

Chatterjee rightly expounds towards the end of the book, the evolutionary approach “acts as a bridge between science and literary or cinema studies, integrating them both into the more general study of human experience.” (104) Chatterjee’s interdisciplinary approach enriches the book, offering a comprehensive understanding of narrative’s significance from multiple perspectives.

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THE ORIGINS OF KANT'S AESTHETICS. By Robert R. Clewis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. 265 pp.

What is beauty? Is it possible to have a coherent theory of aesthetics that holds well across time and space? While these questions have been quite tricky to address, scholars of aesthetics have turned to Immanuel Kant’s 1790 book *Critique of Judgment*, also known as the *Third Critique*, to anchor their questions about taste and pleasure along with beauty. And quite rightly so, for the debates about whether something is universally beautiful or inherently beautiful – to give one of the many debates about art and its interpretation – can all be traced to the way Kant formulated them in the 18th century. These debates are far from being anywhere close to being resolved and in fact, if anything, they have only got richer with time. Yet, there is no turning away from Kant’s legacy in the domain of theorising art. A new book, *The Origins of Kant's Aesthetics* by Robert R Clewis, approaches this legacy from a rather unique standpoint. Rather than interpret Kant for the contemporary expressions of art, it seeks to put together the different components of Kant’s thought by unpacking his argument along the lines of different binaries and shifts as visible in his writings. Clewis consults various kinds of materials such as letters, notes, and marginalia to document the complex nature of questions that Kant first articulated, questions that still baffle scholars and audiences of art.

The binaries or shifts that Clewis considers are: art/nature, intellectual beauty/free beauty, aesthetic perfection/aesthetic ideas, laws of intuition/free play, and aesthetic experience as freedom/morality. Each chapter begins with a specific example from art and finds its way to Kant’s observations about the analysis that that example lends itself to. With a consultation of a wide range of sources, Clewis investigates the influence of British and German philosophers on Kant. The resulting book is a dense history of aesthetics and a close reading of Kant’s philosophy at the same time – which makes it interesting to scholars who are quite familiar with Kant’s predecessors and contemporaries as well as with the work of scholars who specialise on Kant. However, it might prove to be a compass to young scholars as well who are beginning to navigate Kant’s philosophy.

Overall, the readers will be intrigued by Clewis’s framing of themes in Kant’s work. For example, do rules play a role in aesthetics? Is it helpful to see Kant as a formalist and in what way? How are beauty and goodness related? Is artistic genius about freedom or does it operate under some kind of constraints? How can one classify the different art forms? How is the sublime related to morality? Does beauty involve a theorisation of ugliness as well? Each of these questions has fascinating implications for readers and researchers in comparative literature for these questions are likely to enable further reflections on how beauty is processed differently in readers and writers, artists and audiences across time and space.

To focus on one example from the book, let us turn to the idea of normativity. Clewis begins with a review of a piece of music which ripped apart a performance. The review is by Edward Robinson and the review is of Maurice Ravel’s piece *Boléro*. Clewis finds the negative review to be an occasion to foreground the question of standards of aesthetic judgement: are they personal or are they univer-

sal? Dwelling upon this trajectory of normativity or universal validity of judgement in Kant's work as reflected in various pieces of marginalia, Clewis discovers two strands of thought or positions as held by Kant. The early notes from 1760s to 1787 indicate that Kant believed in some kind of empiricism. Taste, in this viewpoint, was also a more or less rationalist conception. Clewis quotes relevant excerpts from Kant and discusses the same with the help of Hume's (among others') influence on Kant. He takes the reader in and out of the work of different philosophers while blending his observations with their words:

... Hume recognizes that critics – even if they are well practiced, unbiased, and equipped with delicacy and strong sense – are bound to differ with each other. People may even disagree with their past selves. “At twenty, Ovid may be the favourite author; Horace at forty; and perhaps Tacitus at fifty.” The contingences of temperament and personality, personal experience, age, and culture will be reflected in a divergence of aesthetic judgments. (28)

The observation is that taste changes and Clewis tunes into Lord Kames, Baumgarten and Wolff, in addition to Burke and Hume, to discuss art criticism in terms of taste. But he also turns to Kant's notes to argue that Kant synthesised the views of these British and German thinkers to arrive at his own unique position, that of 'sensible comprehension': the idea that the beautiful facilitates sensible comprehension according to the laws of intuitive cognition or sensibility. In the process of explaining this theme within Kant's thought on normativity of judgement, Clewis puts together quotes from dozens of sources. While one may not necessarily grasp where every source informing Kant's views intersects with the others and with Kant, reading it all for all the themes Clewis chooses as his schema is a worthy exercise.

As Clewis articulates it very explicitly, the intense handling and attempt at reconstruction of how Kant arrived at his thoughts – or rather oscillated between extreme positions – has a very clear three-fold agenda. One is that Kant should be seen as 'full of inner tensions' thanks to the fact that he borrowed from various sources. Two, the *Third Critique* – a text that most scholars of aesthetics turn to for ideas and first principles in general – should not be seen as the gospel truth; indeed, reading it in the light of the marginalia, as Clewis does, might turn out to be a far more fulfilling exercise. And three, these complexities of influence and shifts or binaries in Kant's thought must alert scholars to the fact that Kant cannot be assumed to have a fixed position and applied unthinkingly to critique.

Thus, Clewis's monograph needs to be read for its innovative practice of turning a work of art theory into a text in itself that needs to be supplemented with a number of other sources rather than being taken for granted. More importantly, in the way it puts together the various voices from British and German traditions, it is a work of comparative aesthetics in itself.

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THE WORLD IN WORDS: TRAVEL WRITING AND THE GLOBAL IMAGINATION IN MUSLIM SOUTH ASIA. By Daniel Joseph Majchrowicz. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. 284 pp.

The book *The World in Words* takes its readers on a fascinating expedition, by examining the importance of travel writing in Muslim South Asia through a historical analysis lens. Daniel Majchrowicz, probes the genre of Urdu travel writing during the time period of 1840 to 1990, providing facts about the past and an ongoing historical documentation of how Urdu speakers communicated with the world. The author begins his work by talking about the emergence of Urdu