

RE-MARKINGS

Vol. 2 No. 2 September 2003

E. Ethelbert Miller

G.V. Desani

Gurdial Singh

Raja Rao

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

Dharmavir Bharati

**Indo-Anglian
Women Novelists**

Douglas Barbour

Post-Colonial Theory

**&
Special Section on**

John Steinbeck

**CHIEF EDITOR : NIBIR K. GHOSH
EDITOR : A. KARUNAKER**

RE-MARKINGS

Vol. 2 No. 2 September 2003

ISSN 0972-611X

Re-Markings, a biannual journal of English Letters aims at providing a healthy forum for scholarly and authoritative views on broad socio-political and cultural issues of human import as evidenced in literature, art, television, cinema and journalism with special emphasis on New Literatures in English including translations and creative excursions

Chief Editor
Nibir K. Ghosh

Editor
A. Karunaker

ISSN 0972-611X

Articles and research papers for publication in *Re-Markings* must conform to the *M.L.A. style sheet* and should not exceed 3000 words. Manuscripts should preferably be sent on floppy disk in text format along with a hard copy to the Chief Editor/Editor or through e-mail attachment to remarkings@hotmail.com.

Chief Editor

Nibir K. Ghosh,
68 New Idgah Colony,
Agra-282001, U.P. (INDIA).
Telephone : +91 562 2420330, 2420116.
e-mail : ghoshnk@hotmail.com

Editor

A. Karunaker,
Flat No. D-3 III Floor,
Padmavati Paradise,
Street No. 8, Taranaka,
Secunderabad-500017.
Tel: +91 40 27001349
e-mail : karunakeredrem@hotmail.com

Published by :
Sumita Ghosh

Cover design : Sundeep Arora
e-mail : sundeep_arora@hotmail.com

Printed at : Aydee Offset, Agra

Copyright © : Nibir K. Ghosh

Subscription Rates:

Single Copy : Rs.100 US \$15 UK £10
Annual (2 Issues) : Rs.200 US \$30 UK £20
Three Years (6 Issues) : Rs.500 US \$75 UK £50
(postage extra for registered Book-Post.)

Subscription may be sent by Money Order/ Demand Draft to

RE-MARKINGS
68 New Idgah Colony,
Agra-282001, U.P. (INDIA).

EDITORIAL

“Come September !” The epithet easily helps one to joyfully recall from down the memory lane that lilting tune from Billy Vauhn and His Orchestra which set the hearts and feet of the young and the old alike dancing with happiness and cheer. All that seems long ago. 11 September, 2001 changed all that. The catastrophe that reduced the mighty twin towers of the World Trade Centre to mere fragments of etherised memory in the twinkling of an eye showed the seamy side of inhuman ingenuity to which even the sky seems no limit. April is no longer ‘the cruellest month’. September has forged ahead with its dead weight of ‘broken images’ spilled the world over. In an age of globalization nothing can remain neutral. Even terrorism has turned global.

In a world already beleaguered with fanaticism and violence where the emphasis is on the adage: ‘good fences make good neighbours’ and where instant justifications are rendered in the name of either justice or counter-revolutionary retaliation, there must be those countless mortals who would like to rise and proclaim: ‘Something there is that doesn’t love a wall, / that wants it down’. Such mortals, however, prefer to remain inert and waiting like the ‘winged seeds’ in Shelley’s ode for the clarion call of the West Wind to awaken them from their slumber.

Nearly two centuries ago, Shelley, in a spirit of intense idealism had referred to the poets as “the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present;” and went on to call them “the unacknowledged legislators of the world” (‘A Defence of Poetry’). In our own time, another poet-prophet, W.H. Auden, disillusioned with the inefficacy of his poetic beliefs to make the world a better place to live in, stated in a spirit of calm resignation, “Poetry makes nothing happen...it survives,/ A way of happening, a mouth.” (‘In Memory of W.B. Yeats’). Both seem to be extreme viewpoints. For global calamities and cataclysms require to be addressed not from the narrow confines of ideas and ideologies but from the vantage point of the healing fountain of human compassion which literature alone can make perennial. The

power of art, like the power of the West Wind, to awaken, motivate and inspire people, springs from the mind and soul of those sensitive mortals who have reflected in a spirit of calm contemplation on the need to strike a perfect poise between external conflict and inward peace. All this seemed, undoubtedly, a mere idealistic notion until very recently when I had the sheer fortune of discussing this dichotomy--related to the role and function of art and artists in the context of the contemporary world--with one of the most persuasive voice in Afro-American writing today i.e. Charles Richard Johnson. I came across a statement by him in the 'Foreword' to his epoch-making book *Being and Race* (1988) : "I see taking form on the horizon of contemporary practice, a fiction of increasing artistic and intellectual generosity, one that enables us as a people—as a culture—to move from narrow complaint to broad celebration."

I really wondered how a writer, with four centuries of slavery embedded in his consciousness, could actually make his creativity move from 'narrow complaint to broad celebration'. Slightly apprehensive of his reaction, I nevertheless mustered the courage to write and ask him what he actually meant by the above statement. His prompt response (the text of which is printed on the back cover of the present issue of *Re-Markings*) sheds ample light on how the 'winged seeds' that lie dormant for ages can evolve into a process of continual renewal despite apocalypses. In sharing with the readers and friends of *Re-Markings* what the magnanimous Charles Johnson has so unhesitatingly shared with me, I feel optimistic that the lovers of sweetness and light will not dread the arrival of another September.

Nibir K. Ghosh

Chief Editor

CONTENTS

*FATHERING WORDS AND HONORING FAMILY:
E. ETHELBERT MILLER'S FIRST MEMOIR*
Julia Galbus / 7

IN A THICK AND RICH SOIL FOR WRITERS:
AN INTERVIEW WITH DOUGLAS BARBOUR
Anisur Rahman / 20

DESANI'S *HATTERR*: CROSSING THRESHOLDS
Rashmi Tikku / 32

FEMINISM INCORPORATED:
THE CONSTRUCTION OF RESISTANT FEMALE
SUBJECTS IN TWO LITERARY TEXTS
Rajesh Kumar Sharma / 41

NATIVISM IN GURDIAL SINGH'S *PARSA*
V.V.B. Rama Rao / 52

THE EMERGENT FEMININE PSYCHE IN INDIAN WOMEN
NOVELISTS WRITING IN ENGLISH
Arati Biswal / 59

MADELEINE'S METAMORPHOSIS AND BUDDHISM:
RAJA RAO'S *THE SERPENT AND THE ROPE*
Akhileshwar Thakur / 67

SPECIAL SECTION ON JOHN STEINBECK

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL STEINBECK: A NEW MILLENNIUM
PERSPECTIVE - *OPENING REMARKS*
D.M. Shende / 72

DIALOGISTIC STRATEGIES IN STEINBECK'S
CANNERY ROW NOVELS
P. Balaswamy / 75

LANDSCAPE OF MORAL WASTELAND:

DIALECTICS OF ANTI-MATERIALISM IN
THE NOVELS OF JOHN STEINBECK
S.S. Prabhakar Rao / 88

IDEOLOGY AND BEYOND: A STUDY OF
STEINBECK'S *IN DUBIOUS BATTLE*
Nibir K. Ghosh / 94

THE IMPACT OF BUDDHISM ON
JOHN STEINBECK'S *THE PEARL*
M. A. Nare / 105

THE GRAPES OF WRATH: ART AND IDEOLOGY
Shoma Sen / 111

POETRY

MY NEIGHBOUR'S SON
Krishna Bose / 118

HAIKU
R.K. Singh / 119

REVIEW ESSAY

POSTCOLONIAL THEORY & AMERICAN CULTURE
Tej N. Dhar / 120

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Bhupendra Hooja / 126

**FATHERING WORDS AND HONORING FAMILY:
E. ETHELBERT MILLER'S FIRST MEMOIR**

Julia Galbus

In 2000, Washington D.C. poet and literary activist E. Ethelbert Miller (b. 1950) quietly published a memoir, *Fathering Words: The Making of An African American Writer*, with little supporting fanfare from the publisher, St. Martin's Press. On April 7, 2003, The Washington D.C. public library system selected *Fathering Words* for its second annual DC Reads program, a national campaign that promotes literacy through books matched to local communities. The choice of *Fathering Words* signals a public acknowledgement that this autobiography about becoming a black writer appeals to a general urban audience. Contemporary autobiography demonstrates the willingness of black writers "to continue to ground personal experience in historical and social circumstances common to other black lives, but to do so increasingly in an unmistakable, individual voice activated through novelistic strategies of discourse" (Stone, "After"187).

How does a person, any person, create a life and know it's the right choice? Here's how it happens for Ethelbert Miller:

One night a poem comes to me. Words. Revelations. In the beginning I was a small boy standing on a corner in the Bronx waiting for my father. The sky is gray. I start praying. Suddenly words are escorting me across the street. I reach the other side, proud of what I've done. I can write. My prayers are songs. I can make music. I can give color to the world. This is my life. This is my gift (67).

Writing also has an origin in family history. Speaking of his father, Miller explains, "I became a writer because he lived a quiet life and my mother was afraid for us to speak, to draw attention to ourselves, to walk out in to the world and perhaps cross a street or a sea as wide as memory" (175).

- **Dr. Julia Galbus** is an Associate Professor of English and the Director of the Humanities Program at the University of Southern Indiana in Evansville. U.S.A.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

IN A THICK AND RICH SOIL FOR WRITERS: AN INTERVIEW WITH DOUGLAS BARBOUR

Anisur Rahman

Poet, critic, editor, reviewer, Douglas Barbour (b.1940), is a Professor of English at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada. He teaches poetry and poetics, creative writing, Canadian literature, and Science Fiction (for a change), and practices a kind of poetry that tests the strange limits of sound and form. His critical works on his contemporaries, Michael Ondaatje, Daphne Marlatt, bpNichol, John Newlove, underline his appreciation for the kind of writing that is different, and by which he also seeks his own identity as a writer. 'One of Canada's finest poets,' Douglas Barbour has chosen an offbeat poetics for himself 'to unite language, landscape and body', in order to evolve a new code of writing. He has ten collections of poems to his credit. Poems selected by Robert Kroetsch and Smaro Kamboureli, and put together in Visible Visions (NeWest Press), won him the Stephan Stephanson award for poetry in 1984. In 1999, he co-edited the sound poetry CD, Carnivocal, with Stephen Scobie. His collection, Fragmenting Body etc.(NeWest Press), published in 2000, that brought him good critical acclaim, is 'a kind of serial poem, a sequence based on imaginative collaboration with the movements of language'. Ghazal, the quintessential poetry of love in the East, has caught Barbour's imagination of late, as it has caught the fancy of many other North American poets. A substantial number of them, which he calls his 'breath ghazals', have appeared in Breath Takes (Wolsac & Wynn). Barbour is a widely published poet and has read/performed his poetry internationally. In this face-to-face interview Douglas Barbour talks to Anisur Rehman and shares his major concerns and priorities regarding life in general and poetry in particular.

AR: You have several identities: you are a poet, a critic, an academic, a publisher, a promoter of good taste. Do you find these roles going well with you, or is there something that you find difficult to negotiate with?

DB: It is quite possible to do all that as an academic in this country. Here at the University of Alberta creative work is accepted and encouraged. I've never felt any tension

between the creative and the critical writer. Teaching supports creative work, but administration doesn't. When in administration, I couldn't do much. The language in administration is so antithetical to poetry. Even to the criticism of it. My tendency as a critic of contemporary work is to write on what I like. Reading and writing is exciting for me; it is something that both exhilarates and provokes.

AR: You seem to be essentially concerned with the creation of the Canadian canon, its identification and its strengthening. This comes out in all your collections of poems and your criticism. Is it an exercise that limits your role as a poet?

DB: Oh, I'm not consciously a canon maker. Indeed, like many writers and critics in Western Canada, I've resisted canonization from the Centre--Ontario. I think I've attempted to provide a supplement to the central Canadian canon. I often wrote about authors who were on the margins. But, then, in the 70s, it was all still quite new, and many writers were just beginning to make a reputation for themselves. I was lucky in that I was able to read widely and make my own choice of writers on the Canadian scene. I was especially lucky in the 80s that *Quarry* allowed me to do that. I was able to write lengthy surveys, and tended to seek out what was positive, and not what was negative in the books I reviewed. Also, I've never really thought of myself as defining Canadian identity in particular. I tend to choose writers who excite me, and that includes some who are essentially Canadian, some who don't make much of a thing about their nationality. I'm very interested in contemporary poetry in Australia and New Zealand. The discourse of nationalism is very ambiguous. Take Michael Ondaatje--when he made it, people talked of his roots in Sri Lanka (Ceylon, when he lived there as a child). I remember a *Time* magazine story on the new internationalism in writing which referred to him as a Sri Lankan writer living in Canada.

- ***Dr. Anisur Rahman*** is Professor of English at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. He was a Shastri Fellow at the University of Alberta, Canada where he conducted this interview with Douglas Barbour on 19 and 20 June, 2001.

Note: For complete conversation contact remarkings@hotmail.com

DESANI'S *HATTERR* : CROSSING THRESHOLDS

Rashmi Tikku

"A threshold is a sacred thing." - Porphyry

With Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* a new kind of hybrid character enters Indian English fiction and spawns a veritable galaxy of characters who inhabit the liminalities of a peculiarly Western and Eastern experience. Desani's single tour de force is a significant literary landmark in many ways. It is unusual for an erstwhile colony to create a text that has absorbed the implications of its colonial past so soon after the country's independence but Desani's novel, published in 1948, locates itself firmly in the ambivalent terrain of its hybrid, cultural inheritance. The leitmotiv of this comic novel is epistemological – namely the search for the meaning of one's identity by a narrator who is depicted as a rudderless migrant, straddling cultures. Desani firmly resists the urge to locate meaning in an imaginary, archaic Indian past and is perhaps the first Indian writer to create a work which is consciously inhabiting a new 'space' which has been created by the pressures of modern imperialism. The action of Desani's novel is located in precisely this attenuated global space, not completely of the West or the East, but in their contact area. Marie Louis Pratt in *Imperial Eyes* has designated this space as a 'contact zone' which she describes as "the space of colonial encounters, the space in which people historically and geographically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations" (Baker 6).

Hatterr's personality is one of the keys to approach Desani's path-breaking novel. He embodies in himself the collisions of race, language and traditions.

- **Dr. Rashmi Tikku** is Senior Lecturer in The Department of English, Lady Amrutbai Daga College, Nagpur.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

**FEMINISM INCORPORATED:
THE CONSTRUCTION OF RESISTANT FEMALE
SUBJECTS IN TWO LITERARY TEXTS**

Rajesh Kumar Sharma

The common opinion in India is that feminism as a modern sensibility arrived here from the West in the 1970s and 1980s.¹ The opinion might be correct with regard to the critical practice but it is evidently not so with regard to the literary practice. The feminist sensibility has long and deeply informed the literary practice in India, a fact that is also borne out by the two texts considered in this essay: Dharmavir Bharati's *Kanupriya* and Shiv Kumar Batalavi's *Loona*. *Kanupriya* is a long dramatic monologue in four parts written in Hindi in 1959, while *Loona* is a poetic drama written in Punjabi in 1965.

This essay examines the construction of resistant female subjects and the forms and limits of the resistance vis-à-vis the patriarchal-phallogocentric order in these two texts.

Both *Loona* and *Puran*, the protagonists of Shiv Kumar Batalavi's poetic drama, belong among the ironic martyrs in literature. The prince among these martyrs is Kafka's K. who, in a moment of ironic illumination on the threshold of death, would have "the shame of it to outlive him" (*The Trial*, 251). He has turned persecution and murder into the fine art of courting suicide and would, finally, transmute it into salvation and martyrdom. Unlike K.'s ironic martyrdom, that of *Loona* and *Puran* is, however, both mixed and ironic.

Loona concedes victory to patriarchy when the flames of her *ressentiment*² consume the man whose body she craves, though she asserts at the same time that her act would confer immortality on him.

- **Dr. Rajesh Kumar Sharma** is Senior Lecturer, Department of English, S. D. College, Hoshiarpur (Punjab).

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

NATIVISM IN GURDIAL SINGH'S *PARSA*

V.V.B. Rama Rao

A broad understanding of the essence of the still very fluid and yet formative concept of Nativism helps us to appreciate the necessity to look into our texts with deep insight to evaluate our creative writers afresh. Nativism is related to the broad concept of Nationalism, not to the aberrant narrow parochialism, regionalism or localism. It has come to be a literary category in Indian literary aesthetic. The emergence of this is a part of a large-hearted and open-minded rationalism. "Nativism", according to Bhalachandra Nemade, "is a response of the people to the past and also to the future. It is the life style of a whole group, of past and future society's collective power of reflection and emotion as expressed through nativism."¹ Makarand Paranjape defines the term thus: "Nativism is rather an attitude, movement or outlook. It is difficult to extract a definite set of evaluative criteria for it, but it helps situate a work in such a manner that its cultural affiliations are revealed. Thus nativism emphasizes the locus of a work and enables the critic to place it vis-a-vis a particular country or society."² The present paper is an attempt to examine the concept of Nativism in the light of Gurdial Singh's *Parsa*.

Gurdial Singh writes of the people of Malwa region in the Punjab. He writes for his people in the language that they use every day, in every wakeful moment. The background, the layout, the personae and the incidents in his fiction are authentic and native. He has drawn from our epics, which have become part of us. His technique draws from the narratives we have had for centuries in our blood. The narrative order in *Parsa* is linear. The gaps in the passage of time are indicated with blank spaces. The beginning of the novel goes to about fifty years in the past. A character narrates to his fellow visitors at the fair the tale of Kauravas and Pandavas.

- **Dr V.V.B. Rama Rao** is a retired ELT professional, writer and translator.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

THE EMERGENT FEMININE PSYCHE IN INDIAN WOMEN NOVELISTS WRITING IN ENGLISH

Arati Biswal

As a genre, the novel in India gained in literary stature in the nineteenth century. Prior to this the novels written were in regional languages. When the initiative to writing in English was made, Toru Dutt with her *Bianca* (1878) emerged as the first legitimate Indian-English woman novelist. Other women writers followed in quick succession. Notable among them are Raj Lakshmi Debi, Krupabai Sathianadhan, Swarnakumari Debi, Sita Chatterji and Cornelia Sorabji. The early novels were mostly of a historical or biographical nature with superimposition of the romantic motif. Most novels written by the first generation women Indian English novelists was of the 'Romance' type. The realistic novel was yet to make an impact on the Indian scenario. The reason for this was that in terms of social interaction, these novelists led a restricted life. Their experience of life was limited and hence imagination flourished giving their writing a romantic and sometimes unrealistic character. Writers of romance created stylized figures which expanded into psychological archetypes and led to stereotyped images of women characters. In the opinion of Meenakshi Mukherjee: "Creating real people in a recognizable historical setting necessitates an acceptance of 'subjective individualism' and a 'specific awareness of history'...The latter had never been a component of traditional narrative in India and the former was not easy in a tradition-bound society" (Mukherjee 69). The novelists projected women in the social context, and themes like social taboos on women, their lack of freedom, sufferings, demand for self-sacrifice, interwoven into the artistic structure of the novels, reveal the nuances of femininity but only on a physical, external level.

- **Dr. (Ms.) Arati Biswal** is Senior Lecturer in English at Rajdhani College, Bhubaneswar, Orissa.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

**MADELEINE'S METAMORPHOSIS AND BUDDHISM:
RAJA RAO'S *THE SERPENT AND THE ROPE***

Akhileshwar Thakur

Raja Rao is essentially a thinker. To him the art of literary creation is a 'sadhana', a spiritual sadhana, and he considers writing as the byproduct of the smithy of his spiritual life. Philosophy, metaphysics and ethics are his fictional material and, indeed, like a metaphysical poet he creates a spiritual world in his novels. His second novel, *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), is perhaps the best illustration of this proposition.

This novel displays different levels of interaction and interfaces of Christianity, Vedanta, Islam and, above all, Buddhism. However, what is central to the novel is the metamorphosis of Madeleine, the female protagonist enamoured with Buddhism. The paper proposes to probe the meaning and significance of this metamorphosis which remains one of the main concerns of the novel.

Religion and the religious precepts have always been a source of inspiration and sustenance and have also served as beacon lights to sensitive individuals living out the flux of life in a trouble-torn world. Madeleine, a Frenchwoman and born catholic, married to an Indian who is five years younger to her, seeks her solace and sustenance from the Buddhist scriptures, principles and the modes of meditation and ritualistic worship. Her husband Rama, who is a pure Vedantist and a researcher of Albigensian heresy with the hope of connecting the Cathars with the Vedic ancestors, is an objective observer of the different shades of changes in Madeleine's life. Raja Rao's keen insight into Buddhist tradition and philosophy provides fictional space for the definition and development of Madeleine's 'persona'-her 'being' and 'becoming'.

- **Dr. Akhileshwar Thakur** teaches English at T.N.B. College, Bhagalpur University, Bhagalpur.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

**NATIONAL SEMINAR
on John Steinbeck
27th February 2003**

**MULTI-DIMENSIONAL STEINBECK:
A NEW MILLENNIUM PERSPECTIVE**

OPENING REMARKS

D.M. Shende

On behalf of the Department of English, Nagpur University, Nagpur, I heartily welcome you all to this national seminar organized to commemorate the 101st birth anniversary of one of the great voices in American fiction, John Steinbeck. The *raison d'etre* and rationale of the Seminar in my opinion does exist. A survey of Steinbeck criticism in the twentieth century reveals that, in spite of Steinbeck's relevance in the Indian and American context, fuller explorations of his writings have not been attempted so far. Steinbeck may present the agonies of an agrarian society in Oklahoma with full commitment to the peasants and farmers there but his literary paradigms can be applied to the living conditions of the peasants, farmers, subalterns, the downtrodden and the oppressed in India too. Without being prescriptive let me put it in all humility that this seminar will be a great success if we make an attempt to re-examine Steinbeck's fictional canon and establish new frames of reference in the Indian context.

Critics have labeled Steinbeck as a propagandist, a communist and even as a biologist. But I believe that he was a humanist committed to the cause of common brotherhood and to the elimination of the forces of evil from modern society -- evils triggered by our selfish approach to the human environment.

- **Dr. D.M. Shende**, the Coordinator of the National Seminar, is Head, Department of English, Nagpur University, Nagpur.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

DIALOGISTIC STRATEGIES IN STEINBECK'S CANNERY ROW NOVELS

P. Balaswamy

Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian scholar whose concepts and exemplifications have taken the Western intellectual community by storm since the 1960s, was primarily engaged in finding satisfactory answers to his philosophical and ethical queries. His basic concern was hermeneutics and he was not at all happy at being called a literary critic. However, the discipline of literary theory and literary criticism, the poetics of fiction in particular, have gained immensely in the last three or four decades by the use of such of those critical concepts which Bakhtin has painstakingly developed in his works, *The Dialogic Imagination : Four Essays* (1981), *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984), and *Rabelais and His World* (1984). The most popular of his concepts are *dialogism, heteroglossia, polyphony, carnival* and *chronotope*. Of these, the western novel critics have found dialogism, heteroglossia and carnival extremely profitable when applied to the interpretation of some novels that have so far been evaluated only in terms of normal fictional critical tools. This paper intends to take a fresh look at John Steinbeck's 'Cannery Row' novels---*Tortilla Flat* (1935), *Cannery Row* (1945), and *Sweet Thursday* (1954)--in the light of the dialogistic principles and demonstrate how these novels yield fresh and enjoyable meanings, thanks to these Bakhtinian concepts.

In fact, for quite sometime, there has been a debate going on among the members of the Bakhtin circle about the wisdom of being carried away when novels often explode with new meanings if reconsidered in terms of dialogism, polyphony or heteroglossia. Some critics have wondered aloud whether the literary text thus chosen and analyzed serves to clarify and qualify Bakhtin's terms afresh or those terms provide a new reading of the chosen text.

- **Dr. P. Balaswamy** is Professor & Head, Department of English, Pondicherry University, Pondicherry.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

LANDSCAPE OF MORAL WASTELAND: DIALECTICS OF ANTI-MATERIALISM IN THE NOVELS OF JOHN STEINBECK

S.S. Prabhakar Rao

Over the years, quest for success has been an important constituent of American imagination. During the present century, America witnessed a phenomenal boom in the financial sphere, which in its turn helped in the emergence of the new man, homo novus, totally devoted to what William James had once called "bitch goddess success."¹ The structure of values has been so trimmed that it is believed, as Max Lerner put it, "in America the indices of belonging are belongings."² The fascination of the story of Tamberlain for the American adult is essentially owing to the fact that it is a success story. But a devotion to success of such a magnitude has also given rise to a counter-movement of anti-materialism. The sensitive writer and the speculative idealist have perceived "the yawning, palpable and ever-widening gulf" between the dream of success and reality of accomplishment. The archetypal American, like Gatsby, may be attracted towards a woman like Daisy, "because her voice is full of money," but also realizes "the vast, vulgar, meretricious beauty of material success." The vulgarization of the dream of success elevating the here and the now of America led the imaginative writer to seek, in the words of Eugene O'Neil, "the glory beyond the horizon"; it also impelled him to denounce the sway of materialism on the American psyche. Van Wyck Brooks chastised the Americans, in 1915, for their failure "to move the soul of America from the accumulation of dollars." Dreiser also expressed through his fictional constructs his conviction that "it would be well for the American people if they loved the real less and the ideal a little more."

- **Dr.S.S. Prabhakar Rao** is Professor of English at JBIET, Hyderabad.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

**IDEOLOGY AND BEYOND:
A STUDY OF STEINBECK'S *IN DUBIOUS BATTLE***

Nibir K. Ghosh

When John Steinbeck (1902-1968) was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962 for "his realistic as well as imaginative writing distinguished by sympathetic humour and a keen social perception,"¹ critics like Arthur Mizner doubted whether the moral vision of the nineteen thirties deserved such an award and decided that it did not. Attributing the award to the relative crudity of European readings of American writers and to the politics of literary prizes, Mizner undermined Steinbeck's talent as an artist.² Even a cursory glance at Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), and *Of Mice and Men* (1937) sheds enough light to show the narrow limitations of Mizner's views in evaluating Steinbeck's ability to go beyond ideologies even in the dogma-delirious decade of the nineteen thirties.

Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* begins with the story of Jim Nolan who joins the Communist Party with the aim of avenging the cruelties inflicted upon him and his family by an unjust economic system. Jim meets Mac who knows more about field work than anybody in the State. Jim accompanies Mac to Torgas Valley where a strike of fruit pickers is expected. At the camp of the fruit tramps, Mac wins the sympathy of the workers by helping London at the birth of his daughter's child. When the strike begins, Mac provides strategic guidance to the strikers. With the failure of the 'talks' between the orchard owners and the striking fruit pickers, a violent clash ensues in which Joy, an agitator, is killed by a vigilante's bullet. Jim too is wounded but his wound makes him grow in awareness which enables him to assume the leadership in the strike until he is led out of the camp by a ruse and brutally murdered. At the end of the novel, Mac is seen with Jim's corpse on the platform waiting to justify the death of a comrade for the sake of the 'cause'.

- **Dr. Nibir K. Ghosh** is Reader in the Department of English Studies & Research, Agra College, Agra and Senior Fulbright Fellow, University of Washington, Seattle, USA.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

THE IMPACT OF BUDDHISM ON JOHN STEINBECK'S *THE PEARL*

M. A. Nare

The present paper is an attempt to examine Steinbeck's Novel *The Pearl* to see how far it shows the impact of the Buddhist Doctrine of Human Suffering, the cause of Human Suffering and the Noble Path which leads to the Cessation of Human Suffering. I may point out at the very outset that Steinbeck had read with great interest the Buddhist Literature including *The Life of Buddha* as he had read *The Bible* and the *Apostles* in his boyhood. The curious thing about Steinbeck's reading is that in spite of a variegated choice, ranging from *The Arabian Nights* to the *Vedic Hymns*, he seems to have been particularly drawn to those books which are concerned with love and compassion. The Buddha's renunciation of his wife / child and empire and his going into the wilderness to find an answer for the ills of man must have made a deep impression on Steinbeck.

A close reading of *The Pearl* reveals that Kino's sufferings are the sufferings of a man who becomes the victim of illusion symbolized by the Great Pearl and his ignorance to understand the wicked world around him. The two themes -- illusion and reality and man's inhumanity to man, run like streams through this novel. In shaping the characters in this novel Steinbeck has shown remarkable understanding of the sufferings of the poor, the underdogs and the downtrodden. This compassion for the poor and ignorant human beings exploited by the corrupt social system has taken him to Communism and Marx as much as to the great compassionate Buddha. No doubt, he loved Christ but he had very little respect for the preaching done in the churches of his time. Steinbeck seems to have accepted the Buddhist Doctrine on Salvation as a more tenable option.

- **Dr. M.A. Nare** is Senior Lecturer in English (Retd.), Govt. Post Graduate College, V.M.V. Amravati.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

THE GRAPES OF WRATH: ART AND IDEOLOGY

Shoma Sen

In the era of post Literary Interpretation, Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* has not received much critical attention. Most of the critical writing on this novel veers around the older debates: art or political propaganda? Was Steinbeck a humanist or a communist? Is it a proletarian epic or an epic of the American people? The studies of the stylistic devices of *The Grapes of Wrath* explore its nature and machine imagery, take up the Biblical parallels, the nature symbolism etc. Warren French, in his "From Naturalism to Drama of Consciousness: The Education of the Heart"¹ portrays the theme to be one of education related to the growing consciousness of the migrants, dispossessed of their land. Leonard Lutwack in "*The Grapes of Wrath* as Heroic Fiction"² calls the work "a thorough didactic epic novel" and divides its structure into three parts: dispossession, migration and resettlement. Much critical attention has gone into the inter-chapters, including the entire chapter devoted to the turtle - a symbol of the Joad family/ dispossessed people/ human race plodding on, against all odds, for its survival. In short, responses to *The Grapes of Wrath* have travelled a long way from the initial condemnation and banning of the book for being obscene and 'red' to its later unanimous acceptance (especially after Steinbeck's Nobel Prize) as one of the greatest American novels of undoubted artistic genius and human vision.

However, re-reading *The Grapes of Wrath* at the turn of the century, at both textual as well as contextual levels, in the light of the contemporary critical theories and contemporary political and economic developments in the world, one finds ample scope for discussion. An exploration of the proletariat as the 'other' in the consciousness of 'reader' and 'writer' can be a journey into the colonizing mentality of our inner selves.

- **Ms. Shoma Sen** is Lecturer in English, P.W.S. College, Nagpur.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

POETRY

MY NEIGHBOUR'S SON

Constantly doodling over his homework
Sashi let out an easy droll
with problems hitting like bricks
on his all-seeing eyes.
In a peaceful cloister
he carefully dissected the words
of his beloved teacher
roving like peach endowments of late sunlight.

The everyday prayer with his grandmother
played like a puff of cool breeze
on a plate of steaming rice
whenever bouts of bamboo shades free-floated
attempted to find a place
inside the tawny temple.

From the wreckages of the past
he built a chest of drawers
into which he filled love
luxuriant and sensual as velvet
shaken from the boughs of childhood
silhouetted against a cool, reflecting pool.

Like an expert policeman
he never took diffident steps in trenches
but went in with flutes of nightingale
turning life's stormy crossings
into an array of fun-land paintings
haunting the walls of play-school corridor.

-Krishna Bose

- *Dr. Krishna Bose teaches in the Department of English, F.M. Autonomous College, Balasore (ORISSA).*



‘HAIKU’

Bathing in thousands
they float lamps on her breast--
the river sparkles

In the moving train
sleeping on his feet
the newspaper man

A film of mist
between my eyes
and her image

Standing behind
the window bars observes
darkness in shapes

Love tickles
with erect pistils:
hibiscus

Vulnerable
darkness of the opening:
standing alert

Fondling her breasts
I incite a poem
on her body

Alone
rings the cell phone on
her bed

Disappears
into dust her last
Photograph

-R. K. Singh

- **Dr. R.K. Singh** is Professor of English in the Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, Indian School of Mines, Dhanbad.



POSTCOLONIAL THEORY & AMERICAN CULTURE

Tej N. Dhar

Though post-colonial theory came into its own only during the past two decades, it has already made remarkable gains in its reach and influence. It started with providing a reading strategy for the literatures of the erstwhile colonies, which, in spite of differences in their provenance, bore common distinctive markers, because of the shared experience of colonialism. In addition to absorbing the influences of imperial culture, such literatures also resisted this influence and colonial control by asserting their “differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre.” Since it helped create a paradigm that promised a wider application, postcolonial theory has moved beyond the bounds of actual historical experience of colonialism to embrace other kinds of colonialisms, of sources of domination legitimized by social mores, cultural practices, and linguistic power, of hegemonic controls of subtler kinds, which, even when they are not easily discernible, have far-reaching cultural implications. Though this ever-growing expansion has proved a source of confusion and embarrassment for some, for others it has provided a useful tool of purposeful inquiry, and for many others a source of mounting influence in the academy in almost all parts of the world. The book under review is one such example of the possibilities opened up by the postcolonial theory, for it is both a justification for and an illustration of the relevance and usefulness of this theory for understanding the variety and complexity of those literary traditions and texts which are inseparable from the historical experience of race and ethnicity.

REFERENCE

Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature. Eds. Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2000. Price: \$ 26 (paperback); \$ 50 (hardcover). pp. xx+471. Indexes.

- **Dr. Tej N. Dhar** is Professor of English and Director of the Arts Program, University of Asmara, Eritrea (N.E. Africa).

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

Letter To The Editor

Dear Dr. Ghosh,

A happy season of Spring & Summer to you. And Congratulations! Re-Markings has completed a year. Three tightly (but neatly) packed issues of interesting and meaningful reading matter, spread in about 400 pages, featuring critical essays and appreciations by over two score critics/scholars of nearly as many authors of India and abroad: no mean achievement this. One admires (almost envies) your 'debut' with such a flourish and wide support. It goes to your and your team's credit that with only three issues, one as good as the other, you have carved out a place for yourself and the Re-Markings amongst the half-a-dozen or so special select literary journals in India.

However, I often wonder how such high level literary journals, mostly quarterlies and bi-annuals can help in arousing and sustaining the general interest of the average scholar or book-lover in the absence of a wider and broader pasture-land of book-loving readers with a developed literary taste. Granted that we have over 200 Universities and similar institutes of higher education and perhaps a network of 8-10,000 colleges where English is taught/studied. But has that all created and developed a taste/enlightened interest in English/world literature of different genres? Are there publishers and bookshops and sales-outlets and college/university/public libraries with adequate funds to keep their collections up-to-date? If not, aren't the literary and academic journals 'inter-breeding' a select band of clientele? Anyhow, I find some of your offerings of interest and eye-openers. At 80 plus, I just haven't the time for literary discussions and searchings.

Re-Markings has helped me to come abreast with some of the works of new, unheard of but established writers and trend-setters. For example Don DeLillo – the chronicler of what we all are obsessed with – the threat of terrorism. The survey of modern Sanskrit Literature is also useful. (Dated : March 23, 2003).

--Bhupendra Hooja, Chief Editor, *Indian Book Chronicle*, 11 Uniara Gardens, Jaipur.

RE-MARKINGS

POETRY AND TIME

Time has been
so inconsistent with me;
at times sitting there,
right in front of me
huge and bizarre-faced
not moving at all;
and at other moments
flitting away,
like a wraith,
as if it wasn't there.

And I never knew
what to do at those times.
Poetry which seems so much
interlinked with time
also plays the same
deceitful tricks with me.

Jayanta Mahapatra
(in a letter to Nibir K. Ghosh)

ISSN 0972-611X