

## Review

Ravindra, Ravi. *Le Yoga du Christ*. Trans. Sylvie Carteron. Paris: La Table Ronde, 1991. 331 p.

First published in English in 1990, *Le Yoga du Christ* has since been translated into numerous languages. The book is essentially a reading of the Gospel according to St. John from a Hindu perspective in which Ravindra tries to uncover and recover "le Soi en chacun, et chacun en le Soi." It is also a testament to Ravindra's own particular esteem for this gospel, his "espoir de permettre au Christ intérieur de croître en nous." The author's viewpoint, given that it aims at a non-sectarian examination of St. John's account, is both highly original and extremely insightful. I will not follow here the traditional path of recounting the book's contents as it has already been commented on by numerous reviewers. Rather, I will attempt to place my remarks within the general context of this special issue of *Dalhousie French Studies* on "Bouddhisme et critique de la modernité en francophonie," while realizing, naturally, that Hinduism and Buddhism might lead to different conclusions about the Gospel according to St. John, but would share the common notion of open inquiry and non-sectarianism vis-à-vis contemporary thought paradigms and interpretive methods.

Biblical hermeneutics by their very nature pose some interesting questions for the literary critic (I will not presume to deal with the more general problematic of interpreting religious discourse, belief or dogma) insofar as the sign, linguistic or otherwise, accrues numerous semantic values simultaneously, much as a literary text does. But this polysemy is obvious and the problem does not come to an end when the critic has unveiled the many layers of meaning disseminated by the text, because that which is being represented in the Bible does not belong to the same category of reality or, for that matter, to the same reality as everyday or literary discourse. Unlike Coleridge's advocacy of a "willing suspension of disbelief" in the face of a literary work, multiple interpretations of the Bible would in fact require a "willing suspension of belief," a position that few of the faithful would be prepared to adopt. However, this is precisely what Ravindra demands of his readers; his journey is one of discovery by and through language, a text, a gospel. To follow his reading is to allow oneself to open to a perspective which at once exceeds and expands upon the Christian message. This is risky business because, for the believer, the Bible is the true Word of God: it does not represent the Truth, it is the Truth. As Ravindra points out, "[d]ans l'évangile de Jean, le sens de croire [...] est bien proche de reconnaître et de voir."

In his *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* Todorov raises the question of Biblical interpretation (I raise it here because it treats both Biblical texts and literary texts as literary phenomena) and places it within a theory of narrative genres. So-called "marvelous" and "fantastic" events occur in the Bible, but Todorov makes the point that they are not read as stories derived from the two genres in question, rather they are read as extraordinary events or miracles taking place in the "real" world. Fundamentalists might have a tendency to interpret such events literally, but even more liberal-thinking believers, who might read them allegorically or metaphorically, believe nevertheless that they are true.

The possible "readings" of Biblical texts outlined above places the reader — and obviously the translator — in a very curious position. Within the Christian world, the Bible is called upon not so much to mediate reality but to reify it. In essence, the status of the Word as sign is annulled in favor of a Logos *cum* reality. Ravindra's

reading of the Gospel according to St. John explodes this hermetic hermeneutic and projects the reader back into the postmodern world of the literary sign where multiple meanings coexist and float about *ad infinitum* in a sea of interspiritual discourse. It is language itself which brings the intertext into being and enables it to “make” sense, to be dispersed and interpreted in a larger interreligious context. Yet, however we frame this question or propose a focus, it remains clear that all of these readings/interpretations are permissible by virtue of the fact that we have agreed to resolve them through language. What would become of such an enterprise were we to begin with the taoist maxim that “The way that can be spoken of is not the constant way”? Ravindra is acutely aware of the spiritual dimension on the other side of language (“la plus belle réussite d’un langage est d’amener au silence au-delà de toute énonciation verbale”) but, like the poet, he is inevitably faced with the paradox of using language to say the unsayable, and his reading proceeds along the lines of a close textual analysis of each verse of the Gospel according to St. John.

Ravindra’s reading presupposes that somewhere at the core of the Gospel according to St. John there is a shared semantic nucleus that may acquire different forms at the surface level and therefore, the same signified may be expressed and amplified by a number of signifiers, the Christian and Hindu mythologies being the two cases in point. Alternatively, the opposite, albeit postmodern, point of view is also possible within the confines of language: namely, that the extant worldview and ontology articulated in the Gospel according to St. John partakes of two different cultural semantics with the result that Hindu scriptures may enlarge upon and elucidate Christian scriptures. Truth is indeed a pathless land, or rather Truth is not in any permanent sense, it arises anew in each and every moment.

Whatever the case may be, Ravindra’s originality in undertaking such a reading is, as my preceding paragraph suggests, its dialogic nature. It does not place the Truth on either side. On the contrary, it demythifies the notion of Truth with a capital T and forces it to be “generated” in modern linguistic terms by the very language and dialogue that mediate it. Not “this” nor “that,” but an ever-expanding, ever-deepening inquiry into the nature of reality. Lest some might think that Ravindra’s reading, like Barthes’ flight of the signifier in *S/Z*, runs the risk of slipping off into the vacuous semantic vortices of postmodern rhetoric wherein the only acceptable truth is the relativistic or pluralistic, I say: Look deeper. Ravindra’s reading comes from the heart, not the mind. It is informed by compassion and the quest for ever more subtle understanding. I leave the final word to Ken Wilber: “Make no mistake: if postmodernism is right, there is and can be no Spirit whatsoever. If Spirit is anything, it is universal. If Spirit is anything, it is all-encompassing. If Spirit is anything, it is the ground of manifestation everywhere, equally, radiantly” (*The Journals of Ken Wilber* [Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1998]).

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