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Book Reviews

The Political Vision of the "Divine Comedy" by Joan M. Ferrante. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. Pp. 392. \$35.00.

Of Dante's two great passions, Beatrice may be the more memorable, but politics is the more interesting. Anyone who has read the *Divine Comedy* knows that Dante was not only a political refugee, having been exiled from his native Florence, but a political theorist as well. Dante in fact is very likely the most politically minded of all medieval writers. Personal hardship made politics an inescapable brute fact of life for him and contributed to the formation of his political ideas, but it was not the prime motive for his becoming a theorist. Even had his lot been more fortunate, he would still have come to espouse his theory of government defining the ideal relationship between the two formidable political powers of his day, church and empire. He was simply too involved with the fate of the real world, writing the *Comedy* more out of a desire to cure corruption in government than to avenge himself on his enemies. Dante may be most remembered as having envisioned the shape of things in the afterlife, but his mind was primarily fixed, as Ferrante argues, on the affairs of man in this world.

Given the centrality of the theme of politics to the *Divine Comedy*, it is surprising that this should be the first book to treat the subject in so comprehensive a manner in quite some time. Charles Till Davis's *The Idea of Rome*, published almost thirty years ago, has up till now served as the fundamental study of the origins of Dante's political conceptions out of which was born his vision of Rome as a secular and Christian center. Ferrante retraces some of this ground, as well as a good deal of territory covered by numerous other historians and critics, much of it familiar territory. But she lays to rest any thought that all may have been said on the subject. In fact, this remarkable book fills a lacuna in Dante studies that has not really been considered to exist, and it fills it admirably. It is the work of a seasoned scholar that is destined to become mandatory reading for every serious student of the *Divine Comedy*.

Dante criticism of late has been dominated by allegorical readings of the topological variety. That approach, promoted over the years by Singleton, Freccero, and their disciples, has stressed the importance of allusions to and refashionings of Biblical figures and events in the *Comedy*. Ferrante's tack, by placing emphasis on the historical dimension, is therefore especially refreshing. This is not to suggest that she either rejects allegorical significances or pits history against allegory. Rather she shows how the one complements the other, something that is apparent in her handling of the poem's largest images. Hell stands for Florence, the corrupt, self-centered, and narrow-minded city-state. Its opposite, Paradise, represents Dante's image of the Roman empire, the ideal, regenerate society. In between lies Purgatory, a transitional domain that traces out the road from the small and greedy city-state to the utopian empire that some future though enigmatically identified messiah will one day found. These analogies have been made by other critics, as Ferrante herself is quick to note, but she refines them and creates an extremely useful

and cogent structure into which to situate what is the chief substance of the book, namely a comprehensive, discursive reading of the entire poem, almost canto by canto, event by event, major figure by major figure. What emerges is a renewed awareness of the pervasiveness of the political motif throughout the poem, even in places where it at first appears muted or even absent.

One example of the latter is her analysis of the story of Piccarda, a soul that might have gained a higher position in heaven had she not fallen victim to her brother Corso Donati's need to marry her against her will in order to establish a politically favorable connection. In another, she observes (citing Landino's note quoted in Sapegno's Italian edition, but not in Singleton's) that Dante had special reason to vent his wrath on Filippo Argenti (*Inf.* 8) since it was Filippo's family that received Dante's confiscated belongings after his exile from Florence. And among the thieves undergoing grotesque corporal transformations as their punishment there is Agnolo, who began as a White Guelph and later became a Black Guelph, providing "a stunning example of political metamorphosis for personal advantage" (p. 181). The political seems in one way or another to lurk behind the actions of most of Dante's characters. We come away from this book convinced that the poet's imagination was primarily possessed with politics, driven utterly to demonstrate that the lives of all individuals were inextricably entrapped, either directly or indirectly, in political realities.

Politics was of course inseparable from religion, and the Church, or more precisely the papacy, was Dante's *bête noire*. There could be no peace, no truly ordered Empire, until the Church was divested of its self-proclaimed temporal powers, supposedly legitimized by the Donation of Constantine. The archvillain of the *Comedy* is the papacy, and Ferrante underscores the numerous devices that Dante employs for heaping opprobrium on this body all too politic. She observes acutely that among the myriad residents of *Paradise* we find but one medieval pope, and he is cited as a theologian renowned for having written a manual of logic. Ferrante marshals much more evidence of this kind to illustrate her claim that "There is no place in Dante's ideal society for the bureaucracy of the church" (p. 309). If the popes stand out in Purgatory and in Paradise by virtue of their general absence, it is because they are mostly in Hell.

A major virtue of this book is that it gives us an ordered and sequential reading of the poem. It is the best full reading of the poem from this perspective that we have. We find here an extensiveness of analysis, a balance of critical intellect and intuition, and a major argument that is indisputably sound, supplemented by numerous fine insights into the working of Dante's imagination at specific points along the dramatic axis of the poem. She never fails to provide the reader with something long known but long forgotten, tying it together with the more fanciful sorts of speculation which are, to her credit, identified as speculation. There is a good deal of sanity here and an overwhelming breadth of learning that cuts across traditional critical boundaries. While she espouses no particular methodology, her approach is broadly crossdisciplinary, blending considerations on philosophy, theology, history (both sacred and secular), and culture with reflections on poetic style, imagery, and narrative development. Especially suggestive is the way in which she turns up word play in the text (both syllepsis and paronomasia) and shows how it ties together apparently divergent domains of thought.

Of all the chapters, the last is the most original and, as a result, of necessity the most adventuresome. One might wish that she had not again relied on the procedure of analyzing examples taken chronologically from the text, as in previous chapters, but her observations are nevertheless too illuminating for this to divert the reader's attention. It presents a far-reaching discussion of commerce, money, and medieval views on the sin of usury in the context of an investigation of Dante's use of financial imagery. Contrary to expectations, Dante is found to have a healthy respect for proper and legal commercial enterprise. There is much that is extremely useful in these pages, but her reading of Ulysses as an allegory for mercantile profitmongering will strike many as provocative. Of the multiple interpretations of his south sea journey, no one, to the best of my knowledge, has offered a reading that conceives of it as a pursuit of wealth akin to a merchant sailing to faroff lands in search of new commercial markets. Upon first consideration, such a proposal brings with it a good deal of surprise. Ulysses, though damned, has always been seen as noble if misguided. But a profiteer? No classical or medieval source of the Ulysses story ever envisioned him in such garb. But Ferrante finds numerous pieces of evidence which turn an initial incredulity into amazement that this reading may not be altogether implausible. She turns up possible punning on fiscal terminology ("folle volo, / sempre acquistando dal lato mancino"), cites his involvement in the theft of the Palladium as noted by Dante, and places his voyage in the context of the journeys of Marco Polo, who returned from China in 1295, and of the Genoese brothers, who, being less fortunate, disappeared after sailing through the Columns of Hercules in 1291. If Ulysses' quest was after wealth and his exhortation to his men a tissue of lies designed to mask his true motives, he is a more debased figure than we have up to now supposed him to be. The Guido da Montefeltro episode, which follows immediately in canto 27, explores similar mercantile connections. Whatever the ultimate merit of these unusually original individual readings, and the chapter as a whole, Ferrante will be seen as the Branca of Dante criticism.

In sum, this is a major contribution to Dante studies. It is lucidly conceived, gracefully written, and, rarity of rarity these days, flawlessly (save but a single lapse) proofed and edited.

Brandeis University

Richard H. Lansing

Detours of Desire; Readings in the French Baroque, by Mitchell Greenberg. Columbus: Published for Miami University of Ohio by the Ohio State University Press, 1984. Pp. xi + 163. \$17.50.

Greenberg's objective is twofold: to expound a psychoanalytic interpretation of Baroque ideology in France (1550-1650) and to illustrate the character of Baroque desire through close readings of D'Aubigné, Montaigne, Théophile De Viau, Sorel, and Corneille. The theoretical position, staked out in the introduction, relies upon an opposition between Classicism and Baroque. The first form of representation is based on the father figure as a force of

containment and authority. This may be understood in various ways: aesthetically, as the emulation of Latin and Greek models; politically, as obedience to the Sun God (Louis XIV) who symbolized self-sufficiency, integrity, and a totalitarian exclusion of difference; socially (the "Father" as "Law") as the representative of the primary taboo that founds society—the interdiction of incest; metaphysically, as the exclusion of disorder and the arbiter of life and death.

The French Baroque, situated between the Classicism of the Renaissance and that of "le grand siècle," may be construed as a fall away from the Father and his structured world. In the absence of a clearly defined Other/Father, the Baroque nostalgically longed for a symbolic, ritualizing center, but transformed this absence into those disruptive impulses that patriarchy represses: excess, dislocation, and ambivalence. Copernicus fostered a new world-view that displaced symmetry, hierarchy, and oneness into "the dissymmetry of the many" (p. 7). Moreover, the Reformation rended the unified body of the Church, and unleashed the rebellion and chaos of civil war. In the social arena, the rising bourgeois class eroded the stability of a cast system based on loyalty to the sovereign. In his Introduction, Greenburg writes: "The Baroque invites a speculative analysis of its desires because desire itself seems to be, in essence, 'baroque.' As representation, the 'Baroque' offers itself to our gaze as the quintessential projection of all desire" (p. 4). Greenberg makes this claim based upon the Freudian and neo-Freudian views of such thinkers as Bataille, Bersani, and Lacan. Genuine desire is a consent to incompleteness and hence drive by lack. The difference between self and Other can never be nullified, but this very gap becomes the motor of desire. "It is by these continuous detours from object to object that desire seeks to abolish difference and paradoxically to maintain it" (p. 13, n.4). Baroque literature would incarnate such a concept, since it yearns for a centering principle whose absence continually displaces desire. As opposed to the integrity of the Father in Classical ideology, the Baroque takes on an ambivalent stance, fracturing all possibility of primal unity.

Chapter I entitled "D'Aubigné's Sacrifice" analyzes the ambiguity of desire in *L'Hécatombe à Diane*. The poems of this collection mark desire as an unfixable yearning for self-mastery. Writing (poetry), which would ostensibly control chaos, loss, and death, fixes itself upon an erotic object only to create a constant oscillation between promise and want. Thus it is that Eros becomes interchangeable with Thanatos. Visual, gustatorial and mythological imagery reveal the reversibility of such key oppositions as presence/absence, life/death. The color red, signifying the fire of desire, is transformed into metaphors of burning torture. Likewise, such appeals to taste as *douceur*, suggest the "maternal attributes of the woman . . . as supportive nurturer," but these prove to be meretricious covers for "devouring, ingestion, and death" (p. 26). Onomastically, Diane is not only the nocturnal guiding light but also the infernal Hecate and vampirish "Diane Tauroscythienne." But what is the meaning of the chapter title, "D'Aubigné's Sacrifice"? Psychologically the narrative is a kind of vicious circle in which the poetic impulse recuperates the erotic only to mark better eros's destructive power—an obsessive repetition. But it is also the artistic ritual of the lover giving himself over to the beloved, symbolizing his sacrifice to her transcendent powers. Yet as a narra-

tive of that offering, as an artistic act, the poet resists self-extinction by constantly rekindling a creative desire—the “spectacle” of sacrifice. But death in words is only a figurative death that welcomes but resists self-dispossession. Such a precarious position is finally stabilized in D’Aubigné’s *Tragiques*, where the author embraces literal death and the rewards of paradise: “La fin du mouvement et la fin du désir” (p. 38).

Chapter II (“Montaigne at the Crossroads”) shows how the author’s repression of femininity and death provide insights into his poesis. Male models appear to predominate in the *Essais*, because they stand as a powerful Other that both attracts and threatens. The symbolism of the male and masculinity extends to paternal, linguistic, and literary levels. It is Montaigne’s father who introduces him to speaking and writing. Pierre Eyquem initiates the son into Latin, and demands of the household that domestic conversation with the youth be restricted to Latin. In this sense, Montaigne has “no ‘mother tongue,’ he has only patriarchal speech” (p. 42). In addition it is the father who urges Montaigne to enter the literary world by his dying request that he translate Sebond’s *Theologia naturalis* into French. However, translation is an ambiguous paternal legacy, for it carries the constraints of the Father’s wish but the freedom of the son’s writing talents. The dissonance of dominance and liberation is also mirrored in Montaigne’s reverence for classical languages and authors. By using French Montaigne makes himself susceptible to fluctuation and evanescence, while Latin is stable and permanent. Similarly, Classical writers appeal to Montaigne for their virility and courage, since such thinkers as Socrates, Cato, and Epaminondes successfully confronted mutability and death. The classical style itself is characterized by a corresponding self-sufficiency, power, and telos. However, Montaigne breaks these Self/Other binds by situating himself at their juncture. The most important of these mediations occurs at the female/male interstice and concerns death. In appearance, women are virtually absent from the *Essais*, and the ambivalence Montaigne experiences towards them contributes to our understanding of the form of the *Essais*. Montaigne would like women to be mothers and nurturers, but their stronger, indeed insatiable sexual energy threatens the author with inferiority and loss. But the very coquetry that Montaigne attributes to women’s sexual power he appropriates to his own discourse—seductive, playful, infinitely tempting. Neither dominating the woman, nor falling victim to her dominance (symbolic of death), Montaigne textualizes sexuality by creating a work that would induce insatiability in future readers. For the *Essais* are open-ended and circuitous, and by these tactics, Montaigne could “short-circuit the notions of origin and ending, of birth and death” (p. 58).

Chapter III is a study of De Viau’s *Pyrame et Thisbé*. Greenberg shows that androgynous desire, the incorporation of the Other in the Same, leads to the abolition of difference and to self-destruction. The literal wall that separates the lovers symbolizes a social taboo founded upon a theory of geneology: “Power—familial and political—is handed down in an orderly progression from father to son. When confronted with the passion of youth that threatens this order, Narbal [Pyramus’ father] reacts with despotic wrath” (p. 71). The striking aspect of Pyramus and Thisbe’s love is the identity of their desire; they define one another as interchangeable and the same, physically and

spiritually. Only the wall differentiates them. On the one hand, the wall *divides* the lovers. On the other, it becomes the stimulus of desire, for it functions as a cultural mirror that reveals both Self and Other, the desiring subject in relation to the beloved. Forced to flee the obstacle that tyrannizes them but which maintains desire, they must face in-difference. They arrange a rendez-vous at the tomb of Ninus, a *locus amoenus* of primeval beauty. At the beginning of the tragedy, the lovers had described nature in opposition to culture: freedom from paternal authority. But this rendez-vous puts them into "real nature" (p. 93), an indeterminate phenomenon that exceeds the structuring difference that originally defined the nature/culture opposition. Having "abandoned the obstacles that their passion needed," (p. 93) and having fallen prey to this alien setting, they have in effect abolished difference. Such a situation can only invite destruction. "The self no longer has a structure around which it can fix itself because nature is precisely the realm that exists outside subjectivity and subjectivity's representation in language. To become adequate to this space, the self must become one with it. It must no longer be a 'self'" (p. 94). Pyramus, taking Thisbé for dead, commits suicide, and Thisbé, upon discovering her "missing half" (p. 94) does the same. They join in the indifference of Death.

Sorel's *Francion* (Ch. IV), written in 1623, is situated at the intersection of pre-bourgeois and bourgeois France. As such, its ideology remains indeterminate, reflecting the hero's marginal position as one who "must partake of society in order to criticize it" (p. 98). *Francion*, psychologically speaking, is both society and its Other, or rather the Other in the Same. His fraternity of ideological rebels (the "généreux") and Marsault's group of former servants turned robbers (the "plumets") both negate certain social repressions only to re-incorporate them into their organizations. Though they espouse egalitarianism and a mutual respect for physical and moral valor, they constitute elite societies marked by dress codes, acquisitiveness, and the exclusion of women. Who or what *Francion* is remains an enigma. He is *Francion* or "Frank"—the enemy of hypocrisy and social privilege. Yet, he "maintains, within his group, a position of mastery that is both powerful and alienating" (p. 106). Divided like its hero, the novel oscillates between a progressive biography of *Francion* and explosive episodes of anal/oral farce that threaten to de-center linearity. The male axis of linear progression attempts to bridle the fear of feminine freedom figured in the scenes of gluttony and scatological jokes. This tension between the structured biographical narrative and the grotesque, unrepressed farce discloses a desire for and a fear of the nurturing object—an ambivalent wish to control the figure of an absent mother. But the novel refuses closure, for at the "end" *Francion* wanders off to Italy, once again seeking a new love and conquest. *Francion* is a text straddling libertine and bourgeois movements, both denying and affirming a fixed concept of the self and the primacy of the individual.

The last chapter focuses on Corneille's best tragedy, *Polyeucte*. Greenberg's goal is to elaborate the writer's sexual politics from a woman's perspective. Pauline is caught between her love for Sévère and the duty she owes to her father and husband. Space limitations prevent me from capturing Greenberg's intricate analysis, but it is nevertheless possible to enumerate some important principles. Cornelian theater is masculine and patriarchal, empha-

sizing the state over the individual, the rational over the passions, the virile over the feminine. Personal desire is disruptive to societal duty ("devoir") and thus, the forces of social order prove inimical to individual satisfaction. In Corneille's view, women exist solely to valorize masculine competition. Thus, "Pauline has only a reflected value, the reflection of the desire (jealousy) in the eyes of the Other. She is a prize that shows other men the worth of her possessor" (p. 141). Women can only make up for this socially imposed lack by duty to the Father (the Law, the State), and in consequence, their observance to *devoir* alienates them from their own sexuality. They exist as media of exchange. Corneille's heroes are men who, in order to accede to glory, to the status of the Father, must kill the feminine in themselves. Women foster illusion and tempt men to avoid reality, which is essentially the triumph of their *gloire* or political ambition. In addition to Pauline's perils, Greenberg wishes to draw our attention to the dynamics of illusion and to the spectator's pleasure in *Polyeucte's* conclusion. While this tragedy contrasts Pauline's lucid desires with her father's (Félix) blind ambition, and Pauline's search for liberation with Félix's paranoid control, the play's ending appears to redress these imbalances only to reinstate them. Pauline, in a gesture of rebellion towards Félix, converts to Christianity, and the father, inspired by the ardor of Polyeucte's martyrdom, does the same. Father and daughter seem reconciled in a clear vision of their newly found faith. However, the conversion, in effect, allies Félix's political power not only with the Empire but with God himself, thereby re-establishing the strongest of patriarchal orders. The seventeenth-century audience would take pleasure in both the temptation to transgress duty and the reaffirmation of authority in this emerging Classicism. As Greenberg views it, the play appears to sublimate Pauline's destructive threats to social order but in reality only redoubles her repression and subjugation.

Greenberg's book is excellent, combining a command of literary history and psychological theory. However, he could have clarified the statement that "desire itself seems to be, in essence, 'baroque'" (p. 4). Since Greenberg gives us a "definition of desire" that is written as if it transcended historical periods (pp. 12-13) one would assume that this formulation (based on lack and displacement) would be operative in any time, but that in certain eras, such as Classicism, the modes of self-modification within this definition would differ. A distinction could have been made between definition and process. It is not clear to me whether his definition of desire is supra-historical or rather a twentieth-century interpretant of the term desire. However, he is everywhere consistent in the application of his definition. This is a valuable study since Greenberg's psychoanalytic description of French Baroque ideology has strong explanatory power that yields rich and insightful interpretations. Instead of reducing authors and characters to a study of psychological pathologies, he constantly relates the psychoanalytic dimension to history and literary form. In this regard, his book can be read alongside the recent studies of Claude-Gilbert Dubois and Germain Bazin. In addition, there is a sense in which this study will challenge literary theorists, for it posits a notion of desire (*manque*) that marks the debate between American ego psychology (especially the concept of ego syntonic acts) and Lacan. After such literary critics as Lebègue, Buffum, and Rousset had countered the

French prejudice against their Baroque literature, an explosion of Baroque studies ensued whose very profusion began to render the term too general and amorphous. But Greenberg's method restores precision and implicitly invites us to reread certain writers (Sorel, De Viau) who might otherwise fall victim to critical neglect. In this sense, Greenberg is highly conscious of our institutional priorities and values that motivate or repress critical practice. I highly recommend this book.

Wayne State University

Michael Giordano

Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville by Michael Paul Rogin. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983 [1979]. Pp. x + 354. \$10.95, paper.

As a practitioner of psychohistory, Michael Paul Rogin has been criticised for his style and method, although *Fathers and Children* remains, to my mind, one of the more useful studies of the overlapping of psychological and political issues in the Age of Jackson. With *Subversive Genealogy*, Rogin's style and method are used in a more self-consciously artful manner. This work is less a historical contextualization or psychoanalytic probing of Melville's art and politics than it is an elaborate familial, social, political, and literary allegory whose topic is Herman Melville and whose materials are the intersections of Melville's life and writing with family and social history.

The main figure is Melville's father, son of a veteran of the Boston Tea Party and a failed clothing importer, who stands for the contradiction of patrician values in a commodity economy. He reappears through a number of surrogates throughout Rogin's book, principally as Justice Lemuel Shaw, Melville's father-in-law. Melville's older brother Ganesvoort, a Jacksonian orator, and his cousin, Guert Gansevoort, who presided at the most famous American case of mutiny, stand for two alternative attitudes toward paternal authority. According to Rogin, the various political and familial conflicts figured by these three achieve formal expression in Melville's writing. And Melville's development parallels the course of his relation to his family and to American history: from the political romance of Jacksonism, to the emergence of an American class society, to the establishment of the American capitalist state.

Rogin's scholarship is thorough and he manages to manipulate his data without losing sight of his purpose. His is not an easy argument to make. To develop the familial and social conflicts of the early nineteenth century, Rogin must describe the Melville family's relation to a patrician idea of the family which was created as a nostalgic counterpart to the decline in the influence of extended families. Similarly, he must place the Melville family in relation to a society which was transforming itself as it was creating myths about its present, past, and "manifest destiny." The most complicated problem, however, is that the language itself was in transition (as Tocqueville and most conservatives of the period complained). To his credit, Rogin most often avoids falling back on reified notions of "family" and "society," although he

is sometimes too quick to use such terms as "patriarchy" and "Calvinist" and "orality" and "aggression" as short-hand ways of binding a grab bag of ideological conflicts. By far, the most convincing part of his argument is his quoting from the letters of Allan Melville, Herman's father. This marvellous collection of homilies and opinions typify the contradictions of a post-heroic age (as explored elsewhere by George Forgie, Ann Douglass and others, including Rogin himself) and provide the clearest context for the themes and discourse of the Jacksonian period, especially as used by Melville.

But the style! Rogin's ironic pairings of dissimilar data will never be confused with elegance. His main strategy is to argue through contiguity: he does not finally contextualize Melville's art or politics, but rather juxtaposes pairs of facts from political or family history or from Melville's fiction, or juxtaposes a fact with a theoretical pronouncement from (typically) Freud, Marx, or Tocqueville. When this works, the yoking of these apparently dissimilar details produces an "Ah-hah!" When it fails, there is only a strained analogy: *Moby-Dick* and Manifest Destiny share the same initials (p. 101). But in neither case is there really an argument. The terms are forced into unqualified relations so that similarities look like identities or causalities and dissimilarities look like oppositions.

The problem with Rogin's method in *Subversive Genealogy* is not psycho-history per se, if by that is meant the attempt to use psychoanalysis to investigate more of the lived experience of individuals in a particular age than is available through other forms of historical inquiry. Rather, it is that Rogin uses theoretical statements from historians and psychoanalysts as easily convertible tropes. Thus, he collapses history, psychology, and writing under the weight of overarching generalizations which carry with them the habits of normalizing and totalizing that Rogin has inherited from neo-Freudians and neo-Marxists. For that reason, Tocqueville and Marx and Freud and Carlyle and Theodore Parker and Melville all wind up saying pretty much the same things about external behavior and interior experience, and false and true values. Psychological and historical theories are not merely related by Rogin, but are easily translated into one another and converted into myth: "The white whale . . . drives Ahab back to the original human helplessness against which commodity creation defended. . . . Capitalist appropriation has failed him (as it failed Allan Melville), returning him to the devouring danger of mother nature" (p. 115). Similarly, Rogin's use of data reduces details to type and figure. Because Melville's father was in the textile business, for example, no article of clothing appears without its layers of psychological, historical, social, familial, religious, or literary significance. Gansevoort Melville's "rebaptising" speech in support of James K. Polk is thus opposed to Melville's filial piety through a nickname given in *Redburn*: "Rebaptizing Polk, Young Hickory, Gansevoort Melville repudiated his clothing-importer father for a new, democratic identity. Mate Jackson, who claims to be a 'near relation of General Jackson of New Orleans,' baptize[d Redburn] over again as 'Buttons'" (p. 66).

Finally, despite Rogin's title, his ironic style, and his use of a potentially radical method, *Subversive Genealogy* is not at all subversive. It rests assuredly on a host of unquestioned assumptions: the neo-Freudian goal of "integration," Tocqueville's Whiggish criticism of American individualism

and American language, Marx's reading of the 1848 Revolution and its applicability to what Rogin calls the "American 1848," the canonization of F. O. Matthiessen's five figures of the American Renaissance, and formalist definitions of literary value, among others. What Rogin has achieved is not so much a criticism of Melville and his age which might open up new areas of inquiry, but an intricate re-allegorizing of Melville's work. At worst, it is a marvellous tour de force and the problems of style and method can be overlooked as necessary features of the allegorical apparatus; at best, it is a compendium of useful and fascinating historical and biographical details.

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John Franzosa

On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection by Susan Stewart. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984. Pp. 213. \$25.00.

One of the literary critics with the greatest stylistic influence in some quarters of the American academy today is Roland Barthes, who developed an attenuated style in which sentences begin to take on the force of maxims. "In Chateaubriand," he wrote, "the metaphor never brings objects closer together, it separates worlds." Such statements incline towards the grammatical rule of thumb, though reflected in them are the fleeting impressions from which they are derived. Susan Stewart's *On Longing* displays a very sensitive ear for this kind of instant crystallization of the impression, though in her work the fleeting perception is at once more subjective and even poetic than those in Barthes. For example, Stewart says at one point, "Both the electric toaster and *Finnegans Wake* turn their makers into absent and invisible fictions." Evidently, through the assertive formulation Stewart is able to concretize what is, essentially, a very evocative if not somewhat irrational intuition which puts into a surreal conjunction an electric toaster with Joyce's *Wake*. Here, I think, Stewart's book succeeds rather well in unlocking from within Barthes' delicate tensions between the subjective and the regulative a critical unconscious that plays havoc with the syntax of culture on one level while raising that havoc to the level of formal rules on the other. Stewart's intuition about electric toasters and *Finnegans Wake* regularizes the peculiar intuition that these objects can turn their makers into "absent . . . fictions," or, what is in itself an oxymoron.

Elsewhere, Stewart writes, "The blank spaces of night, the blinding whiteness of the page before print, offer themselves to the fantastic, to a reading of fire or the tracks of animals." Here again, rhetorical assertion makes things come alive. The pages before print, like blinding floodlights, are offering themselves, proffering themselves to the fantastic, that sacrificial scene where fire can be read and to which the tracks of animals lead. The assertion sublimates hallucination in such passages, and this is exactly what occurs in the texts of Barthes as well, though one has to read Stewart to see in high relief what is so nuanced and even camouflaged in Barthes. For Stewart radicalizes the "instant" apperception through a poetic overdetermination which in-

volves not only hyperbole but speed. In this way Stewart's critical perceptions take on the immediacy of television with its instantaneous images and fragmented segments, which is to say, her writing is postmodern to the extent that it sacrifices development and embraces ready-made formulae within which the most incongruous and attenuated inspirations can be made available in what appears to be rushes of perception, impulses of wit. In this sense thought is not so much a product of reflection as it is of an immediate projection whose speed cancels the possibility of deep reflection.

Although some might take this as an unfavorable criticism of Stewart's work, I prefer to see it as a brilliant adaptation of critical style towards a contemporary condition of culture which, as Stewart recognizes, is one that is all surface and no depth, a culture in which reflection in the manner of a Bachelard is no longer possible unless one ignores the majority of the culture that surrounds us. As Stewart herself writes, "Nostalgia is a sadness without an object, a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience." To think within a culture predicated on notions of sentiment and nostalgia conditioned by the Charlie Brown greeting card or by the Ziggy calendar necessarily involves an anti-reflective or instantaneous mentality in the absence of a genuine object. Here again television may be apropos, since the television image is itself the replacement for an object completely divested of reality, hence producing a sense of nostalgia which is itself stuffed with bursting with the plenitude of televised images, and particularly consumables like electric toasters whose very appearance masks or makes invisible the scene of its production, an elision that involves even the producers themselves. To watch the televised image is to long, to yearn, but not like a Madame Bovary, who really felt deprivation, according to Flaubert, but like a Mary Hartman for whom misery is but a vague and intangible feeling that invests itself in the margins of suburban glut.

Stewart's book reflects on a wide range of cultural interests. It covers a number of historical periods and investigates everything from doll houses to skyscrapers. In fact, the book comprises a wonderful exploration of several cultural forms: the miniature, the gigantic, the imaginary body, the objects of desire. Within these contexts the consciousness or anti-self-consciousness of nostalgia is not so much developed as it is divined through the collaging together of numerous aperçus or instant judgements which, as we have noticed, take on a certain surreality. This allows the reader a freedom to ruminate within the incongruous or to advance speculations which build on Stewart's very suggestive leads. For example, Stewart writes that "the invention of printing coincided with the invention of childhood. . . ." And she adds that the miniature text and the notion of the child are, in fact, exaggerations of interiority.

There are two directions, of course, in which one can go with such interesting suggestions. One direction would be an investigation of painters like Van Eyck and Vermeer; the other is, again, a better understanding of television. In terms of Flemish painting we see the exaggeration of interiority in terms of how perspective and consciousness are allied, hence producing the conditions for a Cartesian consciousness. In terms of television we might see how the exaggeration of the interior leads in a quite different way to anti-self-

consciousness, the undoing of the Cartesian revolution. That a cultural form, like miniature, can be seen as significant in terms of the intellectual history of self-consciousness and its negations is very intriguing, and that Stewart's text points as well to the figure of the child in conjunction with this problematic raises a large number of subsidiary questions relating to figures like Rousseau, Carroll, and Freud.

The miniature is, again, key to a metapoetic consideration of postmodern critical style, particularly Stewart's inclination towards the self-contained formulation, and, by analogy, to Barthes' own cellular structure in volumes like *S/Z*. This produces what Barthes called a writerly rather than a readerly text, meaning that the text is not object or referent dependent but becomes its own object and as such anti-reflective. Once more the instantaneous finds its justification in a reduction or flattening of the signifier, that is to say, its one dimensionality. Stewart's book not only investigates this flattening in terms of nostalgic forms like the miniature, but also as a textual pointillism of impressions which demand filling in by those of us who desire connectedness, though, as J.-F. Lyotard has noted in *The Postmodern Condition*, such a longing for teleology or even history belongs to a bygone age that knows nothing of computer menus, digital tuning, and undecidability.

In "The Gigantic," Stewart presents a chapter on the exaggeration of the fragment and how in modern urban spaces this inflation of the image produces a decontextualization of the vernacular and a derealization of the physical. The massive icons produce a facade which turn suggestions made by advertisers into rules of thumb for the motorist or pedestrian: "Feel the Velvet." Again, the stuffing of the city with such massive signs compensates for the sense of longing for something even while circumscribing the lack which subtends the proliferation of predigested or ready-made slogans for what is, after all, but vacant experience. Stewart's investigation of this aspect of city life occurs mainly by way of an interrogation of pop art which in her view is a key to understanding how experience is abstracted into something like information, that is, highly compressed reference. "But once we engage in the mode of consciousness offered by existence within the city, distance is collapsed into partiality, perception becomes fragmentary and above all temporal. Inside or outside, the typical view of the city is through the window—a view within a definite frame and limited perspective, mediated and refracted through the glass of the city's abstraction of experience." This abstraction results in the production of forms of correspondence in terms of which ideological networks are set up, networks that are immediate, available, and superficial. Of course, one wonders, given Stewart's description, why she thinks "perception becomes fragmentary," for isn't it always already fragmented in a postmodern culture? Doesn't the movie, the billboard, the skyscraper, the skyline, etc. ensure that perception is so saturated with hyperbole that it will never articulate the boundaries by means of which coherence can be attained?

Stewart's chapter, "The Imaginary Body," contains speculations on the miniaturization of the body, particularly in terms of a "Tom Thumb" wedding. Also, I find that she suggests rather interesting ideas with respect to the difference between lockets (the feminine) and tatoos (the masculine). In the last chapter, "Objects of Desire," Stewart investigates the mentality of the

collector. "The boundary between collection and fetishism is mediated by classification and display in tension with accumulation and secrecy." Statements like this show Stewart at her best as a writer capable of distilling very evocative conceptions that straddle psychoanalysis, social theory, and cultural or vernacular practices. At the conclusion of this chapter Stewart notes that the collection represents the "final erasure of labor within the abstractions of late capitalism" and she compares this to "metaconsumption" which makes up the appropriation of what is called camp or kitsch. It might have been helpful if Stewart had stressed "metaconsumption" more in *On Longing* since as she notices nostalgia is largely channeled through metaconsumption by which is meant the purchasing of a commodity in the place of another commodity which, if had, would be a sign or locus where wishing could be authentically initiated.

Although *On Longing* contains a large dose of Marxist rhetoric on late capitalist consumerism and capitalist modes of production, as well as rather redundant accounts of structuralist thought, I find that in the very exaggeration of such ready-made ideas, so tied to the academy as factory of thought, the text accedes to a postmodern writing which explodes the sense of authority which these banalities have in the works of other critics. Perhaps more importantly, I find that Stewart's style uses ready-mades in the service of fantasy which is often given a rather free reign as it establishes scenes of seduction, repression, and explosion that mark a semioclassm typical of postmodern culture, a semioclassm found, for instance, in the buildings of a Philip Johnson. Indeed, we no longer live in a culture where thoughts can be recollected in tranquility, something Proust pointed out when he wrote about the steeples of Martinville from within his cork lined room. That is, our culture has demolished the boundedness of interiority/exteriority to the point that thought takes on a writerly rather than a readerly aspect even in the context of critical writings. Yet this writerly aspect is by no means dry or mechanical; rather, it is the expression of violent emotion crystallized in the formulae of assertion by means of which experience is both abstracted and internalized within a culture that is prepared to receive only what it can instantly digest.

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Erring: A Postmodern A/theology by Mark C. Taylor. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984. Pp. xi + 219. \$20.00.

Mark Taylor's *Erring*, which is already making some waves, announces itself as a new, tricky kind of theology informed by deconstruction and marked by "serpentine wandering," "unexpected twisting and unanticipated turning," "creative disorganization" of "the entire inherited order," "vagrant thought," "excentricity": in short, by erring. Its project is the deconstruction of the terms of theological discourse under the authority of Derrida, who, along with David Tracy, Houston Baker, Germaine Brée and others whose praise is quoted on the dust jacket, has lent his imprimatur to the enterprise. Derrida ought to like it because he is quoted over 130 times, and haunts the work from start to finish.

Such a project was necessary and inevitable; and Taylor, a theologian at Williams College who has previously written on Kierkegaard as well as on deconstruction, was the man for the job. For the book seeks to be "utterly transgressive" in its deconstructive reformulations of crucial terms of religious discourse, and most theologians don't have the belly for this kind of work. Nor the background; while Taylor's work is addressed to the Religious Studies community the return address is Literary Criticism, for the references, other than to Derrida, are not to Tillich, Buber or even Küng, but to Hillis Miller, Barthes, Hayden White and Foucault.

From the footnotes alone it is apparent that we are in the Post-Nicene phase of poststructuralism, with the canon of authoritative Scripture soundly established. Perhaps the most incongruous feature of this book is that while Taylor constantly characterizes his work in terms of an undulating, swerving, unplotable, non-course of deviant thought with regard to traditional theological discourse, he is a deconstructionist Jansenist. His introduction, preciously titled ". . . Prelude," is a virtual inventory of deconstruction's clichés, and the book itself pursues the straight and narrow path of an emergent deconstructionist dogma, even in the style ("This unending [inter]play is the eternal [re]inscription of [the] word[s].") Dedicated to unmasterability, dissemination and marginality, the texts of Derrida have, as Taylor's book makes abundantly clear, become a kind of institutionalized supertext, a reservoir of attitudes and phrases fully capable of authorizing more discourse.

The book seeks not so much to contribute to postmodernist criticism as simply to inhabit it. Unusually dependent on his sources, Taylor has relegated the names of those he quotes to the notes, so that one must flip back and forth to find out who's speaking. Phrases and sentences float around like ice cubes in a punchbowl, with the implication that all postmodernists agree. Sometimes the note-cards stick out, half-assimilated, so that Heidegger, for example, can sneak into a sentence through a two-word phrase, as in: "Effective symbols allow the hidden to shine forth or to emerge from concealment into 'the open.'" Taylor's style is the Frūsen Glädje of academic discourse, lots of bits and pieces stuck together in a highly palatable and dubiously "foreign" paste. Derrida dominates, but he is never quoted with reference to any argument, any text, or even to his name. There is consequently no dialogue at all, just a steady backbeat of citation.

Considered by itself, the project is laudable. Crossing desconstruction with theology, Taylor is attempting what Kenneth Burke called "perspective by incongruity." Four beginning chapters discuss the notions of God, self, history and book, in their traditional conceptualizations, followed by four more that seek to redefine these terms in light of a deconstructive analysis that reveals "God as writing, self as trace, history as erring, and book as text."

On the subject of tradition Taylor is one-dimensional. "The commonplace view," "traditional conceptions," "common sense" and Christian orthodoxy all depend on closure, structure, and mastery gained through the illegitimate hierarchization of key oppositions. Deconstruction, Taylor sometimes implies, has liberated the lower terms (slave, son, death, absence, difference, free play, writing, errancy). But he also argues that these lower terms always covertly dominated their putative masters, and that, for example, "the incapability of erring calls into question the notion of truth that lies at the heart of the Western theological and philosophical network."

But if erring is inescapable, then perhaps tradition should be given some credit for that fact. Taylor is disinclined to give such credit, preferring petrified versions of tradition which are easily shown up by the "radical" fluidity of deconstruction. Take as an example his treatment of narrative in chapters 3 and 7. Taylor takes narrative closure as a part of the fraud of logocentrism, betraying the fact that the logos is "as much invented as revealed, as much created as discovered" (p. 68). Postmodernism enables us to stride boldly into reality, advancing beyond narrative, and, incidentally, beyond the guilt that drives it and the interpretation that decodes it. In place of these stodgy henchmen of repression we should embrace a guilt-free, mazing, wandering, perverse, carnivalesque, transgressive . . . what? What replaces narrative, which Roland Barthes describes as "the central instance of the human mind"? At the end of chapter 7 "the body of the incarnate word" makes an appearance, but I do not know what this means.

What Taylor proposes for those bold (or [d]jerring) enough to handle it is a non-conceptualized mud of sensations which he virtually glories in calling purposeless (quoting from that respected work of narratology, *Zen in (sic) the Art of Archery*). But nothing can replace narrative, nor does it need replacing. In this festive, madcap overturning of narrative Taylor has relied almost exclusively on a tendency in the thought of Derrida, who is not a theoretician of narrative, and not at all on the work of Victor Turner, Barthes, Bakhtin, Fredric Jameson, Culler, or Ricoeur, any of whom might have suggested that narrative is festive enough. Narrative doesn't fail in its project of totalization by revealing its own fabrication; such "failure" is just one of the things narrative does. Poetic language in general is defined by Julia Kristeva as subject to continual upheaval, revolution and destabilization, all the errancy one might wish. Carnivalization can be—indeed, is typically—an institutional activity.

Arrogating all the radicalness to himself, Taylor ignores arguments such as these and consistently underestimates the conceptual power of institutions. Christianity did not survive for so long by being unreasonable; its orthodoxy has always accommodated an errant anti-orthodoxy, which it sought to master but to which it nevertheless gave expression. One form this complex process has taken is the sedimentation of Scriptural interpretation, in which critics such as Frank Kermode and Gerald Bruns have found such a wealth of instruction for contemporary hermeneutics. For Taylor, interpretation is anchored to "the book" rather than to "the text," and must be jettisoned in favor of a vagrant, wandering, mazing, etc. But exegesis is precisely what has allowed Christianity to do as the Romans, flourishing on a worldwide basis for two thousand years in the most widely varying cultural conditions the planet had to offer. Clearly, there is some flexibility here. Indeed, Herbert Schneidau argues in his elegant, masterful *Sacred Discontent: The Bible in Western Tradition* that Christianity is marked not by its sponsorship of centered, closural forms, but by the opposite, a corrosive Yahwist hostility to such forms. If Taylor were inclined to argumentation, he might have found in Schneidau a worthy opponent. Together, at the very least, they suggest the comprehensive ambivalence of Christian thought.

If Taylor underestimates the creative ambivalence of Christianity, he also underestimates the ambivalence of deconstruction. His argument reflects a

certain polemical imbalance in much deconstructionist writing, but the case deconstruction proposes in its more lucid moments—the case Paul de Man, for example, makes with particular force—is that the terms of the binarism are reciprocal and mutually constitutive. Taylor even quotes Derrida on the desire for a center as one of the functions of play, and Nietzsche on the need for conceptual simplicity. They concede what Taylor will not, the human necessity and usefulness of the center.

The confusion of this book should not imply that deconstruction has no work to do in theological texts. The Western tradition is rich in texts that could be subjected to deconstructive analysis, beginning with *Summa Theologica*, which, with its hypotheses, objections, and replies, is riddled with its own opposites and wide open to an analysis which would, ideally, reveal the full complexity of orthodoxy, not simply dismiss it as a gigantic mistake.

To flat-earthers who have never read Derrida and don't intend to, this book may well seem like a bolt from the hitherto simple and untroubled blue. To others, its methodical wandering, veering and swerving will seem quaintly orthodox and self-congratulatory. In any event, it is fascinating for those who have become accustomed to relentless contemporaneity to see, and to recall, the sheer impact of deconstruction on a discipline. Linguistics, philosophy and literary criticism assimilated it gradually, but its traumatizing effects on previously unconverted disciplines such as theology are potentially massive. In *Erring* we see registered the shock of the new, and through it we can assess the power of deconstruction's discourse, as well as the resilience of the institution which has, so far (and not always gracefully), assimilated, transformed and withstood it.

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