

REVIEW

Gary Day. *Literary Criticism: A New History*.
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press,
2008. 344 pages.

Critical response to E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* remains diverse. While some commend Forster's depiction of the India, others express their misgivings at his portrayal of Indians attributing his delineation of the Indians, their behaviors, their religions and customs, even the geographical landscape to be in the Orientalist tradition. While looking at the historical bases of *A Passage to India*, this paper establishes that being conscious of the British administration's policy of 'divide and rule,' Forster undertakes a similar exercise of widening the gulf between the Hindus and Muslims. Forster's 'knowledge' of the political conditions in India and Europe, the differences between the two communities and his imperial anxieties pertaining to the future of the British Empire shapes his representation of Hindus and Muslims as two distinct 'types,' as a form of literary mimicry of the British policy of 'divide and rule.' This paper also argues that *A Passage to India*'s importance as a seminal colonial text in India has helped reinforce this difference in the Indian consciousness and continues to foment communal riots in the country even ninety years after its publication.

This history is written against the background of umpteen critical theories which swept over Europe in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, and in part as a reaction to them. The last quarter of the twentieth century also saw management theories come to the centre stage with their jargon, 'mission objectives,' "strategic plans," "capturing relevant information," and so on. The book takes as its province the whole gamut of European literary criticism from Plato to Derrida. It is not a

conventional history and yet it is an insightful, absorbing and provocative account of the development of theories in the West in the last twenty-four centuries. It provides unsuspected connections between criticism and commerce. The author finds returns, revisions, repetitions and continuities rather than ruptures in the course of the growth of theory. He says that there are two main strains of criticism, namely, rhetorical and grammatical, which have continued over the centuries to this day, albeit in different garbs and emphases.

The refrain of this new critical history is that there is an affinity between criticism, money, market, and management theories. No wonder, Derrida, the high-priest of deconstruction, motivates management theories. The disproportionate importance given to theory prevents students from the experience of literature. This book illustrates how criticism increasingly uses the concepts and technical terms of economics. The contemporary consumer culture triggered by the free market and globalization was, in a way, anticipated by Lord Byron and John Keats who pleaded for 'a life of sensations.'

Day draws a parallel between money and language because both are forms of representation: "Money confers value on commodities, while language confers value on objects, thoughts, and feelings." However, his attempt to link this relationship to Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic theory seems rather far-fetched. He charges that criticism of the 1980s and 90s has degenerated into a technique of reading that uses 'literature' as a way of validating its own 'isms'. It substituted doctrine for genuine engagement with the literary work, and its contempt for humanism played right into the hands of a system that viewed its objects as nothing more than units of production and consumption." The theories which sprouted in the last three decades have, far from encouraging the study, understanding, and enjoyment of literature, willfully destroyed interest in literature. The proponents of the new theories, in Day's view, are 'fundamentalists and fanatics' who do not brook any disagreement.

The six chapters in this book are evenly distributed for an informed discussion of the development of literary criticism in Europe. However, the developments in this field on the other side of the Atlantic are not mentioned.

This book is written in an engaging style and it is enlivened by interesting tidbits about critics and their times. It provides a comprehensive bibliography of both primary and secondary sources chapter-wise. Most of the works listed are recent publications. The bibliography will be of immense use to students who want to pursue their inquiry further.

On the negative side, there is a feeling that the author is over-enthusiastic at times in trying to fit developments in critical theory to a pre-conceived grid of management theory and practice. Occasionally, Day's account appears somewhat disjointed.

This book will serve to de-addict a generation which consumed too much theory. It is useful for a critical debate, although it is not a substitute for the primary critical texts.

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