THE DYNAMICS OF LITERARY REFERENCE : NARRATIVE DISCOURSE AND SOCIAL IDEOLOGY IN TWO 19TH CENTURY INDIAN NOVELS

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Let me begin with a deliberately blunt question : Do literary texts reflect reality? Let us think of the term reflection in its everyday and rather casual sense of representing something, and doing so either well or badly, clearly or with some distortion. It is this relation between texts and reality that I am trying to invoke. My more specific question would then take the following form : Do certain novels depict the social world adequately or inadequately? This way of asking the question about reflection, depiction, and representation is a fairly commonsensical one; and it is the one many ordinary readers, who are not professional literary critics, often think of asking. The question implies grades of success or failure, of better or worse representation or depiction of reality. And it is exactly this question, with all of the attendant theoretical worries about how exactly a novel, any text, reflects a world, that I wish to explore in talking about reference, literary reference.[1]

Why do I begin with an explanation that may seem so obvious and simple to many? I do so because since the advent of poststructuralism in the 1970s, many critics—literary theorists in particular—have tended to think of reference as a reductive notion. They have sometimes assumed that reference is opposed to literariness, to the richer process of interpretive free play. My own view is that this assumption has led us to accept a very impoverished notion of what reference in fact is (or, in my gloss,

what reflection, representation, depiction, etc. in fact are). In this paper, I want to propose and defend a more complex notion of literary reference than the one literary theorists have in mind; I want to argue that we need to see reference as an antifoundationalist epistemological notion. Drawing on Charles Sanders Peirce's account of the role of the Interpretant in the process of signification, as well on the work done by more recent philosophers of science like Richard Boyd, who develop the causal account of reference by showing how reference is a form of "epistemic access," I would like to outline a few propositions about the nature of reference and about its implications for an antifoundationalist literary theory. What I offer is clearly not a full-blown theory of reference. My goal is more modest. Drawing on the pragmatist thinker Peirce and postpositivist realists like Putnam and Boyd, I want to show why it will be valuable to see literary signification and literary reference in epistemological terms, as continuous with ordinary everyday inquiry, including scientific inquiry.

Let me clarify, however, what I mean by foundationalism and antifoundationalism in the context of literary studies. I do not take foundationalism to mean the reliance on determinate and more fundamental theses that we draw from extra-textual sources or from other disciplines. Such foundations are necessary, it seems to me, because literary interpretation is continuous with other fields of inquiry, although it has its own relatively autonomous rules determined in part by the nature of its objects, texts. I use the term foundationalism to refer to epistemological foundationalism, the view that knowledge and inquiry should ultimately be grounded in a privileged class of beliefs, or in a method, which are themselves uniquely resistant to falsification through new evidence, to changes in knowledge. I have argued elsewhere that the best way to read Paul de Man on reference is to see him as criticizing a foundationalist epistemology; even though de Man rarely uses the term foundationalism, I said that his literary analyses in *Allegories of Reading* in particular, are motivated by

the desire to use literature to criticize a certain view of knowledge, a foundationalist view which assumes that word and world, sign and object, will coincide perfectly, and that interpretation can be based on that idealized coincidence.[2] De Man's impatience with reference is an impatience in part with the hope of some literary critics that the world outside the text can tell us simply and surely what the text means. But he is really after much bigger game. His famous celebrations of Language and literariness are best understood as an attack on a foundationalist nostalgia which he finds everywhere, not just among literary interpreters. And so he naturally identifies all talk about reference with this nostalgic desire to seek extra-textual certainty and to avoid epistemic complexity. Now my general point in my chapter on de Man was that once we recognize the underlying epistemological critique in his work, we need to explore both an antifoundationalist epistemology and a supple and nonreductive view of reference which is compatible with such antifoundationalism. This is exactly the project de Man could not imagine, and that was because he assumed that reference is necessarily and always a reductive notion.

What, then, would a complex and sophisticated notion of reference look like, especially one that does not rely on the kinds of foundationalist nostalgia de Man rightly cautions against? Let me present three basic theses that suggest how such a theory of reference can be developed.

1. Words, concepts, and even theories refer to aspects of the world, but in necessarily mediated ways. **There is no unmediated reference.** As Peirce argued, the referential relation is never "dyadic," between (what he calls) a First and a Second, a Sign and its Object, but always inevitably mediated and transformed by a Third, the Interpretant. Peirce was elaborating a theory of signs, but he saw such a theory as part of an

epistemological project.[3] Later thinkers as varied in their backgrounds as Heidegger and Quine made the same point : the empiricist vision of knowledge based on pure observation is wrong because even observation is profoundly mediated by our background assumptions and unstated theoretical commitments. The foundationalist view is misguided because knowledge is never self-evidently or non-inferentially generated from the data of observation.

2. Many significant instance of reference, especially in scientific discourse or literary texts, do not involve simple empirical givens, static and unique objects in the world, but rather complex objects of inquiry. In considering the culturally mediated process of signification, Peirce pointed out that what he called the Object of the Sign was itself more than the observable datum of the empiricist. Objects, for Pierce, are always and already interpreted by both the Sign and the Interpretant; they are, as he put it, dynamic rather than static, engaged by and defined within the process of signification. The postpositivist philosopher of science Richard Boyd similarly argues for a dialectical view of the object, the referent, of scientific theoretical terms. In detecting key features of the natural world, Boyd argues, scientific inquiry relies on theoretical terms that point (often inadequately) to objects as mediated and theory-laden as "electron," and "DNA," "gold" and "reptile." These objects themselves undergo change and refinement as our epistemic practices evolve, and Boyd suggests, much like Peirce, we should thus not construe such objects in empiricist terms.[4]

3. If reference is an epistemologicla notion, and the objects of literary reference are complex objects of human inquiry, then it follows that in many instances it will be misleading to see reference as we literary theorists sometimes tend to do, as an all-or-nothing affair. Either we have an instance of referential success, we assume, or else reference fails. Instead, the more mediated and dialectical notion of reference I am retrieving from Peirce and postpositivist thinkers like Putnam and Boyd suggests

that **reference should be seen as existing in degrees.** Boyd provides a crucial theoretical account of this phenomenon, an account that can be useful for literary scholars. Reference, says Boyd, provides degrees of epistemic access to central aspects and properties of the world. Differences in referential practice do not point merely to differences in social or intellectual convention, because in some crucial instances they are based on better and more accurate knowledge. Referential vagueness, imprecision, indeterminacy, and even failure, can sometimes give way to increasing degrees of success precisely because, of the growth of knowledge, of our socially coordinated knowledge-seeking practices. On this view, that are no guarantees of referential success, just as there are no guarantees of scientific success. But when reference works, it works not because we refine our linguistic terminology but rather because we gain better knowledge of the world, through historically contingent social practices of inquiry. Here is Boyd :

> Scientific terms must be understood as providing the sort of epistemic access appropriate to the level of epistemic success typical of scientific discoveries. Historical evidence suggests that the theories which are accepted by the scientific community are rarely entirely correct in every respect, even when they reflect the discovery of fundamentally important truths. What is typical of successful scientific investigations is successive improvements in partial but significant knowledge : scientific progress typically arises from the replacement of revealing (though only approximately accurate) theories with more revealing (and more nearly accurate) theories. Similarly, it is true that the history of science reveals a number of plausible but fundamentally mistaken "false starts" which are only corrected over time (for example, Drawin's belief in inheritance of acquired characteristics, or the theory of vital forces). Thus the sort of success which is characteristic of epistemic access in the case of a theoretical term in science involves the capacity of the scientific community, typically and over time, to acquire increasingly accurate knowledge about the referent of that term. (506-07)

The first obvious question then is this : does literary reference really work in this way, to facilitate what Boyd calls epistemic access? When we are analyzing literary texts, can we talk meaningfully about "successive improvements" in knowledge and the social coordinated practices of a community of knowers? My view is that what we call "literary reference" is a very heterogeneous phenomenon, defined in a number of different generic modes and contexts, and so it would be foolish to try to find its essential and unitary definition. Literary reference is, rather, best seen as a cluster concept, a grouping of roughly similar phenomena that we observe and study in a number of very different literary contexts. The 19th century realist novel, for instance, obviously refers to its social world differently than does a devotional lyric circulated privately among members of a royal court. Both the intended audiences and the stylistic features shape the layered ways in which texts refer, and our goal as theorists of literary reference is less to seek the singular essence of literary reference and more to work modestly and inductively to identify and analyze these constitutive layers.

At least in some crucial instances in literary history, I would like to argue, Boyd's view of the progressive refinement of reference seems to hold. Writers sometimes seem to comment on previous writers and attempt to provide fuller, less partial, and thus more accurate reference. But this process of critique and revision, which is often evident in the history of literary realism, for instance (see section 2, below), is where we also see how complexly mediated reference is, how the referent is itself defined as theory-laden. The improvement of reference we see in these contexts leads to greater accuracy or objectivity, but it is not because the object simply unveils itself in its innocence. Rather,

even in the realist novel, literary reference reveals the role of social ideology or theoretical bias in *every* representation of the object, of the world. But some ideologies and biases produce better and more accurate knowledge, less distortion and mystification. It is through the analysis of ideological distortion and error that complex realist novels reveal the possibility of accurate and objective knowledge, a knowledge which is often as much about the mediating ideologies as it is about the object of representation.

One particularly good example of this process of referential refinement is evident in the history of the novel in colonial India. It is often recognized by literary historians of India that Fakir Mohan Senapatiis Oriya novel *Six Acres and a Third* (1897-1899) is perhaps the first truly sophisticated example of realism in the history of the Indian novel. [5] Sisir Kumar Das, in his monumental *History of Indian Literature, 1800-1910,* calls Senapati's novel the "culmination of the tradition of realism" in modern Indian literature. "All these plays and novels contain elements of realism in varying degrees," Das says about earlier realist texts, "but none can match Fakir Mohan's novels in respect of its minute details of social life and economic undercurrents regulating human relationships and the variety of characters representing traditional occupational groups." [6] Das is right about Senapati's achievements, of course, but if we look more closely at how Senapati is actively revising and rewriting one of his predecessors we will see something far more important about Senapati's project and about the development of literary realism in the context of colonial Indian Society. One of Senapati primary achievements as a realist writer as evident in the way he analyzes *the ideological underpinnings of the literary representation* of (colonial) Indian society. He succeeds as a realist because he focuses less on the "what" of representation and reference and more on the "how," on the mediating perceptions, values, and judgements that constitute the "object" of literary

representation. He is thus a realist not only in the literary-critical meaning of the term, but also in the philosophical sense : he goes beneath the surface of description to analyze social *causes*. His narrative discourse focuses on the distorting ideologies that accompany social representations and attempts a more reflexive and accurate account. His realism is thus less descriptive and more analytical, and we see this clearly in the way his novel implicitly comments on an earlier realist novel from the 1870s.

Senapati's novel, written in Oriya, is about life in an eastern Indian village. It is historically and socially very specific, however, for its refuses to accept Orientalist images of the timeless Indian village and presents in its place a complex account of social exploitation under colonial rule. But colonial rulers—that is, the British—rarely appear directly in the novel. Instead, what we get is an unsentimental analysis of the unequal relations between Indian (or Oriya) peasants and landlords, as well as between the educated intelligentsia and the ordinary Indian (Oriya). One of the key literary models Senapati has in mind is the award-winning novel *Bengal Peasant Life,* written in English by the Reverend Lal Behari Day, a Bengali writer who was also an ordained minister. [7] *Bengal Peasant Life* is one of the earliest examples of literary realism in India, and it is often cited as exerting an influence on Senapati's realist mode, but what has not been analyzed adequately is exactly how and why Senapati rewrites ideological elements of Day's descriptive-realist text. Day's novel, as has been pointed out by some critics, [8] is written in what might be called a submissive tone, presenting colorful sociological details about Bengali village life to its colonial readership. Like many realists before him, in India and elsewhere, Day wishes to write in a plain and unvarnished style, rejecting "anything marvellous or wonderful" in favor of the authentic reality of Indian (Bengali) village life. "My great Indian predecessors the latchet of whose shoes I do not pretend to be worthy to unloose, Valmiki, Vyas,

and the compilers of the Puranas, have treated of kings with ten heads and twenty arms; of a monkey carrying the sun in his armpit; of demons churning the universal ocean with a mountain for a churn-staffu etc. etc." (pp. 5-6). Instead, says Day, he will provide a "plain and unvarnished tale of a plain peasant, living in this plain country of Bengal told in a plain manner" (7). This is from the first chapter of *Bengal Peasant Life*; but it must sound familiar to readers of realist novels from just about every literary tradition. What Senapati, who begins writing 25 or so years later seizes on, however, is that while Day's style may be "plain and unvarnished," his representation of the Indian village is anything but "plain," that is, unmediated or innocent.

Writing in Oriya rather than English, in a lively colloquial style as opposed to the tame prose of his predecess, Senapati is at pains to redefine realism as much more than a plain unadorned representation written in simple language. In both novels there is a chapter where ordinary village women are bathing at the village pond, and Senapati's chapter is clearly a deliberate rewriting of Day's. In both texts, we listen in on the conversation among the women, and learn of details of their domestic lives. Here is an excerpt from Day's novel, with its unabashed anthropological tone :

A woman who is rubbing her feet sees another woman preparing to go, and says to her,

"Sister, why are you going away so soon? You have not to cook; why are you then going so soon?"

"Sister, I shall have to cook today. The elder *bou* is not well to-day: she was taken ill last night."

"But you have not to cook much. You have no feast in your house?"

"No; no feast, certainly. But my sister has come from Devagrama with her son. And the fisherman has given us a large rohita, which must be cooked."

"Oh! You have guests in your house. And what are you going to cook?"

"I am going to cook *dal* of *mashkalai*, one *tarkari*, *badi* fried, fish fried, fish with peppercorns, fish with tamarind, and another dish, of which my sister's son is very fond, namely, *amda* with poppy-seed."

"The everlasting *badi* and poppy-seed. You banias are very fond of these two things. We Brahmans do not like either of them."

"The reason why you Brahmans do not like *badis* is that you do not know how to make them well. If you once taste our *badi* you will not forget it for seven months. You would wish to eat it every day. As for poppy-seed, what 'excellent curry it makes. [T]hough you are a Brahman, once taste my *badi*. *Badi* will not destroy your caste."

So saying, the banker woman went away with the *kalasi* on her waist.(121)

Much of Day's novel is written in this embarrassingly turgid style, where the main goal seems to be to convert the village women into specimens of this or that caste, this or that sub-region of Bengal, so that the reader may be amused by these cultural details. Senapati begins with an entirely different premise. For one thing, his rendition of this conversation is indirect, presented not as direct dialogue but rather in the narrator's inimitable voice. The humor is that of the village story-teller reveling in his oral performance.

The gathering at the ghat became very large when the women came to bathe before cooking their day time meals. If there had been a daily newspaper in Gobindapur, its editor would have had no difficulty gathering stories for his paper; all he would have had to do was sit at the ghat, paper and pencil in hand. He would have found out, for instance, what had been cooked the previous night, at whose house, and what was

going to be cooked there today; who went to sleep at what time; how many mosquitoes bit whom; who ran out of salt; who had borrowed oil from whom; how Rama's mother's young daughter-in-law was a shrew, and how she talked back to her mother-in-law, although she married only the other day; when Kamali would go back to her in-laws; how Saraswati was a nice girl and how her cooking was good, her manners excellent...

Padi started a brief lecture as she sat in the water cleaning her teeth. The sum and substance of it was that no one in the village was a better cook than she. She went on tirelessly, pouring out much relevant and irrelevant information. A few pretty women went on rubbing their faces with their sari-ends, in order to look even prettier. Lashmi's nose, adorned with a nose-jewel, had already become red from too much rubbing. Sitting at the water's edge, scrubbing her heavy brass armlets with half a basketful of sand, Bimali was engaged in a long tirade against some unnamed person, using words not to be found in any dictionary. The gist of it was that somebody's cow had eaten her pumpkin-creepers last night. Bimali proceeded to offer some stinking stuff as food to three generations of the cow owner's ancestors, going on and on about the fertile soil in her back garden: the wretched cow had not merely devoured the shiny pumpkings that grew there but had destroyed the possibility of it producing many more such delicious pumpkins. With the help of several cogent arguments and examples, she also demonstrated that this cow must be given as a gift to a Brahmin, otherwise a terrible calamity would befall the owner. If a violent quarrel between Markandia's mother and Jasoda had not suddenly erupted and put an end to all the talk, we could have gathered many more such items of news. (Chapter 12)

At first, the differences appear to be mainly those of *tone*, but what soon emerges is that Senapati is trying to reframe the

women's discourse through the humourous *and critical* voice of his narrator. Day's narrator presents his account of the Indian village to the English-educated Indian reader as well as the colonial readership in England, and his approach to his subject is that of a benign tourist or anthropologist. You would never suspect from Day's account that he is writing about Indian society in the 1870s, a period when anticolonial and nationalist ideas are spreading across the country.

Pretending to be plain and unvarnished, Day's descriptive realism hides the fact that its own plainness or neutrality might be ideologically motivated, for the narrative information it provides is clearly partial and resolutely apolitical. Senapati's text, by contrast, foregrounds the ideological dimension of literary representation in colonial India. Senapati is writing, after all, in Oriya for educated Oriya readers, some of whom will not only know English but will also have been co-opted by colonial values and ideology. So his narrator (one of the genuine achievements of this novel) is a sly, clever, and critical commentator, mediating between the Oriya villagers he is talking about and the English-educated Oriya middle class who might read his account. His tone is satirical and subversive; he is less the teller of a simple story about Oriya peasant life and more a self-conscious trickster-like critic of colonial relations and attitudes. But his analysis is not limited to the obvious disparities between British and Indian; it is just as interested in the cultural reproduction of these relations among different classes of Indians.

There was only one pond in Gobindapur, and everyone in the village used it. It was fairly large, covering ten to twelve batis, with banks ten to twelve arm-lengths high, and was known as Asura pond. In the middle once stood sixteen stone pillars, on which lamps were lighted. We are unable to recount the true story of who had it dug, or when. It is said that demons, the Asuras, dug it themselves. That could well be true. Could humans

like us dig such an immense pond? Here is a brief history of Asura pond, as told to us by Ekadusia, the ninety-five-year-old weaver.

The demon Banasura ordered that the pond be dug, but did not pick up shovels and baskets to dig it himself. On his orders, a host of demons came one night and did the work. But when day broke, it had not yet been completed : there was a gap of twelve to fourteen arms-lengths in the south bank, which had not been filled in. By now, it was morning, and the villagers were already up and about. Where could the demons go? They dug a tunnel connecting the pond to the banks of the river Ganga, escaped through it, bathed in the holy river, and then disappeared. During the Baruni Festival on the Ganga, the holy waters of the river used to gush through the tunnel into the pond. But, as the villagers became sinful, the river no longer did this. English-educated babus, do not be too critical of our local historian, Ekadusia Chandra. If you are, half of what Marshman and Tod have written will not survive the light of scrutiny. (Chapter 12)

Notice the revision of one of the central norms of realist literary discourse. The legends and religious mythology Day wanted to banish from his text are brought back in, rehabilitating, in the process, the illiterate village historian Ekadusia Chandra and raising doubts about the authority of Marshman and Tod, prominent English historians of Indian culture. But the primary object of satire, the object which frames the discourse, is the English-educated babu, who imitates colonial values mindlessly and accepts uncritically its condescending attitudes towards indigenous Oriya or Indian culture. The irreverent tone of this passage is present throughout the novel, and if we are to analyze the main way that Senapati revises Day's representation of village life in India, we would have to focus primarily on the mediating role of the narrator in framing the object of literary representation.

Day's Orientalist representation of the Bengali village women effectively dehistoricizes their lives; his narrator's gaze swerves up from the Indian village to a timeless world where social life is drained of political specificity. The landlord's daughter, for instance, is supposed to remind us of ancient Egypt : "Her head was uncovered; her body covered in every part with ornaments, the silver anklets of her feet made a tinkling noise. All eyes were directed towards her. She had no kalasi at her waist, was attended by two maid-servants, and looked as proud as, to compare small things with great, Pharaoh's daughter might have looked when she went to make her ablution in the Nilep"(pp. 123-24). References to Greece and Egypt, to various classical and contemporary European models, dominate Day's novel, and they provide the ideological frame of historical innocence through which we are asked to view the Indian village of the second half of the 19th century. Colonial rule is rarely mentioned, and if it is, it is made to seem utterly natural, never a political issue.

Senapati's garrulous narrator, on the other hand, can't seem to keep colonial rule out of his mind, try as hard as he might. Here he is, talking about the pond, before the women appear:

There is another equally irrefutable proof to support this contention [that there are fish in the pond]. Look over there! Four kaduakhumpi birds are hopping about like gotipuas, like traditional dancing boys. The birds are happy and excited because they are able to spear and eat the little fish that live in the mud. Some might remark that these birds are so cruel, so wicked, that they get pleasure from spearing and eating creatures smaller than themselves! What can we say? You may describe the kaduakhumpi birds as cruel, wicked, satanic, or whatever else you like; the birds will never file a defamation suit against you. But don't you know that among your fellow human beings, the bravery, honor, respectability, indeed, the attractiveness of an individual all depend upon the number of necks he can wring?

Some sixteen to twenty cranes, white and brown, churn the mud like lowly farmhands, from morning till night. This is the third proof that there are fish in the pond. A pair of king-fishers suddenly arrive out of nowhere, dive into the water a couple of times, stuff themselves with food, and swiftly fly away. Sitting on the bank, a lone kingfisher suns itself, wings spread like the gown of a memsahib. O stupid Hindu cranes, look at these English kingfishers, who arrive out of nowhere with empty pockets, fill themselves with all manner of fish from the pond, and then fly away. You nest in the banyan tree near the pond, but after churning the mud and water all day long, all you get are a few miserable small fish. You are living in critical times now; more and more kingfishers will swoop down on the pond and carry off the best fish. You have no hope, no future, unless you go abroad and learn how to swim in the ocean.

The kite is smart and clever; it perches quietly on a branch, like a Brahmin guru, and from there swoops down into the pond to snatch a big fish. That lasts it for the whole day. Brahmin gurus perch on their verandahs, descending on their disciples once a year, like the kite. (Chapter 12)

Reading Lal Behari Day and Fakir Mohan Senapati together in this way, then, we are faced with the question : do their narrative discourses (atleast in these two chapters, which so closely resemble each other in many ways) share a common referent? Is this referent "village life in India"? Perhaps, but that would be a very partial and inadequate explanation. For Senapati's novel historicizes and politicizes Day's discourse, and it does this by drawing attention to the crucial role of the narrative's mediating values and attitudes. Senapati's narrative discourse takes us beneath the surface of descriptive realism to reveal the ideological gaps and silences in Day's text. Using Boyd's terms, we might say that Senapati's discourse, in resituating Day's account of village life, improves it; it provides a critical and reflexive, and

hence more objective, definition of the referent of both texts : village life in *colonial* India society. [9] When we approach both novels this way, we notice the referential continuity, and a more complex and general referent emerges in the background : *colonial relations, both literary and ideological.* The object of representation, very narrowly defined, may be Indian village women bathing at the pond, but any reader who focuses on that alone will miss the substance of much of what is going on in these novels.

To talk more adequately about these "realist" texts, what we need is an account of not just the object in the social world but also the mediating layers, the referential lenses, through which those objects come into view. These lenses are what Pierce calls the Interpretant. They are not extraneous to the object of signification, you will recall from my earlier account, but rather essential to it. Reference, on this view that I am outlining, is not about simple empirical givens (the minute details of social life, for instance) which the realist writer tries to represent (describe) accurately. Rather, the writer brings the objects of signification into our view, into discourse, by working on the referential mediations themselves. The Interpretant (here, the narrator's mediating role) is not a person but rather an interpretive perspective, and this perspective is not just conventional; it has an epistemic dimension. That is because it facilitates better or worse accounts, greater or lesser degrees of access to reality, which in turn is not simply waiting out there for us to hold up a mirror to it. It is this focus on the epistemic dimension of reference which marks the sharpest contrast between the realiset view I am developing and the poststructuralist one defended by de Man and others.

At crucial moments in literary and cultural history, such as the instance I have described in the history of the realist novel in 19th century India, we can point to *advances* in the referential function of literature, and such advances suggest new ways of doing comparative (Indian) literary study. Common referents can help provide a comparative framework that takes us beyond the

limits of local literary and linguistic traditions and raises the stakes of literary analysis. Working with a realist theory of literary reference will enable us to see common textual referents as productive sites of theoretical encounter, of ideological contestation and revision. But once we enlarge the analysis in these ways, we can appreciate the dynamic relationships in which literary production is always embedded. What I called "advances" in the referential function of literature, for instance, cannot be seen as purely literary advances; they cannot be understood in only linguistic or formal terms. Senapati's critique of Day's account of Indian peasants is a critique of social ideology, of the ideology that inheres in our representational habits. Given the analytical values and critical attitudes he presents, Senapati's loquacious and wily narrator embodies an epistemic achievement, not just a literary one. It would not be inaccurate to say that this narrator is Senapati's (and the early Indian novel) contribution to an anticolonial and demystificatory social thought. Our evaluation of Senapati's achievement is in turn not a purely literary-critical one, for it depends crucially on our knowledge of colonial Indian society and culture, the kind of knowledge which is in part fundamentally interdisciplinary.

My realist-pragmatist account of the mediated nature of literary reference is, then, an attempt to reassert the epistemic dimension of literature. Our appreciation of this dimension of literary texts, I have argued, will be limited if we see reference as a static and reductive process. I would like to end with the proposal that a theory of literary reference be seen a component of a more general antifoundationalist and postpositivist view of knowledge and inquiry, a view that recognizes the possibility of both ideological distortion and objectivity, of theoretical error and socially coordinated epistemic progress.

NOTES

1. This is a slightly revised version of a paper presented to audiences at a number of universities, including Rajasthan, Jadavpur, Stanford, and Hawaii, as well as at the Modern Language Association and the School of Criticism and Theory. A fuller version will appear in the *Journal of Contemporary Thought*.
2. For an extended discussion of de Man on reference, see my *Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997; Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1998), Chapter 1 : "Paul de Man, 'Language, and the Politics of Meaning.'" The poststructuralist view of reference as necessarily reductive and foundationalist is evident in the work of a number of critics. See, for instance, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's critique of the Subaltern School reference to "reality": 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography' in her *In Other Worlds* (New York : Methuen, 1987), esp. p. 205. The other essay by Spivak where related issues are discussed is the widely cited 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Urbana : U of Illinois p, 1988), 271 313. Joan Scott's influential essay 'The Evidence of Experience' (Critical Inquiry [Summer 1991]: 773-997) defends a similar epistemological position, especially as it concerns the status of personal experience in the writing of history. For useful "realist" theoretical rejoinders to Scott, see the essays by Zammito and Wilkerson in *Reclaiming Identity : Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, ed. Paul Moya and Michael Hames-Garcia (Berkeley : University of California Press, 2000; Delhi : Macmillan, 2001).
3. I am summarizing and drawing on my extended discussion of Peirce in *Literary Theory and the Claims of History*, Chapter 2.
4. See especially Richard Boyd, 'Metaphor and Theory Change' in *Metaphor and Thought*, 2nd edition, edited by Andrew Ortony (New York: Cambridge UP, 1993). For more sources, see *Literary Theory and the Claims of History*, Chapters 2, 6 and 7.
5. A new translation of Senapati's novel *Chha Mana Atha Guntha (Six Acres and a Third*, with an Introduction by Satya P. Mohanty) is forthcoming from the University of California Press in 2005 (to be

reprinted by Penguin-Indian in the same year); the translators are Rabi Shankar Mishra, Satya P. Mohanty, Jatin Nayak, and Paul St. Pierre.

6. Sisir Kumar Das, *A History of Indian Literature 1800-1910* (New Delhi : Sahitya Akademi, 1991), p. 296.
7. Day's novel *Bengal Peasant Life* is available in the following edition : Lal Behari Day, *Bengal Peasant Life, Folk Tales of Bengal, and Recollections of My School Days* edited by Mahadevprasad Saha (Calcutta: Editions Indian, 1969).
8. See H. S. Mohapatra and J. K. Nayak, 'Writing Peasant Life in Colonial India,' *The Toronto Review of Contemporary Writing Abroad,* Spring 1996, pp. 29, 40.
9. Senapati's account is more "objective" than Day's, but that is not to say that it completely "neutral," shorn of all evaluative or ideological content. For a brief discussion of the postpositivist realist view that objectivity is itself theory-laden and evaluative, see my 'Can Our Values Be Objective?' On Ethics, Aesthetics, and Progressive Politics' *New Literary History* (Autumn 2001).