no doubt clearly distinguishes between them and the art of painting in terms both of their ontology and the phenomenology of their perception. But in his commentary on dance and music, which were important adjuncts to Bharata’s theatre, there is not much on how these twin arts appear to and are experienced by the audience; their definitions are given largely in terms of their formal, constitutive elements. So it may not be possible to generalize that he defines the various arts in terms of “the phenomenological ontology of each art” (Sukla, p. 122), although a suggestion for that sort of generalization is strongly implied. Again, I wonder if Sukla’s division of the Indian theories in terms of relational, functional, and procedural approaches is not too pat. For instance, Sankuka and Bhattanayaka are as much concerned with the functional (and therefore with the phenomenology of the spectator’s reception) as with the “relational” (the work’s relation to reality, in the sense understood by Sukla). And Abhinavagupta, in spite of his emphasis on the psychology of *rasa* experience, is equally attentive to the objective or constitutive features of the art forms he comments on. It would therefore be more accurate to characterize his approach as “integrative” in that he, like Bharata and Anandavardhana, pays due attention to all three components of the poetic activity, namely, the end to be achieved, the means of achieving it, and the manner of performance or particulars of the procedure to be adopted (*sadhya, sadhana, itikartavyata*). Nevertheless, Sukla has done an admirable job of presenting these ancient theories in the vocabulary of modern criticism, thus bringing them closer to the mainstream of Western philosophical aesthetics.

Japanese art-making, according to Yuriko Saito (“Representing the Essence of Objects: Japanese Aesthetics”) starts with the transcendental aim of overcoming the self and its intervention in the perception of the true nature of objects. It gives a metaphysical twist to the concept of imitation. The aim of art is still imitation or representation of objects of course, but not of their externals. The artist is asked to intuitively grasp the inner essence or mood of an object of nature and reproduce it in his chosen medium. He thereby achieves a genuine representation with an “over-all effect of artlessness and spontaneity” and with complete “object-centredness,” without the interference of the lyrical ego. This idea, as is well known, is at the root of the haiku and the imagist poem. There is, however, something dubious about this account of art creation. For one thing, no material medium, including language, can capture and manifest inner essences except through their external appearance or logical signs. And, for another, it is well-nigh impossible not to project onto the object the perceiver’s self—its mood, perspective, or viewpoint. According to the *Rasa* theory, even an admittedly objective description of a scene or landscape becomes “tinctured” (*rusita*) at the hands of the poet/artist. Larry Shiner, in his discussion of “Western and Non-Western Concepts of Art,” arrives at the conclusion that the concept of art has a cross-cultural essence—there is no culture without art and without some notion of art—and that “cultural authenticity” is not a necessary condition for belonging to the category of art. That is to say that an artifact is recognizable as such by its own tokens, even without a knowledge of its cultural context. The term “artistic authenticity,” as opposed to the context-relative cultural authenticity, could only mean the autonomous, meaning the non-relational, and manifest features of the artwork by which it is identified as art.

In “Historical Definitions of Art” (under “Contemporary Perspectives”), Kathleen Stock writes that the primary assumption of historical definitions is that what unifies the concept of art is that artworks stand in some appropriate relation to already established works—either in virtue of the artist’s intention to situate his work in that relation or in virtue of the artwork’s standing in a relation of exemplification, amplification, repudiation, etc. to an established artistic tradition. The first, the author calls the “internalist” position, and the second, “externalist.” She rejects both approaches on grounds that artistic intentions cannot be

straightforwardly read off from the manifest properties of an artwork, and that the mere existence of a historical relation to past works is not constitutive of its artistic status. Even identifying narratives, as in the case of *avante-garde* objects, cannot turn nonartworks into artworks. This might suggest that the best way to identify artworks would be by their manifest properties. But Stock denies this. She says, endorsing the Wittgensteinian account of art, that "it is not the manifest or relational properties on their own that are constitutive of art; it is the recognition by users of the concept that certain manifest or relational properties are significant in particular cases that is constitutive." There are no set of necessary and sufficient conditions; only resemblances to established works (p. 174). This view raises two questions: first, what makes certain objects or artifacts "established works" or what are the criteria for designating them as artworks, unless the designation were purely arbitrary or conventional, like naming persons. Second, if resemblance alone were the criterion governing classification, what should count as the features shared by a present, yet-to-be-named object with an accredited past work, and how should their significance be determined, unless, once again, one has unquestioningly to go by the verdict of the art establishment?

Robert Stecker's "The Ontology of Art Interpretation" is focused on the objects of critical interpretation, art being one of them. It discusses two issues concerning the objects of interpretation: (i) Are the objects of interpretation the sort of things capable of having essential properties? And (ii) the relation between interpretation and its object. Stecker favours what he calls the "contextualist syndrome," according to which the object exists and so its properties, prior to interpretation and independent of any individual interpreter's conception. He joins issue with Margolis who maintains that objects of interpretation lack a "fixed nature" and that their meaning is constructed by the process of interpretation and alters with it (the "constructivist syndrome"). Stecker holds that artworks have certain essential properties—structural or historical—on which their identity depends. But he observes that all artworks are not ontologically of one kind and that there is no single sort of thing that all artworks have. Some, like music and literature, are abstract structures or "structures-in-use" and context-sensitive, and they derive their essential properties from art-historical context, whereas others, like painting and sculpture, are physical objects. He calls this "ontological contextualism" or "heteronomous contextualism."

Stecker's conclusion, then, is that an artwork, regarded as an "embodiment" and a token-of-a-type, must possess some properties essential to its being identified as an embodied object and as a token of its kind, but that it is subject to historically grounded changes in structure over time. Hence the criteria for identifying something as art, too, must change from time to time. An artwork is intended to fulfil a function belonging to standard works (central art forms) at a given time. The standard functions include the representational and expressive functions, while some others are accidental and context-dependent.

Stecker's type of "historical functionalism" seeks to strike a balance between several rival theories while rejecting all of them individually—essentialism, anti-essentialism, historicism, institutionalism, intentionalism, simple functionalism, the Wittgensteinian "use" theory, the "cluster concept," etc. He grants that there are central art forms with standard functions and properties, but denies either that they are invariable or that there are a uniform set of properties necessary and sufficient for being art. As he puts it in an earlier work: "Art is not a status bestowed by an authority...." It is rather "a set of evolving practices defined by an evolving set of aims...." The consistency of Stecker's *via media* approach may be questioned from the essentialist/objectivist standpoint. First, considering that art objects are identified and their *arthood* is to be defined in terms of the common properties they possess—intrinsic perceptual properties as well as those that depend on immediate contextual setting—and for which they are valued, rather than by the experience they evoke or by the artist's intentions—which is what Beardsley's type of functionalism ultimately stands for—why not call it an "object-property" approach and why admit the intentional component into the definition? Again, if it is admitted that art serves certain standard functions, why not regard these very, well-established functions as definitive of art? For the central art forms themselves could not have been given the status of art unless they fulfilled these functions, even granting that they can be applied to artworks only disjunctively. Then again, if these functions and the formal, structural, or semantic properties from which they are to be deduced are to become well established, they could not be subject to historically grounded changes. There must be some invariable and unchanging relation between art objects and some at least of their properties, such that it would justify their being classed as art. If, on the other hand, as Stecker holds, functions and their corresponding properties are inconstant and evolving over time, why are they standard or normative for art? Moreover, if

artworks are tokens-of-a-type, and types are eternal, and Stecker would allow this, then, what is typical of the central art forms must consist of those very unchanging and universal characteristics.

"Aesthetification as a Feminist Strategy," by Monique Roelofs, explores the interrelationship between aesthetics and gender politics. She believes that there can be no gender neutral theoretical framework for aesthetics and that aesthetic ends cannot but be gendered. The "aesthetification" that she proposes consists in "a politicized view of aesthetic existence" and, correlatively, an aesthetified view of gendered relational life. Valuable as this contribution may be to feminist studies, it sheds little light on the contentious term "aesthetic": it doesn't take us to the root of the matter. What is "aesthetic"? One may also quarrel with the feminist claim that aesthetic ends are necessarily gendered. If they were, then, by the same logic there should be a white aesthetics, a black aesthetic, and an aesthetic for every ethnic or national group in the world!

An effective answer to aesthetic relativism is provided by Denis Dutton ("Universalism, Evolutionary Psychology, and Aesthetics") Dutton, like many others in this volume, argues that art and beauty are universal and cross-cultural categories, and that art-making and enjoyment are rooted in man's evolutionary psychology—in our fundamental emotional drives for pleasure, play, sex, and the like, which are not culture-specific or historically relative. Although this study does not directly address the issue of art's essence or differentia, it perhaps provides a firm basis for a theory of art. For no theory of art and aesthetic activity can ignore the fact that art engages our most basic cognitive and emotional capacities. This assumption that art answers to something universal in human nature is taken as axiomatic in Aristotle's *Poetics* as well as in Bharata's *Natyasastra*. It is now being confirmed by scholars (if confirmation were needed) with the aid of evolutionary psychology and cognitive sciences. But the findings of these sciences at best provide corroboration to the value and appeal of art. They are not in themselves strictly the business of aesthetics.

The discussions contained in this volume present a variety of alternative approaches, representing different traditions, persuasions, and viewpoints on the subject of art and essence. They do not of course leave us with anything like a definition that those of us who are accustomed to traditional ways of thinking can settle for. The two major aestheticians among the contributors, Davies and Stecker—who sympathize with the essentialist position, albeit in a much qualified way—are inhibited from offering a definition along traditional lines, having to accommodate today's artworld and the many theoretical currents of our age. Davies, on the whole, favours an extrinsic, relational, and "procedural" or artworld-based approach to definition, and Stecker, a partly intrinsic and partly extrinsic approach, in which definitions are guided by our changing concepts of art and classificatory practices. (In fact, recent definitional proposals may be seen as so many manoeuvres to get around the phenomenon of modern art.) But there are enough insights in these contributions on which to build a workable definition. There is a fair amount of consensus among these on certain elements of art that may be deemed essential for its being art, namely, its artifactuality (with its implication of intentionality or human design and functionality), the universality of its practice and experience, and the functions—representational, expressive, or decorative—which it normally performs in at least the central art forms. Once the term "art" is understood in the light of these, its application to anomalous cases, such as contemporary works, can be treated as an extension of its primary use. Such a definition might smack of being stipulative or legislative. But it must be remembered that the definition of all words is, in the final analysis, arbitrary, and a normal use has to be accepted for all of them. In the case of the central art forms, our norms (which have their roots in elemental human nature and hence are nonrelational and not solely dependent on our classificatory practices) are already established by an overwhelming mass of art tradition across the world, and there is no reason to alter our conception of art whenever a mutation appears on the scene. If, however, one must accord art status to such cases then, it would be easier to find another definition of art, based on another conception of it, than to ask us to alter ours. Whether artworks have hidden essences to be discovered or not, one thing seems fairly certain: it is well-nigh impossible to carry on an intelligent discourse about art, or about anything for that matter, without a definition of one kind or another. Besides, since (at least according to some) words are class names and denote universals of qualities and relations, based on the concept of a common quality—which is especially the case with words that denote directly apprehended, physically instanced particulars—"art" too, being such a word, must designate a characteristic or a set of characteristics that define its class. On this count also a definition of art in terms of its essential characteristic/s seems inescapable. There is much in this collection of essays that will reward serious study and reflection. We should be indebted

researcher in aesthetics. The resources contained in this volume will make it attractive to students as well as specialists.

V.K. Chari

O'Hara, James. *True Names: Vergil and the Alexandrian Tradition of Etymological Wordplay*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1996. Pp. 320. US \$44.50. ISBN 0-472-10660-0.

In archaic Irish literacy tradition, there are two large collections of orally-transmitted sacred tales of places—antiquarian-didactic tales about noteworthy places—the *Dindshenchas* ("place-lore"), and a curious text called the "Fitness (Correct Explanation) of Names" (*Co?ir Annmann*). They both commemorate repeatable place-events associated with saga heroes, mythical or magical adventures, or prototypical deities, and provide access to a neglected pagan store of toponomics. These "wisdom" stories in prose and verse, filled with word play and paronomasia, explain the origin of prominent Irish names and place names. The early Irish onomastic landscape, reflecting ancient Indo-European modes of thought, finds a delightful though unwitting match in O'Hara's latest book (=O'H.). Both traditions recognize and expose wicked punsters.

Frederick Ahl's brilliant *Metaformations: Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets* (Cornell U.P., 1985) anticipates and antecedes this work, and that book's introduction sets the stage most appropriately for the present study:

Puns [...] deceive because people generally expect language, and indeed nature, not to confront them with doubles. Puns pluralize and destabilize meaning [...] by undermining people's confidence in their own perceptions. Visual or verbal 'puns' amuse the reader or the spectator who takes pleasure in watching someone else's confusion. (Ahl 17)

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An earlier monograph by O'H. on Vergil's *Aeneid* (Princeton, 1990) called attention to the twin themes of death and prophecy. His new title derives from *etymos logos*, a "true explanation" or essential feature of a person, place, deity, or thing. For the Ancients, knowing the aetiology (origin) of a name was tantamount to knowing profoundly is *raison d'être*. The author has assembled, in this learned and extremely useful volume, an immense catalogue of serious etymological word play in the works of Vergil. As did the Roman epic poet himself, O'H. draws extensively on the works of Homer, Hesiod, Plato, Varro, Ovid, and Servius, among many others. Of course, the bilingual situation of ancient Rome is a given, and Greek etymologizing runs rampant—just as it does between Latin and the medieval vernaculars.

The work divides into a general overview of etymological practice before Vergil, a survey and analysis of various techniques and features of etymological wordplay (such as paronomasia, allusion, glossing, framing, clustering, vertical juxtaposition, the use of kennings and allusion, etc.), a probing discussion of Vergil's own etymologizing strategies and their function, and then a detailed catalogue (pp. 115-229) of etymological wordplay in the *Aeneid*, the *Eclogues*, and the *Georgics*.

O'H. takes as a starting point the *Cratylus* of Plato, in which Stoic thinking is targeted, epitomized in part in the Pseudo-Augustine *de Dialectica* (or *Principia Dialecticae*), which offers four rules, as it were, of paronomasia (simplified here): similitudo, echoing, change of emphasis of transference, and the use of opposites. Several quick would be examples the collocation of *libro* and *liber*, *libri*; or the correlation of *Media* and *Medea*; *Latium* derived from its anagram *maluit* (see Ahl. 47); *Ascanius'* joke about eating their tables involves a pun on *mensa*, originally a round sacrificial cake..., and so forth.

The grand master of these curious puzzles, Callimachus, composed witty poetry that, writes O'H., "is characterized by attention to geography, ethnography, language, and aetiology, which includes the origins of customs, myths [...], and words and names." (23)

O'H. urges us to accept that Vergil embraced these strategies "... not in order to be pedantic or to contribute to his reader's knowledge of etymologies, but because he saw etymological wordplay as one effective

way of achieving some of the goals of his poems.” (103) Apart from the indispensable aesthetic pleasure they reward, and the profound wisdom they impart, learned poetic allusions significantly initialize the text as special and extraordinary non-fictional discourse.

My only reservation bears on a familiarity with Vergil manuscripts. In spite of a disclaimer that he is following Servian tradition, it is surprising to see O’H. begin the Catalogue with the *Aeneid*—which runs counter to hundreds of high medieval manuscripts that always present the *Eclogues* first, then the *Georgics*, and the *Aeneid* last (most youthful to most mature work, one presumes).

Carefully indexed, cross-referenced, and heavily annotated, the work will serve as a scholar’s resource for years to come. O’H.’s comprehensive introduction on etymologizing both by Vergil and his Alexandrian forerunners helps illuminate the phenomenon in light of the Roman poet’s style and authorial presence. He illuminates the allure of this (for me, at least) unpedantic creative-interpretive tendency in terms of Vergil’s own poetic agenda. In addition to complementing Irish medieval literary habits, the trend O’H. charts will be useful for medieval scholars as well, who will recognize the similar style of medieval commentaries, which involves a kind of lexico-syntactic associative echoing, at once ornamental and magical, that fits words together that iterate, alliterate or assonate in order to stress the mutual relationship of their nomen and essentia—phenomena seen in texts as diverse as *Beowulf*, Welsh alliterative poetry, the 14th century *Ovide moralise?*, even Jean-Paul Sartre’s *The Flies* (character’s names reflect their essence).

O’H. volume thus clarifies the aetiological propensity—highly prized in sophisticated Alexandrian poetry—which itself aimed to understand the present in light of the past.

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Grace M. Ledbetter, *Poetics Before Plato: Interpretation and Authority in Early Greek Theories of Poetry*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003, pp. 128.

Ledbetter publishes this book after Andrew Ford’s Princeton book *The Origins of Criticism* (2002). Ledbetter therefore is unaware of Ford’s views regarding the literary culture and poetic theory in classical Greece. In the bibliography Ledbetter mentions Ford’s Cornell book *Homer: The Poetry of the Past* (1992). Long ago Rene Wellek distinguished between two major modes of literary criticism—the linguistic mode and the fictional mode. The first mode treats poetry (or literature) as a specific mode (Mukarowsky’s defamiliarization) of linguistic use (or expression) and the second mode treats poetry as a form of fiction. The fictional mode obviously presupposes a developed philosophical worldview—views regarding the truth and falsehood in human experience. As it seems, this mode of criticism becomes dominant in Plato with a culminating resolution in Aristotle. The linguistic mode studies poetry as a specific linguistic expression, a specific skill of narration that marries style to content, exhibits harmony, proportion and ornaments in effecting a special emotional and cognitive response to the audience. This is what, Ford thinks, the origin of the way the Greeks appreciated the songs — “a public act of praise or blame upon a performance of song” (p. 3), however inadequate and unsatisfactory the mode may appear to a contemporary scholar or reader. Ford starts with the response of Penelope and Telemachus to the song of Phemius on the return of the Achaeans from Troy as narrated by Homer in the *Odyssey* book I. This response is considered the earliest literary criticism in Greek literature. But *poetics* or poetic theory as a self-conscious discipline offering systematic account of the nature of poetry, Ford asserts, starts with Aristotle. If that is so, then obviously poetics refers to the fictional mode of treating poetry as Aristotle’s definition rests on the mimetic mode of literary truth suspending the issue of language to the context of rhetorics. More than a decade before Ford, Lubomir Dolezel considered poetics as a cognitive activity that gathers knowledge about literature, whereas criticism, Dolezel asserts, is not merely blaming or praising literature. It’s an oxiological, value-assigning activity which integrates and re-integrates

literary works into the system of a culture. (1990: *Occidental Poetics: Tradition and Progress*). Dolezel further asserts that Aristotle is the founder of the epistemological principles of poetics.

Ledbetter broadens his view of poetics or poetic theory beyond both Dolzel and Ford—“systematic accounts of the nature of poetry in the most scientific terms available” (pp. 4-5)—the view, Ford finds available in the very Greek sources—the *poietike technē*. But Ledbetter thinks, much before Aristotle, not only Plato and Socrates even the poets like Homer, Herodotus and Pindar had their poetics or poetic theories (p. 1). He correlates Susan Sontag’s approach to art with Homeric Poetics: experience of art is an immediate sensual awareness unalloyed by interpretation (p. 3). But Ledbetter discovers a difference between Homer and Sontag in considering the former as an epistemologist who counts this immediate experience as a cognitive activity whereas the latter considers this experience purely sensual or erotic. Thus poetics as a cognitive science is much older than Aristotle’s poetics.

Ledbetter agrees with a large number of critics of classics that “Both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* supply Homer’s self-conscious reflections about the nature of the poet and poetic discourse by representing their heroes as poet-figures. ...Homer explicitly and repeatedly compares him (Odysseus [as well as Achilles]) to a bard.” (p. 2) Ledbetter correlates the readings of Homer by his two great predecessors, Erich Auerbach and C.S. Lewis, for introducing a theoretical perspective of Homer—“pure present” or immediacy of perceptual presentation (not representation) that avoids/evades all interpretation. Although Homer’s, as of Hesiod and of Pindar, medium of poetics is not a philosophical treatise, but poetry itself, his poetic theory can precisely be put as a discourse that provides a kind of divine knowledge that has the immediacy and plasma of sensory experience. (p. 3) Further, Homer advocates an affective theory of poetry, that is, poetry affects emotionally, as was Odysseus by the song of Demodocus. The Muses are endowed with divine knowledge, and they are therefore invoked by the poets to impart them this knowledge for communicating to the human. So, the poet does not have a direct divine vision; he is rather a medium of communication.

But Hesiod is a naturalist. His skepticism contrasts Homer’s supernaturalism (pp. 40 ff.). On the other hand, according to Pindar, poet is an interpreter—“muse, be my oracle, and I shall be your interpreter” (p. 62). Poetry, according to Pindar, interprets for its human audience a divine message that the poet receives as inspiration from the Muse. Whereas Pindar allows only a privileged poet for interpreting the Muse’s words, Socrates “provides a method that disciplines interpretation, makes it generally available to poetry’s audience, and prevents it from being a mere instrument of the poet’s authority.... Socratic poetics serves the more radical goal of denying that poetry’s real value stems from something that the poet himself, contributes.” (p. 78).

Ledbetter’s efforts in elaborating upon the core points of his arguments based on reading and analyzing the original texts are highly successful and exemplary of a genuine scholar. Unlike other scholars, he is not unnecessarily or rather boringly lingering on the technical details. The whole book is distinguished by its lucidity, readability and therefore remarkable for its accessibility to the general readers, apart from being a solid contribution to the specialized area of classical scholarship in literary theory and criticism.

Francis Sparshott, *The Future of Aesthetics*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998, pp.173.

The present book is based on the 1996 Professor Gilbert Ryle lectures established by the philosophy department of Trent University in 1977. A reader of the book is immediately attracted by the very content page of the book that arranges, in four chapters, the overlappings of the areas of knowledge that determine the future of aesthetics: I. Aesthetics and the Future of Philosophy, II. Philosophy and the Future of the University, III. The University and the Future of Civilization, IV. Civilization and the Future of Aesthetics. Philosophy, University, Civilization and Aesthetics are interdependent. One’s future depends upon the other’s future. The insight behind this correlation is most expected from an aristocratic contemporary thinker of Professor Sparshott’s status.

Aesthetics as a full-fledged, self-conscious discipline developed in the eighteenth century and has proceeded since then till date through different philosophers and philosophical schools through Kant. But its origin can be traced as early as in the classical traditions of Plato and Aristotle, in their axiological discourses, where they have discerned six factors that stimulate human action: “One does and chooses things either (i)

because one enjoys them, or (ii). because they confer some advantage on one, or (iii). because they are useful for some purpose, or (iv). because they are good of their kind. or in relation to the situation in hand, or (v). because they are lawful or right, or (vi). because they compel ones admiration, one finds them fine or beautiful.” (p.10).

Hedonistic (the pleasant), opportunistic (the profitable), pragmatic, the useful ethical(moral) (the good), legal (the sight) and appreciative (the beautiful) of the non-utilitarian type (such as appreciation or admiration of beauty) are six factors that determine the value schemes of human life. Among them the last one is the aesthetic one that signifies love for beauty for the sake of beauty itself without any ulterior purpose; and the sense of beauty means a sense of order artistic beauty being to a large extent contextualized. Therefore it is only in the arts that beauty is cultivated, and the immediate value of works of art does lie in their beauty. From the beginning of civilization man has been investing so much of money and attention because he has been realizing the truth that the arts sustain the fabric of society (in which, along with the arts, philosophy also flourish). Aesthetics as a wing of philosophy (Hegel preferred “philosophy of art” to “aesthetics”) “results from the confluence of three streams of thought... First is the status of philosophy among values; second is the logic of taste, the nature of the arguments used in literary and art criticism; and third is the part played in the economy of the mind by works of imagination.” (p. 5) Although inquiries of very different order, each with its own-dynamic, in practice their necessary relationship “both guarantees aesthetics and the philosophy of art a place in philosophy, and makes the subject abhorrent to tidy-minded philosophers.”

In modern times aesthetics evolves in Baumgarten’s inquiry as the science of perceptual experience that gains its philosophical status in Kant, and therefore. the future of asthetics and the six value schemes in which beauty finds its determinate meaning, deedly depends on the future of philosophy. (p. 15). Secondly, aesthetics as a full-fledged discipline requires the confluence of three different lines of inquiry as mentioned above. On the other hand philosophy is now a systematic discipline cultivated not in any market (Socrates), nor in any drawing room dialogues (Plato), nor in one’s individual intellectual exercise (Aristotle, Kant...), but in the universities—particularly Anglo-American (Ayer, Ryle, Wittgenstein, Russell, Whitehead, Derrida, Rorty...) In the course of this radical changes in the methodology of philosophical discourses, the very concept of philosophy and the natures of its functioning both depend upon the aims and objectives of the academic institutions that handle and patronize them. Subsequently, as these institutions are patronized by the programmes of civilizations, philosophy must accommodate itself to their programmes—political, economical ethnical, social. The age-old foundational queries gave way to the linguistic queries of the analytical school, which again gave way to edifying philosophy diversified now into its various branches of pragmatism, feminism, ethnic, problematic in political. economical. social factors under colonialism. Civilization is an unstable phenomenon. Since economy and administrative control play vital roles in its evolutionary process, nothing definite can be social about the modès of approval to the very concept of beauty and its contextualization in art theories and criticism. The growing branches of applied aesthetics and environmental aesthetics only exemplify the truth of these observations. Philosophy is just a fashion in the contemporary context. “Fashions in philosophy simply change, Quine or Adorno is the colour of the month.” (p. 23)

Sparshott sufficiently and systematically substantiates his basic observations that the future of aesthetics depends upon the future of philosophy. its future depending upon University, subsequently the future of University depending upon the nature of civilization. The language of the lectures evince his sincere probe into the problems, and the conclusions are convincing. The book provides an excellent guide for the readers who miss their ways in the bewilderment of ideas and slogans developed and raised during the last few decades. One can now confidently read the various branches of philosophical thinking as related to the arts. art criticism, literary theory as counted under a single and influential rubric “Cultural studies” as demanded and determined by rise and growth of different nationalistic programmes of the contemporary multicultural (?) civilization.

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