

From the Editor's Desk

In his *Dream of the Earth* (1988) Thomas Berry, cultural historian and 'geologist', famously observed: "Our challenge is to create a new language, even a new sense of what it is to be human. It is to transcend not only national limitations, but even our species isolation, to enter into the larger community of living species. This brings about a completely new sense of reality and value." Berry's vision has been endorsed by the post-theory academy, evident from the way terms like 'cosmopolitanism', 'species being', and 'planetary humanism' have gained considerable academic currency. Contemporary Literary Studies is focusing its attention on evolving a critical praxis, wherein this new sense of being human will be continuously explored through an ethical-rational critique of the societies of the present — a necessary precondition for creating a posthuman world that approximates Berry's "community of all living species". The discipline has dedicated itself to the arduous task of describing the complex processes that are continuously shaping the construct called human society, and identifying the tendencies of the present that suggest the shape of the future. Literary Studies aims to achieve this Promethean task by interpreting a variety of texts — the self and life narratives from the centre and the periphery, multitudinous tales of joy and sorrow of life in the here and now, the fantastic/futuristic Utopian/Dystopic narratives projecting alternative realities.... Literary Studies approaches these texts, armed with the belief that these narratives are both sources of knowledge/wisdom, and socio-cultural ensemble for critical scrutiny. *Alteritas: EFL-U Journal of Literary Inquiry*, an international online journal, is a modest attempt to join the current debate within the Literary Studies community.

The first issue of the journal deals with some of the key issues the academic community is currently spending its critical energies on: interdisciplinarity, and comparatist focus in new humanities, bio-ethics, the shape of the posthuman future, the malaise of othering that plagues even initiatives aimed at a progressive view of difference, locating the canonical text and the culture it constructs/reflects `elsewhere`, acts of remembering dislocation in the aftermath of a traumatic event that subvert the `received view` on the experience of the dislocated folk, and fictionalized remembering as an act of re-remembering the adult subjecthood en route to reclaiming traumatic childhood experience.

The first essay of this volume, “Krishna takes Enlisted Against the Nazis and the Japanese: The Reception of Bagvad Gita in T.S. Eliot and Robert J. Oppenheimer” is Dorothy Figueira’s analysis of the struggle of the two seminal minds of the twentieth century to find a way to reconcile human agency in a war-torn world where agency inevitably involved causing or contributing to death and destruction, with the ethical diktat that Emmanuel Levinas sees as central to human civilization: “Thou Shalt Not Kill”. Gitaupdesh, where human agency/action, and total surrender to the will of the Other, the polar opposites in mainstream Western thought, emerge as one and the same through the resonance of ‘karma’, provided the clarity the two thinkers were desperately searching for. To Figueira, the cross-cultural illuminations of the Gita suggests the importance of a genuine comparative focus in literary studies within the new humanities.

In the next essay, “What’s the Point in Caring? Bioethical Concerns in Roald Dahl’s Short Stories”, Snigdha Nagar explores the way Roald Dahl exposes the limits of technological rationality. Making the best use of the potential of the fictional narrative to re-present reality so as to shock the audience into questioning socio-contemporary cultural practices, Dahl compels

his audience to realize the need for balancing scientific inquiry with ethical thought. Dahl's critique of the one-sided views on human life, Snigdha seems to imply, effectively complements Herbert Marcuse's theses on technological rationalism.

In her essay "Towards a Posthuman Future: Androgyny, Transhumanism and Culture", Laxmi Pillai argues that the posthumanist world is a configuration conducive to ideologies that contain the germ of inclusiveness. She views feminism and transhumanism, with their openness to acknowledging their Other—patriarchy and anthropocentrism, an openness she considers the first major step towards a synthesis of these apparently irreconcilable positions, as progressive ideologies with a potential to inaugurate a posthuman world.

"Of Transgender Bodies that Matter: Queering the Media Narratives in Kerala", the third essay in this volume, Anu Kuriakose argues that the media narratives of the transgender often end up mainstreaming them, by constructing their transgender identity along the familiar lines of patriarchy and heteronormativity. Despite their best intentions to help the transgenders emerge from the margins of the society, Anu Kuriakose claims, media representations of the community end up representing them as yet another, if somewhat intriguing, version of the same.

The next essay titled, "Re-interpreting the Bard, From Kathakali to Kathaprasangam: Cultural Revisionings, Orality, and Theories of Spectatorship" challenges the universality of the Shakespeare appeal, and attempts to establish that the works of the myriad-minded bard are an interesting overlay of myriad story-telling and performative traditions, and the cultures they shape/reflect.

In "Marji in Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis: An Un-childlike Child and the Interpretative Fictionalizing by the Child", the next essay, Rahul Kamble outlines Marjane Satrapi's unique narrative strategies that give her child-protagonist voice, a feat that eludes most writers of

children's fiction. He critiques the facile recreation of the child hero in the adult author's own image, and the dull and dour homilies that are paraded in the name of children's fiction, which he sees as instances of inauthenticity, and artistic failure.

"Reminiscence vis-à-vis Reticence: Interpretive Conflict in the Oral Narratives of 1947 Partition Refugees in Kolkata", the final essay in the volume, takes a re-look at Partition narratives, by focusing on victim interview, an instance of oral history. Sumallya Mukhopadhyay claims to have unearthed two interesting patterns in the interviews she has had with the victims: their reticence over certain areas of experience in their erstwhile home, which result in the events being depicted in an entirely new light, and the reversal of the traditional gender roles in the act of speaking for the family.

I do hope the first issue of *Alteritas* will mark the inauguration of a thousand one nights of interpretive encounters, interactions that will enrich scholars in the field, and contribute to their efforts to forge critical-ethical consciousness in their societies at large.