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David Kopf, *Scratches on Kali's Mind*.

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(26 pp! almost entirely restricted to works in English and French with a few German and one or two Italian authors thrown in) under the general headings of "Capitalism, cities, and urbanization", and "European states".

From the point of view of comparison it is perhaps unfortunate that the time span included in the several presentations varies widely—from "Late Roman to 18th century" for the Italian situation to "16th and 17th century" for the Dutch state—reflecting differences in the points of view of the authors as well as differences in the focal periods of the several histories. Comparison is further hampered by the apparent penury of the publishers who produced a volume in which illustrative material is woefully lacking: All but one of the substantive articles lack figures, and all but two lack tables, so that for the most part the reader is thrown back on seeking to draw conclusions and make comparisons of developments in time and space on the basis of the various qualitative text descriptions.

That said, it still seems to this reviewer that the volume contains a great deal of useful and interesting information rarely assembled in one place. It should serve both the general reader interested in problems of urbanization in the pre-industrial west, and the specialist concerned with problems of the complex interrelations between states and the cities in their territory, as well as with the even more complex international systems of cities that are recognizable from the beginning of the period here covered on until the completion of the emergence of modern nation states ("integrated states" in Tilly's phrase) and the submergence of all but a very few independent cities.

Ralph W. Brauer


David Kopf's first novel, Scratches on Kali's Mind, is at least a dozen stories in one. The main characters of this Balzacian panorama of social types are twelve American expatriates in the Bengal during the months leading up to the third India-Pakistan War of 1971, which led to the independence of Bangladesh. In a sense, this is an historical novel about the revolution in East Bengal, the genocide and other atrocities committed by the Pakistani army, and the role played by the Indian and the United States governments in the conflict. In another sense, the novel is also a Bildungsroman about the diverse ways in which the cross-cultural and civilizational encounter with the East shapes the spiritual, eth-
ical, and existential crises, quests, loss and redemption of a diverse group of Americans who arrived in Calcutta in the sixties as representatives and agents of, or rebels against, the new Western imperial super power.

The novel consists of three parts. Part 1, by far the longest, comprises ten chapters, each of which centers around a character, with the exception of the tenth, which has two protagonists. Those characters interact with numerous other secondary characters who are not presented in the same depth as the primary characters, or the protagonists of individual chapters, but from the outside, so to speak—that is, only in so far as they complement the action or the portraits of the protagonists. In each of the chapters, the reader becomes acquainted with the complexities, conflicts, traumas and motivations which fill the inner life of each of those protagonists and inform the social roles they play.

The first to be introduced is Jerry Weinberg, "American beat poet and guest of the United States Information Service in India" (3), Jewish and homosexual, described in the chapter heading as a "Beat Sannyasi," and elsewhere as a "mystic of the flesh" (9). Equally at odds with his sponsors and with Westernized Bengalis, he wonders "why did India look abroad for truth when it was part of her own tradition? ...Just imagine India as one sprawling Passaic, New Jersey. Giant factories with a dull mechanized proletariat, hard work and no joy, industrial waste and pollution, congested slums and acute poverty. You can shove it all up! Self-realization, man—that's where it's at!" (8). Weinberg is one of only a few characters who seem to have resolved their identity crisis before the start of the novel. For him, "[t]here are two classes in the world: squares who are the shits and hipsters who are the non-shits. The hipster ought to accept life as suffering and identify with suffering humanity. But the squares behave as if repression and the work ethic were where life is at and are too stupid to realize they are only shadow boxing with death" (10). This none too articulate formula nevertheless contains the key to at least two of the major thematic concerns of the novel—the question of authentic life and how it is to be lived, and the question of death, whose divine personification is the goddess Kali in the title of the novel, and which is inevitably raised in the context of so many murders, suicides, war, and genocide.

Almost all of the other main characters face those two questions, and all of them do indeed fall into one or the other of Weinberg's categories—squares and hipsters. Their loss and redemption depend on how their understanding of the true meaning of life and death develops—or if it does. The group is quite heterogeneous. Dennis Duncan is a diplomat who feels alienated wherever he goes and who is trapped in a stale marriage. When he finally decides to alter his life but is robbed of his dream, he makes a dramatic and crucial decision. Another is Professor Jason Carrington, founding director of the American Association of Indianists, respected Sanskritist, academic empire builder, and personal acquaintance of Gandhi, Nehru, and Shastri; yet ironically, the mere idea of approaching

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Calcutta by airplane throws him into a psychosomatic fit of uncontrollable sneezing, with head aching and eyes watering. Next we read about Christopher Hart, scholar of Eastern erotic mysticism, a worshipper of Sakti and firm believer in the supremacy of the female principle, a student of sacred sexuality who spends the better part of his nights and days in pursuit of sexo-yogic ecstasy. Then there is Hilary Cunningham, an entrepreneurial archeologist who excavates his long buried homosexuality in a moment of profound, drunken insight. He is followed by William Rozario, the corporate architect who dreams of saving the city of Calcutta from "sure death" (94) with the help of a small army of experts and ultra-modern technology, yet lives and works in an isolated, air-conditioned penthouse apartment twenty stories above the street level, literally and metaphorically. Then there is Mac Curlin, alcoholic intelligence officer at the American Consulate whose "generation locked self-image of a Gary Cooper in defiant defense of integrity and justice" is coupled with "something of John Wayne in Curlin's dual chauvinism as an American and as a male" (109). The catalogue continues with Professor Edward Moberly, an "Indianized Faustian Man" (133), a brilliant son of an elite family, "an energetic overachiever and zealous champion of super industrialism" (136) who arrives in Calcutta as a fresh Ph.D. in economics from Harvard to join Rozario's "coterie of scientific magicians" (137), only to end up as an ascetic Hindu living in a red-light district. Next is Herb Goldberg, foreign correspondent of a distinguished American newspaper, a "stereotype monger" and image-maker of Calcutta as a "Disneyland of horrors," despite his private liking for the city, but who later questions the integrity of his profession. And finally Part 1 ends with Richard and Elizabeth Barwell. Richard is a missionary who arrives in India with a great amount of zeal to convert Hindus, but he gradually turns into a worldly professional, experiences a violent crisis of faith, and takes his own life after a gruesome self-mutilation which for him symbolizes the essence of Christianity. His wife leaves him after years of frustration and disillusionment which she astonishingly finds less bearable than battery and gang rape.

The lives of those eleven characters are unique, but their stories are interlaced within the network of the American expatriates in Calcutta. The overall effect of this structural arrangement is one of simultaneous synchronic and diachronic movement. Synchronically, the narrative progresses, too slowly at times, from one character sketch to another in a non-linear fashion, which, though intentional, cannot help producing a sense of disjointed, jolty movement, especially when the chapter count reaches ten, and when, having read to the end of the novel, it still does not become clear how some of those characters fit within what eventually appears to be the main thread of the narrative. But that does not take away from the fact that all of those portraits are no less than fascinating, drawn as they are with a great deal of psychological realism and insight. None of the main characters fails to come alive in all their pulsating humanity, and if
they do not all contribute equally to the development of the main plot, they expand and enrich the panorama of men and women trying to come to grips with their identity. Those readers who are not bothered by the slowness of the narrative will discover one of the greatest pleasures of this novel.

There is also a diachronic movement and a subtle build-up of the action out of the intricate web of relationships among the characters; and as the events of student riots in Calcutta and the revolution in East Bengal begin to unfold little by little, affecting the lives of most of them, there also emerges the centrality of one character who is conspicuously absent in Part 1, even though he is the common link among most of the Americans. This character becomes both the sole protagonist and the narrator of part 1. While in Part 1 the narrative voice is that of the third-person omniscient narrator which frequently gives way to dialogue, and occasionally to interior monologue, Part 2 is the private world of Scott Whitehead’s personal diary. Scott and his diary are the novel’s center of gravity and its main narrative thread. We learn in the first few pages of the novel that Scott is a friend of many of the central characters and that he has crossed the border to East Pakistan for reasons that remain unknown throughout Part 1. Amid rumors about his activities there, conflicting news about his exact whereabouts or whether he is still alive, and CIA reports about his involvement in guerrilla warfare, an inauthentic copy of his journal surfaces, adding to the aura of mystery surrounding him. The mystery is dispelled, however, in Part 2, which consists of a fragment of the real diary that chronicles, in a brief period of three and a half months, an extraordinary and harrowing journey of self-discovery. Also recorded in those pages torn from Scott’s diary are horrific scenes of atrocities and genocide, so disruptive of cosmic order and abusive of the natural cycle of death and rebirth that it leaves its violent imprint even on Kali’s mind, giving the novel its darkly suggestive title. Thus, in a sense, Part 2 links together the main thematic concerns of the work.

The novel concludes with a brief Part 3 which depicts a scene form a festival honoring the goddess. Reunited during the ceremony are the “hipsters” of the novels—those characters who have resolved their inner conflicts and achieved self-realization by opening themselves up to the wisdom and spirituality of the East.

One could think of many novels to which Scratches on Kali’s Mind claims literary kinship. The range and depth of characterization is reminiscent of the tradition of social Realism in fiction, while the explicit critique of human corruption, social ills, hypocrisy, politics, wars, and violence is almost Voltairian without the distancing and darkly comic effects of hyperbole which characterize Voltaire’s most biting satire. Indeed, Scott’s story in Part 2 reminds one of Candide in its thematization of self-knowledge gained through nightmarish trials by fire in the worst of all possible worlds; even the cartoon-character quality of Voltaire’s protagonists seems to have colored the portrait of Lakshmi, Scott’s
lover who is raped, kidnapped, raped again repeatedly, forced to witness scenes of cannibalism and all manner of atrocities, shot and believed dead, only to come back alive at the end, having lost her beauty and aged like Mlle Cunegonde. The novel also has twentieth-century literary antecedents which likewise thematize the cultural and civilizational encounter with the East, particularly India. Rudyard Kipling's Kim and many of his short stories and E.M. Forster's Passage to India are obvious examples. Those works register the changing attitudes toward India. While Kipling's English characters go to India only to return more firmly anchored in their belief in the superiority of Western civilization, Forster's characters cannot help being fascinated and even shaken by what they perceive as the "nothingness" at the core of Indian culture and religion, symbolized by the Marabar caves, and which threatens to undermine their grasp on reality. In Kopf, however, the figure of "nothingness" becomes Kali, the goddess of death, whose power is celebrated as an affirmative principle of life, rather than its negation. The real negation of life is seen here to be in the values of the technocratic civilization of the modern Faustian man.

The novel makes for very rewarding, pleasurable reading for its vividly drawn characters and for its depiction of a turbulent era in modern Bengali history. The themes of social, cultural, and spiritual alienation, freedom, and violence treated in the novel relate to a particular era in contemporary American cultural history, but are also universal enough to stimulate the interest of many audiences. The novel would also be of great interest to teach in courses on American civilization, contemporary American literature, cross-cultural and inter-civilizational thematics, and East/West comparative literature courses.

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