

**Portraits of God: Word Pictures of the Deity from the Earliest Times Through Today**

Louis Baldwin

McFarland, 960 NC Hwy 88 W, Jefferson NC 28640 (Box 611). Website: <https://mcfarlandbooks.com>. 2011. 192 pp. \$19.99. PB. ISBN 9780786467204.

The chapter ‘The Projected Self-Image’ (107–8) in the book under review adds a brilliantly sarcastic insight into one of the ‘extreme leftist offshoots of Hegel’ (107). We are speaking here of Ludwig Feuerbach, who was ‘an early proponent of scientific humanism [and] whose thinking formed something of a bridge between Hegel and Karl Marx and [who] was a harbinger of Sigmund Freud’ (107). To find Feuerbach in this book was a pleasant surprise. Baldwin, in this witty book, has presented to us humorous portraits of God, and more wonders follow.

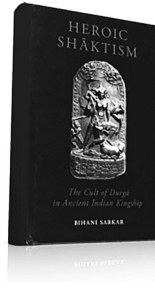
While Feuerbach saw God as ‘the epitome, [and] not the embodiment, of human love’ (108); Sigmund Freud, according to Baldwin might ‘have implicitly agreed with Jesus Christ that the overweening love of self is the root of all evil, although he [Freud] might not have honored the copyright’ (132). ‘The Father Fantastic’ (130–2), which discusses Freud on God, touches upon the issue of theodicy: ‘What is real in this world [according to Baldwin’s study of Freud], in the world we know at first hand, is evil—the pain and other suffering from which there is no escape except by chance’ (131). Again, for this reviewer, this chapter on Freud is surprising in this sort of a book. Baldwin is analytical, but he never loses sight of the idea of God that every one of us has constructed in our minds. He also deals, though inadequately, with the Upanishadic Brahman (14–7).

Karen Armstrong does a good job of writing on God in her books, so does Neil McGregor in his *Living with the Gods: On Beliefs and People* (2018), but Baldwin’s book is not merely supplementary to Armstrong’s works or McGregor’s book; it is essential reading for both philosophers and theologians. One glaring omission in this book is Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s work on the rhizomic nature of the Buddhist ‘mandala’.

Had Baldwin added this to his ‘human portraits’ of God, this book would have been truly a source-book on anthropomorphic reflections on God.

Baldwin’s book is vast in scope, and yet, it is written so clearly that it will appeal to even those who do not agree with the existence of anything transcendent.

*Subhasis Chattopadhyay*



**Heroic Shaktism: The Cult of Durgā in**

**Ancient Indian Kingship**

Bihani Sarkar

Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP, UK. Website: <https://global.oup.com>. 2017. 295 pp. £75. HB. ISBN 9780197266106.

Bihani Sarkar’s monograph is one of those religious monographs written by someone who knows the languages of the yesteryears, knows a lot of ancillary materials, but has actually no personal experience with the Mother in her various forms. The names of these forms, Sarkar can rattle off since her next postdoctoral funding depends on her being able to publish or perish to languish in the backwaters of the tenure-hopefuls in the UK. Now that the COVID-19 pandemic has begun in the UK, perhaps she is rooting for a plum post as a savant on the Mother Goddess in some hallowed and sanitised hall of some bleak college ruled by an inflexible, iterative, and tautological structuralist like herself.

Chapters 3 and 7 show Sarkar at her archival, plodding, and non-syncretic best. In ‘Taking Over Skanda’ (97–114), Sarkar shows her huge deficits as being part of any faith community except the sort that armchair scholars of religion have been doing throughout the last century. She reduces Lord Shiva to nothing more than a detritus who is so ephemeral that it would surprise a non-Hindu reader to find that actually Shiva is offered worship within Advaita Vedanta, in its Kashmiri Shaivite form, and within other living traditions of Hinduism. These, apart from the way Shiva is seen by the Virashaivas and Lingayats of contemporary South India. They would be horrified to know that both Devi Durga and Lord Shiva are all

imaginings of various Sanskrit poets. It is akin to saying that *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1955) by Nikos Kazantzakis is a valid testimony of the life of the real Jesus just because this reviewer has fumbled upon it while searching for authentic sources for Christ's life.

In chapter 7, Sarkar confuses literature, history, liturgy with *dulia* and *hyperdulia* with her gross hermeneutical error that Navaratri is only about symbols and metaphors. Reading this chapter, one senses that nobody really feels that good won over evil ever; even metaphorically. Sarkar loves metaphors and other literary tropes since she is in an ivory-tower of solipsism fuelled by misplaced religious scholarship. Again, to reach Sarkar's Anglophilic intellect swimming within Sanskrit and Hindu waters too deep for her; we must use a Christian analogy to show her intellectual confusion.

If one reads the very erudite John P Meier's monumental 5 volumes' *A Marginal Jew* series (1991–2016), one feels that the Jesuit Meier's life's mission is to desacralise and reduce Christ to human levels that are historically comprehensible to finite beings. History, archaeology, and a vast array of linguistic jingoism have established Father Meier as a recent stalwart in the historical Jesus movement. But to what avail? Bihani Sarkar's book will be, through standard *quid pro quo*s in high places, one day lauded as a great contribution to Hindu Studies. And perhaps, on the merit of her archival knowledge, her erotic descriptions of Devi Durga will even win her some coveted honorary Chair at the American Academy of Religion alongside Wendy Doniger and Sarah H Jacoby. This reviewer was ashamed to read and review Jacoby for this journal for Jacoby misrepresented the life of the Tibetan mystic, Sera Khandro.

One foresees a great academic career for Bihani Sarkar precisely because she has neglected the living tradition(s) of Shakta tantra, which she has mapped wrongly in her despicable book. In short, Bihani Sarkar writes for academic kudos in the Western world. She is like a learned medical student who has only read of human anatomy but never seen a real corpse.

*Subhasis Chattopadhyay*



**On Psychological and Visionary Art: Notes from C G Jung's Lecture Gérard de Nerval's 'Aurélia'**

C G Jung

Edited by Craig E Stephenson

Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540, USA. Website: <https://www.press.princeton.edu>. 2015. 240 pp. \$35. HB. ISBN 9780691162478.

Richard Sieburth annotates a beautiful quotation from Gérard de Nerval's *Aurélia*: 'Dream is a second life. ... The first few instants of sleep are the image of death; a drowsy numbness steals over our thoughts. ... Then ... a new clarity illuminates these bizarre apparitions and sets them in motion. ... [Emmanuel] Swedenborg called these visions his *Memorabilia*; they came to him more often in reverie than in sleep; Apuleius's *Golden Ass* and Dante's *Divine Comedy* are the poetic models of such studies of the human soul' (120).

The book under review, published with the support of the Philemon Foundation, is a manifesto for Romanticism, albeit written in the twentieth century. R F C Hull and Gottwalt Pankow, the translators have done us a service through their cultural work of being loyal to Jung's German without losing Jung's nuances while translating Jung into English.

In the first section of this review, we will engage with Stephenson's excellent introduction to de Nerval's *Aurélia*, posthumously published in 1855, and show how Stephenson interiorises and represents the Romantic agon. Then we shall move on to Jung's writings and notes on *Aurélia* to prove how modernist Jung (1875–1961) was and, as we will see in a moment, all modernism and postmodernism; that is, in short, all that came after the great Romantics, happen to be just dirges to Romanticism. Even in March 2020, this reviewer is convinced that we continue to live under the shadow of the Romantics and all that is written is written within the umbra and penumbra of Romanticism; at least within English letters. The writings may range from Haruki Murakami's (b. 1949) *Norwegian Wood* (1987), to Kazuo Ishiguro's