REVIEWS OF BOOKS

Genres littéraires en Inde. Edited by NALINI BALBIR. URA 1058, Université de Paris III/CNRS. Paris: PRESSES DE LA SORBONNE NOUVELLE, 1994. Pp. 426. FF 180.

This collection consists of fifteen essays that, with markedly varying degrees of specialization and sense of purpose, describe certain forms that texts have taken in South Asia. "*Littéraire*" here does not mean "literary" but rather something like textualized; only half of the essays are concerned with expressive forms that a contemporary reader would call "literary." This distinction, however, is never quite clarified in the book. The inaugural chapter on genres in general in fact conceives of them exclusively in terms of *belles-lettres*. Basic questions tied to the definitional problem of the "literary" in the narrower sense—what has been thought in South Asia to distinguish literature from other forms of language use, who has been authorized to decide which is which, how might this authority have been contested over time—are nowhere thematized. As for the logic that governs what genres and languages are selected for analysis, it is not described and cannot be inferred from the essays themselves. One soon enough realizes that this is not a handbook in any sense; one cannot look up, say, the Bengali *maṅgalkāvya* or old Kannada *campū* (or the Sanskrit *mahākāvya*, for that matter) and find any historical account or structural description. What we have instead is an apparently chance assemblage of topics, those that a group of scholars (codenamed "URA 1058" at the National Center for Scientific Research) happened to be working on when the book was conceived.

Marie-Claude Porcher's opening essay offers some general reflections on genres. If we are to perceive, describe, even name Indian genres, so we're told, we have first to return to our own tradition of thinking theater and poetry. But it is not clear to me why this need be so, or indeed, who "we" are. The organizing question seems to be whether European genres are universal, so we get several pages on Plato and Aristotle and the baggage we carry with us from them to any foreign literature. When we finally get to "Indian" categories we are given exclusively the definitions produced in Sanskrit texts (with an elementary discussion of basic dichotomies: *śāstra/kāvya*, *śravya/dṛśya*, the hierarchy of poetry types in *Dhvanyāloka*, *pratibhā*, and—lest any Indological cliché be omitted—*śoka/śloka*). Her main argument is that "in our tradition" the theory of genres is constitutive of poetry, whereas the Indian aesthetic is concerned in the first instance with poetic creation. I don't know that the latter statement quite captures the matter. It certainly is the case that for early South Asian, or at least Sanskrit, literary theory, genres play nothing like their role in Aristotelian thought. They are not held to constitute fundamentally different species of literary experience. In Sanskrit theory all genres equally exemplify what is held to be distinctive about "literature"—and this is not, I think, the character of "poetic creation" but the powers and mysteries of language. Although a permanent debate marked the development of *alaṃkāraśāstra* in its attempts to determine the nature of the very subject of its knowledge—to determine what, in fact, poetry is—what remained constant was concern with the minimal structure of literary experience: the individual verse and its rhetorical and aesthetic characteristics. Whether the verse is "dramatic," "lyric" (*muktaka*), "courtly epic" (*mahākāvya*), is secondary; in fact, such distinctions are often impossible to make, as are distinctions in the aesthetic impact of any of them as whole works.[1] To what

[1] Partly for this reason it is misleading to assert that literary critics in Sanskrit unanimously recognize the primacy of drama over other genres. This is of course the position argued by Abhinavagupta and his teacher (cf. for example his commentary on *Nāṭyaśāstra* 6.33), but precisely as such it presupposes an alternative assessment. One such is expressed by Bhoja: "It is difficult to specify what precisely this aesthetic response [*rasa*] is, since it is knowable only experientially, and isn't universally accessible. When displayed [*pradarśyamāna*] by skilled actors in correctly performed dramatic representations [*abhinaya*] it can be grasped by spectators; when properly declaimed [*ākhyāyamāna*] by great poets in their compositions it can become accessible to the minds of the learned. However [there is a difference in these two modes of aesthetic experience:] things are not so sweetly relished when they are actually perceived as they are when cognized through the language of masters of language. . . . Therefore we prize poets far more than actors, and poetry more than dramatic representations" (pp. 5–6 of the forthcoming edition of the Sanskrit text of *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* in the Harvard Oriental Series; the translation is mine, as are those from the French of *Genres*).

degree this theory is adequate to literary realities, however, is another question altogether.

The first of the substantive essays in the book, and one of the more ambitious, is that of Georges-Jean Pinault on the genre of the eulogy in Vedic hymns. The problem he explores—can one make a list of terms designating "poem" or "poetry" in Vedic?—might have been usefully complicated by some cultural-historical reflection, since it begs a number of important questions about what "poetry" is. (Before modernity Indians strictly differentiated Vedic hymnology from what, by the second or first century, they were calling *kāvya* or *sāhitya*; and correlatively they eschewed entirely its genre terminology, which disappears almost without trace from the literary culture in the post-Vedic period.) What is especially valuable in the essay is the collection of passages from the *Ṛgveda* referring to what appear to be different aspects of language usage. Pinault however wants to argue for the existence of a definite, totalizing set; indeed, he thinks he has identified a traditional list of six functions in *ṚV* 6.38.3–4: *ukthá-*, *stóma-* (or *gíraḥ*), *bráhma*, *arká-*, *mánman-* (or *dhī́-*), plus *ṛtá*, which is supposed to be present by a series of allusions. Although it is not easy to specify the differentia of these items from within the Vedic texts themselves, Pinault believes these six can be exactly correlated with the Jakobsonian schema of linguistic functions, also six in number (thus Jakobson's "expressive function" is equated with *dhī́-*, his "conative function" with *stóma-*, etc.). We may well understand how Molière's Jourdain (a case dear to Jakobson) spoke prose without knowing it. But Vedic seers speaking Prague linguistics without their knowing it is structuralism at its most dubious: that form of thought that always and everywhere finds what it's looking for.

The major part of the book (from which, for some reason, Pinault's essay is excluded) consists of two parts, dividing up the world of "literary genres in India" into the "didactic" and "narrative." The former is a grab-bag of studies that in the main consists of uninspired and sometimes trivializing formal description.

Colette Caillat's essay on the genre of *sūtra* among the Jainas is largely a series of substantiations of Renou's 1963 article on *sūtra* style. Some general considerations on the form of the texts (commencement formulae—beginning of sūtras with *suyaṃ me*, etc.—and closure formulae), metarules (*paribhāṣā*), intertextual referencing, numerical (or numerological) characteristics, and syntactic features are offered in more or less catalogue fashion. This is all fine but there is no argument to the analysis and no indication of what conceptual or pragmatic purpose this detailed knowledge is assembled to subserve. Edith Nolot's comparison of the *Suttavibhaṅga* and the *Bhikṣuṇī-prātimokṣavibhaṅga*, for its part, is conceptually a reprise of Hermann Oldenberg's article of 1912, with rather simple grammatical, formal, and stylistic observations wrapped around large chunks of citation. In Jean Fezas's analysis of the form of the *Arthaśāstra* and the *Kāmasūtra*, one of the great texts of world culture elicits little more than observations on the enumeration of chapters and the distribution and function of verses, punctuated by such reflection as this: "If we examine the relation between the table of contents and the rest of the [*Arthaśāstra*], we can see that the treatise is effectively divided into books. Each of these books is concerned with a specific subject. . . . Each book has its own title and number, which is found in the table of contents as well as in the colophons marking the end of each chapter." A piece by Antonella Comba on the *tantrayuktis*—knowledge of which, we are told, is indispensable, especially to Westerners, for reading a technical Sanskrit text—provides nothing remotely approaching a usable exposition of the topic. Instead we get a discussion of the minor medical texts the author has selected as sources, and a definition of one element of the *tantrayuktis*, *adhikaraṇa*, wherein her research reveals the fact that Indian scientific texts are divided up into sections of different subject matter ("thus the *adhikaraṇa* . . . fills the function of our chapter headings"). By this point one begins to wonder if the book isn't a kind of parody of Indological trivialization. The essay of Claudine Bautze-Picron, however, brings us back to substantial scholarship with a contribution that traces agreement between sculptural program and textual prescription in the ritual and meditative works of Vajrayāna Buddhism known as *sādhanamālā*. And Lyne Bansat-Boudon offers a useful, lightly historicized differentiation of the terms *nāṭya*, *nṛtta*, and *nṛtya*,[2] though one may well ask whether the few pages on theater in the book should be devoted to tracing the genealogy of communicative dance-forms, and none to the categories of the *daśarūpaka* itself.

The "Forms of Narrative Genre" is a far more satisfying section, in large part because of the contribution of Nalini Balbir, whose major essay on the forms and terminology of ancient Jaina narratives is the most valuable piece in the book. This demonstrates very wide and authoritative reading in Jaina narrative traditions, great thoroughness (even if her taxonomy of Jaina taxonomies is sometimes mechanical, and Jaina), and substantial and pertinent examples in translation. Particularly noteworthy is her analysis of the Jaina parable, and her suggestion that this is a form of thought especially common in oppositional as opposed to dominant discourses (thus its relative rarity in "classical Hinduism") is intriguing and valuable. It is the first glimmer in the book of the idea that there may be some formative relationship between literary genre and the practices of the social world.[3] The whole question of the lived

[2] How her analysis differs from that of K. M. Varma (*Nāṭya, Nṛtta and Nṛtya, their Meaning and Relation*, 1957) I cannot say, since Varma's work is not available to me.

[3] Pierre Bourdieu has recently offered an important argument on the correspondence between the "hierarchy of positions" in

and the fictive as genre differentia, however, that Balbir almost wants to see as a Jaina invention, requires more detailed and theoretically nuanced reconsideration.[4]

This holds true for the essay that purports to "define the allegorical genre in India," contributed by Jean-Pierre Osier. Basing himself largely on a minor Jaina tale, the *Madanaparājaya*, with brief and predictable reference to *Prabodhacandrodaya*, the author suggests that, in distinction to Western allegory, the code of the discourse in Indian allegory must be known in advance; this is, therefore, an initiant's genre. What it does for the initiant that other, doctrinal, texts do not do, is unclear; it appears to function as some sort of mnemonic, though it is hard to see how this works for Kṛṣṇamiśra's (or Aśvaghoṣa's) drama. But the essay is flawed in a number of ways, largely because a too-narrow definition of allegory and the author's limited reading in South Asian literatures prevent him from grasping the depth of the problem he has taken on.

For example, we are told that "it does not seem to be the case that allegoresis existed in India as a hermeneutic process permitting the solution of aporias in a problematic or awkward text, in order to ascend from carnal literality to the sublime and dizzying heights of a symbolic sense naturally hidden . . . ," etc. This will come as news to readers of a wide variety of commentaries, of which Ravicandra on *Amaruśataka* is only one of the sillier, if notorious, examples. Far more serious and important is a tradition like that of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas (especially the sixteenth-century scholar Govindarāja), who worked out a thoroughgoing allegoresis for the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. The author's stipulative definition ("attributing the behavior of living beings to abstractions"), moreover, restricts attention to an exiguous body of often second-rate material and excludes from consideration a whole range of important texts from the Vaiṣṇava tradition (from *Viṣṇupurāṇa* 5 to *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 10 to *Gītagovinda*, each with its different kind of built-in interpretations), to the historical *kāvya* (as in Gauḍa Abhinanda's *Rāmacarita*) or better the historical *campū* as we have it in old Kannada (in Pampa's great work, for instance, Arjuna *stands for* Arikesarī of Vēmulavāḍa), the *premākhyān* literature, especially *Madhumālatī* or *Padmāvat* (with their own full-blown Sufi exegeses), or even shastric texts like *Kāvyamīmāṃsā* (the marriage of Kāvyapuruṣa and Sāhityavidyā). It is puzzling, too, that nothing is said about the gap between literary theory and practice here: although one purpose of the book, as the editor puts it, is to show "how at every epoch [Indian] civilization appealed to reflection and founded on theory its literary and artistic creation," there never was any critical reflection on the allegorical mode. Serious commentators on *Prabodhacandrodaya* like Nāṇḍillagopa make no mention of the fact that the play they are reading is an allegory; there doesn't even seem to be a special term for it in Sanskrit critical discourse.

Marie-Jeanne Boistard's discussion of the genre ambiguities of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* traditions is the one essay to raise, if only indirectly, the fundamental question: what is the point of genre analysis anyway? The *Yogavāsiṣṭha* may share some features with, and actually claim recognition as, *śāstra*, but is this kind of internal or emic account adequate? And adequate for whom? The author finds it necessary to go beyond the text's shastric features to focus on its narrative since "it is precisely the narrative element . . . that a Westerner is tempted to retain by preference in order to give a genre definition to the text, since we have no literary category equivalent to 'śāstra'." But to whom is it granted "to give a genre definition"?

When we seek to understand a genre within another's tradition, we are seeking to understand, besides the generative matrix it presents to writers, the readerly expectations it provokes. Whatever else it may be, a genre identification is a map for reading in a textual maze where form has its own meaning; it predisposes an audience to decide whether, for example, the text belongs to the genus that makes truth-claims about the world, has deontological purposes, or is above all self-referential (to use Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka's categories, *arthapradhāna*, *śabdapradhāna*, *uktipradhāna*). And this identification—which, by the way, can change in time or be programmatically resisted, as the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* or the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* itself, respectively, shows—is an essential prior move for those of us who seek historical-anthropological knowledge of South Asia. We want to know what tenth-century Kashmiris, prompted by genre indices (and which indices), expected when hearing or reading the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*. We cannot orient ourselves to the text without first understanding how such readers oriented themselves —unless we want to read in a way no Indian ever did. Such reading is of course not illicit; on the contrary, it is ultimately necessary insofar as texts are also forms of ideology, and ideology is by

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the literary field, such as that of genres and styles, and the "hierarchy of social origins," cf. *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1993).

[4] Cf. p. 224. I have similar difficulties with Porcher, who finds the genre distinctions between the *kathā* and the *ākhyāyikā* "unconvincing." The point is not whether these categories are convincing or not, but rather to recognize and make sense of the fact that people in early India (like Amarasiṃha 1.6.5, 7, and his commentators) were thinking about the very different relationships texts could have with the world outside the text. Some texts can be *upalabdhārthā* (Kohala rewrites this as *paraṃparāśraya*), whereas others are *prabandhakalpanā* (Bhānujī Dīkṣita glosses this as *stokasatyā*); the distinction of course also underwrites the difference between *nāṭaka* and *prakaraṇa*. Even more complicated does the matter become later, as in the twelfth century when, *pace* Ānanda's common-sense position ("A poet has no need to carry out a mere chronicle of events. That is a task accomplished by the historian"), historians begin to write *kāvya*.

definition precisely what is occluded from those subject to it. Yet here, too, we cannot possibly know what early readers could not see until we know what they did see, and in this sense the prior recuperation of their historical reading practices is a theoretical necessity of scholarship.

Less concerned with genre is the essay of Françoise Mallison on hagiographies in medieval western India. The author wants to position these within a long tradition of Sanskrit biographies of the "grands docteurs" of the Vedanta; in fact, the latter are largely a post-Vijayanagar invention.[5] And surely it is an overstatement to say that "along with the religious hymns (*pada*), the biographies of saints (*caritra*) . . . are the only religious and literary—the only cultural—expression of the greater part of a population that does not have access to the learned culture." What about the *bāt* or the *rāso*, what about the Lorik-Cāndā tales? Neither objection, admittedly, diminishes the importance of the hagiographies, for which the author provides a brief discussion of some representative examples and their salient characteristics. Rather more interest is shown in the question of their historicity, and their usefulness for an account of medieval "mentalities," though what this has to do with hagiographies as a specific genre is not self-evident.

The final section of the book is devoted to work on Tamil literature: a brief account by Jean-Luc Chevillard on citations of Tamil literature in a fourteenth-century commentator on grammar (giving us some sense of medieval canonicity), a literary appreciation by Chantal Delamourd of the contemporary short-story writer, Vannadhasan, and—next to Balbir's the most valuable piece in the book—François Gros on the role of commentary in reading the third book of the *Tirukkuṛaḷ*. We are shown that literary commentary, which seems ubiquitous in India, does indeed have a history; the first known Tamil commentary devoted to an exclusively literary work does not appear before the tenth century.[6] Gros demonstrates how commentarial reading practices in Tamil change over time—in this instance, how the earlier and dominant analysis of the work according to the schema of *tiṇai* became an "obsolescent poetics" in the eyes of a thirteenth-century Sanskritizing commentator from Kāñcīpuram (Parimēlaḻakar), who deploys in his interpretation the conceptual paradigm of the early eleventh-century Sanskrit critic, Bhojarāja. Above all, Gros rightly stresses the necessity of mastering the commentarial tradition as a "grid for pertinent reading," while at the same time demonstrating that a pertinent reading is one that remains historically and critically astute.

Genres littéraires en Inde is, thus, a very mixed, but finally disappointing, offering. It purports to be "a new type of study in Indology," presumably because it is a "collective" work. But in fact it's only a collection, and a rather haphazard one at that. The level of specificity and detail in the different articles, and assumptions about the reader's knowledge, vary widely. Some sections are general and clearly written for outsiders, others present a mass of formal and stylistic minutiae only a dedicated specialist would want to read. As for its conceptual foundations, I see almost no evidence of innovation; the work could easily have been published a century ago. "India" is still, as it was then, largely classical antiquity—Indo-Persian or Urdu genres, for example, receive no mention whatever. Religion is still the dominant organizing logic of its cultures, which are still locked within quarantined spaces rather than defining themselves by interaction. Europe is still the point of scholarly departure, and a basically untheorized Europe.[7] The world of old India is still untouched by historical change—genres are throughout conceived of as static. Indology is still as indifferent as ever to literary studies outside South Asia, which have played little role in sharpening the thinking of these essays; their dominant conceptual approach is undiluted formalism and descriptivism. This last feature is especially paradoxical in a book published from the city where, thanks to a generation of work from Barthes to Bourdieu, the very sense of what it means to study literary texts has been transformed in our time.[8]

Most sorely missed is what one most expects in a collection of materials selected not for coverage but because people have chosen to work on them: there is hardly anything in the way

[5] Jonathan Lewis Bader, "Conquest of the Four Quarters: Traditional Accounts of the Life of Śaṅkara" (Ph. D. diss., Australian National University, 1991).

[6] The rise and development of the commentarial tradition on Sanskrit *kāvya* may not have a much longer history, though this is something I continue to explore. (Durvinīta's seventh-century exposition of *Kirātārjunīya* 15 aside, this seems to begin with the immediate predecessors of Vallabha in tenth-century Kashmir.) Other classicizing traditions, such as old Kannada, stimulated no commentarial tradition whatever, the reasons for which, again, await research.

[7] India is said to lack certain European genres, for example "history as such" ("l'histoire . . . en tant que telle"). What in the world is "history as such"?

[8] For Bourdieu, in some ways the scholar making the most radical shift in perspective, see note 3 and, above all, *Les Règles de l'art* (Paris: Libre Examen, 1992). Such work may not be to the taste of every philologist, especially since some of these theorists, notably Foucault and Derrida, argue that the very idea of genre as a hermeneutic principle is either discredited or futile. But *Genres littéraires* ignores even work that has serious philological roots, for example, the oeuvre of the Latinist Gian Biagio Conte (e.g., *Genres and Readers* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1994; original Italian ed. 1991]), or that of the medievalist Hans Robert Jauss (e.g., *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* [Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1982; original German ed. 1972; French ed. 1978]).

of discovery, whether of new texts, new connections between texts, or new ways of understanding texts. There is little here to prompt us to rethink the inside of Indian texts—how they argue, how they represent, how they perceive the world, how they in turn constitute perceptions of the world. And little to prompt us to rethink their outside. We hear nothing about the historical dynamism that has marked Indian literary cultures, nothing about such defining issues as *language*—the great contests between transregional and regional languages that have shaped these cultures; how genres specific to cosmopolitan or vernacular idioms have participated in these contests, or how any of this relates to the social identities that were fundamentally at stake. And there is hardly any sense of the specific challenges we face or the excitement we can experience, studying the development of the most complex multicultural literary world before modernity. What the collection shows, on the contrary, is how far we have yet to go.

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Satī—The Blessing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India. Edited by JOHN S. HAWLEY. New York: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1994. Pp. 214. $15.95 (paper).

In September 1987, an eighteen-year-old widow named Roop Kanwar was cremated along with the corpse of her husband as a *satī* in a Sikar-district village in the state of Rajasthan. This was one of forty such cases reported in independent India since 1947. The South Asian Institute at Columbia University decided to investigate *satī* largely in its contemporary context, with the Roop Kanwar case as the pivot of the project. The book is the result. Two of the five articles—one by Paul Courtright on "The Iconographies of Sati" and one by Dorothy Figueira on "Sati in European Culture"—actually deal with the history, philosophy and religion of *satī*. Lindsey Harlan's "Perfection and Devotion: Sati Tradition in Rajasthan," Veena Oldenburg's "Feminist Responses," and Ashis Nandy's "The Public Debate on Roop Kanwar's Death" fuse scholarly discourse with items more commonly found in journalistic rhetoric. Comments on each of the articles are made by Vidya Dehejia, Robin Lewis, Karen Brown, and Ainslie Embree.

This reviewer wonders whether this project and the book serve any useful purpose. First of all, none in the present volume pays much attention to the wealth of material written on *satī* since it was declared a major epidemic in Bengal in the early 1800s. Secondly, instead of linking the present study with earlier studies as a means of justifying the project, the editor, Hawley, never quite explains why mature scholars are endeavoring to address themselves with so much passion to a practice that the British abolished in 1829 and which has virtually disappeared in all of India since—with the possible exception of Rajasthan where, according to Oldenburg, twenty-eight of the forty cases reported from 1947 on have taken place. Hawley and others try to compensate for this flaw, as it were, by an elaborate discussion of the semantics of *satī* in Hinduism and of the ethnography of temples dedicated to the goddess Satī. But in the last analysis, I fear, protesting widow-burning in India today is tantamount to denouncing, in the 1990s, Salem witch-burning.

This is not to deny that women today are the victims of abusive and criminal acts. Nor have we exhausted the historical possibilities of studying *satī* in Moghul or British times. Dehejia, commenting on Courtright's deep reverence for the "iconographies" of *satī*, comes closest of all in puncturing the balloon of ethereal, ahistorical and self-indulgent discourse which, in fact, is how *satī*—outside of the alleged murder of Roop Kanwar—is conceptualized throughout the volume. With refreshing historicity, Dehejia argues that *satī* is "by no means an eternal aspect of Indian culture; it has its limits, its points of historical genesis and decline" (p. 50). It was never a problem before 700 A.D. she says. Moreover, Akbar frowned upon its excesses; the British (Lord Bentinck) tried to put an end to it legally; and it has been implicitly understood to be a criminal act by the government of independent India. Dehejia also raises the interesting possibility that the act of *satī* was mostly confined to the warrior caste, which might explain why it has died hard in Rajasthan.

Oldenburg's feminist-inspired essay is the least surprising, since she has taken on the legion of Rajasthani men of every caste and occupation who profited in any way from Roop Kanwar's murder. The Rajput men sacrificed her to restore "chivalric traditions"; Marwari businessmen helped her perpetuate the custom for "status and power and . . . wealth"; and the Brahmins are held responsible "for lending an air of legitimacy to the ethos of sati as a way to bolster their own dwindling importance in the modern world" (p. 104).

Nandy, a psycho-historian who had earlier researched *satī* in Bengal for a bi-centenary symposium on Rammohun Roy in 1972, attributes "widow-burning," then and now, to Westernization and the Westernized elites who castigate the Hindu tradition for a distorted practice outsiders created. When 300,000 people recently went to Roop Kanwar's village on pilgrimage to demonstrate their support for the Hindu rite of *satī*, India's xenophiles groaned once more at yet another display of obscene horror in popular Hinduism. For Nandy, the fact that the people journeyed to Rajasthan with "real faith" and without profit to themselves "tells Westernized Indians something they do not like to hear" (p. 145). According to Nandy, *satī* today is not the *satī* of yesteryear. Do we not realize that "the original