

BOOK REVIEWS

Underworld. By Don DeLillo. New York: Scribner, 1997. 827 pages. \$34.95.

In a recent review in *The London Review of Books*, Terry Eagleton criticizes the author of a book on the politics of geography for coming dangerously close to "claiming that everything is related to everything else"—a claim that Eagleton finds as absurd as the belief that "the Pentagon and my left armpit are subtly interconnected." Though the Pentagon is not connected to anyone's armpit in Don DeLillo's eleventh and latest novel, *Underworld*, one can find in it many examples of the interconnectedness thesis Eagleton so scornfully dismisses, such as the connection between the Little Richard song *Long Tall Sally* and a B52 bomber, or between "the downfall of the empire and the emergence of detergents," or between the orange juice you drink and the defoliant agent orange that can cause you cancer. In *Underworld*, without question one of the most important American novels of recent years, DeLillo gives us a panoramic survey of American history from the fifties to the nineties that subtly interlaces public events with private experiences to produce a dialectical marvel that not only shows how individual lives are inescapably caught up in the *Zeitgeist*, but also how out of such a collective history can emerge redemptive possibilities embodied in singular lives and actions. "Everything is connected in the end," we are told on the novel's penultimate page. It is a tribute to DeLillo's narrative skill that even as the connections are made and the loose ends tied we never lose sight of the "everything," of the texture and density of particular lives and things, from the most banal and ordinary to the most remembered and monumentalized.

DeLillo's novel can be described, with a bit of critical licence, as the tale of a ball and a bomb. These two seemingly incongruous items are brought together in the novel's brilliant prologue. The ball is the baseball that Bobby Thomson hit off a Ralph Branca pitch in the dramatic ninth inning of the legendary game between the New York Giants and the Brooklyn Dodgers on 3 October 1951. Thomson's pennant-winning home run for the Giants is part of American sports history. The ball he hammered into the stands becomes, for DeLillo, a fictional object, a symbolic trophy whose changing history of ownership provides one of the threads that binds together the different characters, settings and episodes of the novel.

The novel's other binding device is the bomb which, like W.B. Yeats's stone, is in the midst of all, there to trouble the novel's living stream. The prologue calls our attention to the fact that the Soviet Union's second atomic weapon was detonated on the very same October day when Thomson's "shot

[was] heard round the world." In the mind of at least one of the spectators at the Polo Grounds that day the spectre of nuclear annihilation is joined to the celebration of the game. Informed of the Soviet explosion, J. Edgar Hoover, in the stands with Frank Sinatra, the restaurateur Toots Shor, and a drunk and nauseous Jackie Gleason (who is memorably described as "vomiting someone's taupe pajamas" on Sinatra's expensive, hand-crafted oxfords), cannot take his eyes off a *Life* magazine colour reproduction of Pieter Bruegel's *The Triumph of Death* and gloomily regards the jubilant crowd around him as "sitting in the furrow of destruction." The prologue's pairing of Life and Death, of the baseball crowd's collective effervescence and the G-man's fantasy of mass destruction, of Thomson the hero and Branca the loser, of the game-winning ball and the end-game threat of the bomb, suggests a dialectical principle of connection that the rest of the novel will effectively deploy.

DeLillo in fact invites us to see in the connections his novel makes not only an act of formal or thematic patterning but also the more pressing task of moral enquiry into our post-war history. Consider, for example, the following passage in which Nick Shay, one of the principal characters, talks about his job as a waste disposal consultant while attempting to reconstruct what happened to his numbers-running father who mysteriously disappeared one day from the Bronx neighbourhood in which Nick grew up: "We built pyramids of waste above and below the earth. The more hazardous the waste, the deeper we tried to sink it. The word plutonium comes from Pluto, god of the dead and ruler of the underworld. They took him out to the marshes and wasted him as we say today, or used to say until it got changed to something else." The passage creates thematic links between hazardous waste, nuclear weapons, the mythological god of death, and gangland or underworld violence. These thematic associations in turn link up not only with the novel's title and that of "a 1927 gangster film and box office smash," but also with a fictitious "lost" film by Sergei Eisenstein called *Unterwelt* which depicts a mad scientist in some underground chamber experimenting with a ray-gun that turns human subjects into deformed, monstrous beings. *Unterwelt's* deformed humans are in turn related to stories Nick's brother Matt Shay hears from fellow employees at a government weapons test centre about "downwinders" in Nevada who were disfigured by radioactive fallout in the early days of aboveground nuclear tests. Flash forward to the nineties and we are back in Eisenstein's country at a radiation clinic to which Nick has been taken by his host Viktor Maltsev, who is in the business of vaporizing dangerous waste by way of underground nuclear explosion. At the clinic we find radiation victims of Russian nuclear tests—grotesque counterparts of Eisenstein's mutants and Nevada's "downwinders" clad in T-shirts advertising a Gay and Lesbian Festival in Hamburg, "the result of an importing ploy gone awry." As Nick notes, "there is a curious connection between weapons and waste," an insight which Viktor elaborates into a historiography of waste as the inevitable by-product of human culture, its "devil twin," its "secret history," an "underhistory" which

we have tried to suppress and bury. One of the great achievements of *Underworld* is its patient excavation of this interconnected “underhistory” to reveal the manifold forms of twentieth-century waste from the fallout of the bomb to the urban wastelands of America, from the laying waste of the Vietnamese countryside by B52 bombers to Nick’s accidental “wasting” of the heroin addict, George Manza.

An even greater achievement than the novel’s archaeology of waste is its wager on redemption, its exploration of the possibility of transforming waste into life-affirming art. Nick’s former lover, the conceptual artist Klara Sax, is shown engaged in a project to turn decommissioned B52 bombers—the waste products of the military-industrial complex—into works of art. Her project is called *Long Tall Sally* after the name of the pinup (and the title of a Little Richard song) painted on the fuselage of one of the B52 bombers. Her work, she insists, seeks to “unrepeat” mass-produced weapons systems by finding “an element of felt life ... a graffiti instinct—to trespass and declare ourselves, show who we are. The way the nose artists did, the guys who painted pinups on the fuselage.” Klara’s art of redemptive trespass is further linked to similar efforts in the novel: to the graffiti work of Ismael Munoz, a.k.a. Moonman 157, a young Puerto Rican from the Bronx who asserts his identity and creativity by tagging subway trains in an exuberant, colourful wildstyle; and to the Watts Tower in Los Angeles, an idiosyncratic architectural wonder made out of all kinds of industrial cast-offs by an illiterate Italian immigrant who devoted thirty-three years of his life to its construction. These creative works that attempt to redeem the waste products of our culture are in turn thematically associated to the metamorphosis of waste in the recycling process (as Nick remarks, “Maybe we feel a reverence for waste, for the redemptive qualities of the things we use and discard. Look how they come back to us alight with a kind of brave aging”) and to the miraculous transfiguration of Esmeralda, an inhabitant of the urban wasteland known as the Wall, whose sordid death results in her saintly image appearing on a billboard.

It is important to note that DeLillo does not romanticize the promise of redemption. He maintains a dialectical tension between transfiguration and indigence: the 7-Up and Milk of Magnesia bottles remain clearly visible in the Watts Tower; the colourful graffiti does not conceal the squalor of Ismael’s life; Esmeralda’s spectral appearance may be a miracle or merely “a technical flaw that causes the image underneath, the image from the papered-over ad to show through the current ad.” But what DeLillo will not surrender is the need, in Theodor Adorno’s words, “to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption.” “Perspectives must be fashioned,” Adorno continues, “that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from felt contact with its objects—this alone is the task of thought.” Such a difficult task of critique and redemption is the

minima moralia of DeLillo's massive novel, poised as it is between postmodern scepticism and Catholic hope.

For all its epic historical sweep, masterful orchestration of themes and moral, political and religious seriousness, *Underworld* does not forget that the universal springs from the local and that the world, real or fictional, depends on the careful registration of individual lives and particular things. Such an awareness informs, for instance, Klara Sax's *Long Tall Sally* project. In a statement that could be applied to *Underworld* she says: "I want to keep our intentions small and human despite the enormous work we've done and the huge work we have ahead of us." The novel's portrayal of what Durkheim called a society's *conscience collective* is complementary to its faithful recreation in Part 6, for example, of the minutiae of life in the Bronx. As Albert Bronzini, Klara's first husband, puts it: "This is the only art I've mastered ... walking these streets and letting the senses collect what is routinely here." Even as the novel records such historical or public events as the Cuban Missile Crisis of '62 (Part 5 contains a *tour de force* rendition of Lenny Bruce's hilariously hip and hysterical riffs on the Crisis), JFK's assassination, the Great Northeast Blackout of '65, and Truman Capote's Black and White Ball of '66, it does not lose sight of "the two hundred and sixteen raised red cotton stitches" of the baseball Bobby Thomson hit into the crowd or the ingredients for a Jell-O antipasto salad a fifties housewife might proudly produce for her family. Attention to the quotidian is a lesson Nick Shay learns from a Jesuit priest at reform school. Naming precisely the different parts of a shoe, the priest reminds Nick that "Everyday things represent the most overlooked knowledge Quotidian things An extraordinary word that suggests the depth and reach of the commonplace." In what other novel can you learn, for example, that "the ridged section at the bottom of the toothpaste tube ... is called the crimp"?

Adopting an aesthetic both Thomist and imagist, DeLillo, like his literary precursors James Joyce and William Carlos Williams, wants to connect words to things in the world. The final few pages of the novel explore the world of cyberspace in which a few keystrokes can bring together a website on miracles and the H-bomb home page, or hyperlink Sister Edgar the nun to "the bulldog fed, J. Edgar Hoover, the Law's debased saint." But it is not the virtual connections of cyberspace that finally interest DeLillo. His loyalty is to "the things in the room, offscreen, unwebbed, the tissue grain of the deskwood alive in light, the thick lived tenor of things, the argument of things to be seen and eaten, the apple core going sepia in the lunch tray ... and the chipped rim of the mug that holds your yellow pencils, skewed all crazy, and the plied lives of the simplest surface, the slabbed butter melting on the crumbled bun, and the yellow of the yellow of the pencils." And his greatest hope, only provisionally expressed, is that "Peace," the final word of the novel, will become "a thing in the world, taking all its meanings, its sense of serenities and contentments out into the streets somehow." Like the "Shantih" that ends T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, that other redemptive shoring of the ruins, the

“Peace” of *Underworld* is both a lament for what we have not yet achieved and a benediction for those who have survived the century’s worst.

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A Deathful Ridge: A Novel of Everest. By J.A. Wainwright. Oakville, ON: Mosaic Press, 1997. vii, 138 pages. \$16.95 paper.

J.A. (Andy) Wainwright’s first novel could hardly have been better timed. The reading and sporting public’s long fascination with the world’s highest mountain has been enhanced lately by the showing, here in Halifax and elsewhere, of the spectacular IMAX film *Everest* on a giant domed screen, with a live commentary by Jamling Norgay, whose heroic father, Sherpa Tensing, accompanied Edmund Hillary to the summit on 29 May 1953. Other recent events, including the deaths of eight climbers in 1996, and the publication of Jon Krakauer’s bestseller, *Into Thin Air*, have focussed attention on the terrible toll exacted by Chomolungma, as Tibetans call it. Buddhists such as Norgay believe it to be the Home of the gods—obviously vengeful gods at times, as no fewer than 150 climbers have perished in the attempt to reach the top.

Since 1953, to be sure, there have been many successful Everest expeditions, close to 500 in fact, including one that involved a Dalhousie University man, Mike Sutton, a Lecturer in Sports Medicine, who made it to the summit on 10 May 1993, at considerable physical cost, as he explained in a *Dalhousie News* interview on his return: “My face was very thin, my ribs showed through, I was coughing, my voice was shot . . .” Even greater suffering was experienced by an American climber during the ill-fated expedition of 1996: Beck Weathers, a Dallas pathologist, lost most of his fingers to frost-bite and required reconstructive surgery on his face.

Wainwright’s hero also endured dreadful suffering and disfigurement in his attempt, his third, to conquer the mountain in 1924. The climber was George Herbert Leigh-Mallory (1886–1924), considered by many to be the most accomplished and the most daring of Everest challengers before Hillary and Tensing. A product of Winchester and Cambridge, and a successful literary historian (among other things, he published a fine biography of James Boswell in 1912), Mallory was in his late thirties when he tackled Everest for the last time, along with Andrew Comyn Irvine, an Oxford man. It was Mallory, incidentally, who answered the question, “What was the point of climbing Everest?” with a laconic “Because it’s there.” To the world’s sorrow, he and his companion disappeared, on 8 June 1924, high on the Northeast ridge, never to be seen again. Twenty-nine years later, when Hillary and Tensing reached the top, they looked briefly for signs of Mallory and Irvine, but found nothing.

Wainwright, however, adopting a “counter-factual” approach, bases his novel on “what might have been” had Mallory been spared by the gods of

Everest, though, like Weathers in 1996, barely alive and greatly disfigured. His survival, in Wainwright's imaginative reconstruction of the story, was at the expense of the life of Irvine, a cause of profound shame and guilt during the years that followed.

The actual historical record shows that Noel Odell, a scientist on that fatal 1924 expedition, had looked in vain for Mallory and Irvine on the wild upper slopes. Wainwright depicts Odell as finding Mallory alone, in terrible pain, his face badly broken from a fall, at Camp VI, 26,700 feet up and nearly 3,000 feet from the summit. In Mallory's hand is an ice-axe (such an axe was indeed found by another expedition in 1933 and is now, as Wainwright notes, in the archives of the British Alpine Club in London). Refusing to let it go, Mallory, in an apparent fit of madness, blurts out, "I killed Irvine." It is not until many years later, however, that Wainwright's Mallory reveals the whole story of that appalling moment, at or near, the summit of Everest. In the interim he has sought sanctuary in Wales, where he had done much of his early mountaineering, his friends having covered up the fact of his survival through a conspiracy of silence intended to protect his reputation, though greatly to the detriment of his wife and family.

The novelist's Mallory is himself locked into a virtual hermitage of silence, mentally imprisoned by his guilt over Irvine's death, but he gradually recovers his love of mountain-climbing in the safe haven of Wales, where a veteran mountaineer called Davies, who tells much of Mallory's story, has agreed to keep an eye on him for the duration of his exile, his creature comforts being attended to by a German widow whose knowledge of Everest is nil. At the time of relating his version of events to a young, present-day Canadian mountaineer-reporter, Davies is 104 years old and Mallory and most of his Everest associates long since dead.

The novelist's narrative technique is not without its aesthetic risks, quite apart from its possible strains on the reader's credulity. No doubt, too, some mountaineers who treasure the memory of George Mallory will resent the idea of his humiliating resurrection, even in fictional form. In effect, the book presents us with an illusion within an illusion—an authorial construct well known to Wainwright from his reading of the work of John Fowles among others. Thus the narrative in *A Deathful Ridge* is multi-faceted: we are given the contemporary "received" account, by journalists and others, of the tragic disappearance of Mallory and Irvine, the story of the conspiratorial cover-up by the mountaineering Brotherhood, the rivetting revelations by Davies, and the more down-to-earth cobbling together of the facts by the Canadian investigative reporter.

One of the most interesting, and moving, episodes is an interview with an actress, Madeleine Carroll, who portrayed Mallory's wife, Ruth, in a film called *The Last Climb*, with Robert Donat as Mallory and Richard Greene as Irvine. It is in this chapter that fiction and reality mesh most believably.

The title of the novel comes from a speech by the intrepid Sir Galahad (to whom Mallory was often likened) in Tennyson's *The Holy Grail*:

Any how my feet recross'd the deathful ridge
 No memory in me lives.

Entirely appropriate, as are the many literary allusions and quotations, both early and modern, with which this admirable first novel is shot through. Most impressive, too, is the background of Everest facts and lore, mountain-climbing technicalities, and detailed knowledge of the extant diaries and correspondence of Mallory and the mountaineering circle of his time. Wainwright, whose poet's eye view of the hazards, failures, and achievements in polar exploration was memorably expressed in his *Flight of the Falcon: Scott's Journey to the South Pole* (1987), has clearly staked a strong claim for himself in the realm of poetically reconstructed history.

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Prismatic Thought: Theodor W. Adorno. By Peter Uwe Hohendahl. Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1995. xi, 287 pages. \$19.95 US, paper.

This book gives us a comprehensive review of the aesthetic theory of Theodor Adorno, a leading member of the Frankfurt School of philosophers from the 1930s to the 1960s. Peter Uwe Hohendahl maintains that the subtlety of Adorno's "prismatic thought" has been lost on successive generations of commentators, from New Left critics to present-day admirers. Writing especially for an American audience, Hohendahl argues that Adorno's great achievement was to uncover the "dialectical tension" between the "principle" of modern society and the diverse forms of "resistance" to it (8). On the one hand, Adorno's work—in epistemology, in social theory, in art criticism—shows how the Enlightenment destroyed the freedom it first made possible. On the other hand, in Hohendahl's view, Adorno never lost hope in the Enlightenment as a liberating force. This poses a problem. Adorno was as suspicious of attempts to formulate a universal "theory" of modern society as he was of the desire to overthrow rational forms and pursue "particular interests and agendas" (19). How could he carry out such a critique of reason and freedom without endangering the project of modernity altogether? Until this question is clarified Hohendahl rightly thinks that the current American attempt to revive Adorno (Jameson, Hullot-Kentor, Bernstein) will remain "controversial and inconclusive" (20).

The task is not made easier when Hohendahl informs us that Adorno's language captures "the dialectical unfolding of the argument rather than the result" (76), and that his essays rely more on "rhetoric" than "logic" (117). Still, we are warned not to confuse Adorno's suspicion of logic and philosophy with a purely aesthetic interpretation of our social existence. In Hohendahl's view, Adorno's account of the "various moments and strands" of history "are

related to one another" (167). Some European commentators (Habermas, Wellmer) find that art and philosophy do indeed come together in Adorno, but in the form of a mystical intuition of the hidden meaning of nature. Hohendahl does not take up this quasi-theological reading of Adorno. While he concedes that the "truth content" of Adorno's writings is hidden in the "contradictory" movement of his thought, he insists that Adorno's inability to resolve the opposition of philosophy and art has a "social origin" (244). Philosophy and art are separated from one another in the same way that reason and freedom have parted company in established social practices. Moderns can no longer rely on common sense or tradition to mediate these opposed moments of their history. But, for Adorno, this means only that the contradiction between art and philosophy must be resolved "dialectically," in what Hohendahl calls a "reciprocal deconstruction" (245).

Here the connection of Adorno's 'negative dialectics' with modern social theory (American and European) is especially hard to make. And this appears to be the chief lesson of Hohendahl's book. Adorno envisages neither a philosophical nor an aesthetic solution to the conflicts of modernity. Rather, as Hohendahl puts it, he "redeems the moment of failure in the philosophical discourse and thereby articulates its limits" (252). This seems to me to strike the right note. The emphasis on the negativity of the dialectic—to the point where social categories of experience are transcended—must be seen as a step of infinite importance, even if the result to be drawn from it must be the opposite of that arrived at by Adorno. Surely there is more to say about Adorno's "lasting contribution" than that he felt "the overwhelming force of human suffering, a suffering that has defied traditional humanism" (253). Hohendahl would like modern social theory to absorb this lesson into itself. But in a way it already has. From this point of view the theological interpretation of modernity—which Adorno merely gestured towards—needs to be extended and deepened and given a more adequate form. How else are we to convert the negative process of reason into a positive result, and thereby restore the human content of art and philosophy?

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Affective Genealogies: Psychoanalysis, Postmodernism, and the "Jewish Question" after Auschwitz. By Elizabeth J. Bellamy. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska P, 1997. 214 pages. \$45 US.

The relations between Holocaust Studies and postmodernism can hardly be called amicable. Holocaust scholars have denounced postmodern theories because of their inability to situate the disastrous event politically and historically. Also, following the disclosures of Martin Heidegger's affiliation with National Socialism and Paul de Man's anti-semitic wartime journalism, French deconstruction has been discredited as a site for re-enacting the Holocaust

memory. Elizabeth J. Bellamy's *Affective Genealogies* reiterates both of these negative critiques; however, unlike much of the currently fashionable 'postmodernism bashing,' her book offers a perspicacious and, for the most part, sound reflection on the Holocaust's resistance to postmodern theory. Interestingly, Bellamy highlights postmodernism's ambivalent involvement with Freudian psychoanalysis; she insists that it is symptomatic of a surreptitious melancholia behind the postmodern rejection of *grand récits*.

In the opening chapter, "Mourning and Melancholia," Bellamy contends that the recent philo-semitic impulse of deconstruction conceals a repressed anxiety over the Jewish question in France, an anxiety it shares with French psychoanalysis. Deconstruction's frequent evocation of the Jew serves not only to mourn the atrocities of the Holocaust but also to exorcize an anti-semitic ghost that it has allegedly inherited from Martin Heidegger's *judenrein* philosophy of Being. However, by appropriating the Jew as a privileged trope, deconstruction fails to negotiate the real Jew and evacuates the distinctly Jewish experience of any positive content. Unwittingly, in its diligence to inscribe the Jew into the discourse of (post)modernity, deconstruction falls back upon some of the anti-semitic stereotypes it has hoped to redress. For example, by conceptualizing the Jew as the embodiment of the postmodern subject's decentring and nomadism, deconstruction reiterates the anti-semitic topos of the Wandering Jew. When it imagines the Jew as the unrepresentable Other, a figure of excess which ruptures the fabric of Western "ontomimetology" (Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's term), it simultaneously re-encodes the Jewish experience in negative, exclusionary terms.

In chapter two, "*Daseinanalyse*: Derrida, Heidegger's Silence, and the Return of the Repressed," Bellamy investigates Jacques Derrida's exculpation of de Man and Heidegger in *Mémoires: For Paul de Man*, a philosophical requiem for his colleague, and *De l'esprit*, written in the wake of Victor Farias' *Heidegger et le nazisme*. Although consenting to Derrida's argument that Heidegger resisted Nazi racist politics, while his infamous silence after the Holocaust coerced philosophy to confront its own ghosts, Bellamy demonstrates how Heidegger's philosophy of Being is structured so as to eradicate the Jew from the Western narrative. Derrida's *Trauerarbeit* with respect to the Heidegger scandal thus manifests his own displaced resistance to memory.

The next chapter, "*L'Histoire Juive*: Caesura, Affect, and the 'Jewish Question' in Psychoanalysis," offers an intricate analysis of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's works. Bellamy maintains that, in his attempt to counter the disarticulation of the Jew within Western politics of representation, Lacoue-Labarthe inadvertently promulgates Hegel's exclusion of the Jew from the aesthetic realm. Also, his famous argument that the Holocaust constitutes a caesura in history eventually casts the Jew into the vortex of *posthistoire*.

Chapter four, "After Repression: Psychoanalysis and 'the jews,'" scrutinizes the work of Jean-François Lyotard, which has been strongly influenced by Emmanuel Lévinas' privileging of ethics over Heideggerian ontology. Bellamy comments on Lyotard's adoption, in *The Differend* and

Heidegger and "the jews," of the Jew as the privileged origin of ethics. Although she commends the ethical integrity of Lyotard's project, the author concludes that, overall, Lyotard's reflection becomes an opportunity for the French thinker to further his interrogation of the aesthetic concept of the sublime. Thus, Lyotard's effort to urge philosophy to speak about the Holocaust only evacuates the Jews from both philosophy and history by transmuting them into an aesthetic concept. Moreover, Lyotard's hypostatization of the Jew as "the unrepresentable" of the Western tradition is merely part and parcel of postmodernism's agenda to deconstruct the subject.

In the concluding section of the book, Bellamy ponders the future of psychoanalysis in the light of the unresolved issue of its Jewish origins. She draws analogies between Freud's and Derrida's ambivalent relation to their Jewishness and detects, in both Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* and in Derrida's essay on Freud, "Archive Fever," an attempt to recuperate Judaism. Derrida's recent work, therefore, can be redeemed for the purposes of the psychoanalytic project, and in the larger context of Bellamy's argument, for confronting the repressed question of the Jew in the post-Holocaust.

It is apparent that Bellamy's psychoanalytic exegesis of major deconstructive texts relies, sometimes uncritically, on the basic concepts of Freudian psychoanalysis, while Jacques Lacan's re-reading of Freud is cursorily dismissed. Thus, *Affective Genealogies* can be summarized, in Bellamy's psychoanalytic idiom, as follows: the "cathecting" of critical libido onto the fetishized figure of the Jew is an instance of repetition compulsion brought about by deconstruction's failure to recognize its own mechanisms of repression. One can glean, from the author's negative assessment of deconstruction, an unrepressed desire that not only the Jew but psychoanalysis itself be salvaged from postmodernist appropriation. This is probably why, despite her skilled readings, the overall critical scope of the deconstructive project remains curiously undertheorized. The deliberate practice of referring to deconstruction as "French Heideggerianism" is reductive, as is Bellamy's synonymous usage of the terms "deconstructive" and "postmodern." The omission from the discussion, except for one short paragraph, of Maurice Blanchot's influential meditation on post-Auschwitz philosophy in *The Writing of the Disaster* is, frankly, inexplicable. She also underestimates the ethical and political import of Lyotard's concept of the differend, which is evident in her flawed interpretation of the French thinker's rebuttal of the Holocaust denier Robert Fourisson. Her contention that Lyotard's views of Jewish death at Auschwitz reactivate Hegel's ascetic aesthetics is tendentious and fails to recognize *The Differend's* questioning of the discipline of history and its polemic with not only Hegel but also Theodor Adorno in *Negative Dialectics*.

Considering Bellamy's aversion to Lyotard's notion of the sublime, it is ironic that *Affective Genealogies* should provoke, in this critical reader, an affective mixture of pain and pleasure. The book is brilliant in terms of textual readings, yet reductive in its assessment of deconstruction; insightful in

mapping out the intersections of postmodernism and psychoanalysis, yet uncritically reliant on Freudianism. For all its virtues and demerits, however, it is indispensable reading for those interested in the future destiny of psychoanalysis and/or philosophy "after Auschwitz" and an undeniable contribution to the task formulated by Blanchot in *Writing of the Disaster* as "How is it possible to say: Auschwitz has happened?" (143)

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The Fateful Question of Culture. By Geoffrey H. Hartman. New York: Columbia UP, 1997. xi, 249 pages. \$22.50 US.

The fateful question was Freud's, and for him it was darkly rhetorical: are the possibilities for cultural development good enough, strong enough to overcome the human instincts for aggression and self destruction, which after all have so far inspired most of what is called history, especially now that we have provided ourselves with the weaponry of total destruction? Moreover, if, as this strangely conflicted, deeply unsatisfying, but probably undismissible book seems to suggest, culture itself has become the fundamental *causus belli* within the university and in the world at large, can there be any hope at all? The question of culture has ceased to be fateful; is it merely fatal? For Hartman culturalism itself is the enemy, but an enemy that might cure the wound it has caused, or could, if properly instructed by literature, by poetry, and of course by criticism: that is to say, a culturalism of a different sort, that of a Schiller. *The Fateful Question of Culture* is a book of paradoxes, contradictions, antinomies, and one is not always sure whether one is dealing with an obscurantist tract or a very bad case of befuddlement, the case of a thinker somewhat like a Greek chorus thinking now this, now that, not knowing which to choose and always longing for the resolution of a higher power. It is a very short book, padded out with two quite unnecessary appendices, and more than sixty of its roughly two-hundred pages of text given over to not particularly illuminating, and occasionally patronizing, footnotes. Yet the burden of sorting out Hartman's argument makes it enormously difficult reading; the syncopation of argument is so extreme one feels one must write the book for him in order to see what he has said. The publisher notes the writing as exemplifying Hartman's role as "elegant stylist"; it is an assertion not likely to be seconded by many readers. Hartman has always been too conscious of his facility in that department to be convincing; the style evades as much as enhances, the elegance often a substitute for substance. It is also haunted by its own strange moments of bathos. Hartman is fluent in the major European languages, but oddly "American": that language even cats and dogs can understand, according to Marianne Moore, occasions difficulties. Thus in discussing one aspect of the wound of culture, i.e. the loss of a *grounded* sim-

plicity of thought and expression to the abstract emptiness of "wit" (*bodenloses Denken*), a deeply burdened notion that brings together Wordsworthian "authenticity," Heideggerian *impensé paysan*, the blood-and-soil propaganda of Nazism, and the possibility of a recuperated Leavisian notion of organic community all questioned or countered by the "blood and cry" of Foucault's Pierre Rivière, Hartman writes: "Also adumbrated is Karl Mannheim's definition of intellectuals as an interclass stratum. Though from a socially stratified and class-conscious point of view intellectuals appear to be deracinated airheads (*Luftmenschen*), they alone may be in a position to demystify the conversion of special interests into universals." Lexicographers of both languages will be interested to discover that *Luftmensch* translates "airhead," to say nothing of the indication that airheads may save the cultural day. The latter part of the quoted sentence carries more or less the major thesis of the book: what it implies is that the university and apparently for Hartman the public space of communication are in serious danger of being taken over by the demagogic and essentially totalitarian discourse(s) of culturalism, which only a dedicated clerisy, instructed by literature *qua* literature, can counter. For "special interests" read identity politics based on a hopelessly extended notion of "culture"; for "universals" read a threatening will to power and potential for those now marginal to capture the centre, either through some secession or a "sinister unification of voices." The latter phrase is brought forward from Kenneth Burke's study of *Mein Kampf*; for Hartman the usual quotation marks limiting the phrase culture wars do not apply. These things are real. But it is not reassuring to discover a bit later that Hartman believes the term "space cadet" would characterize the person and the thought habits of someone who had not inherited landed property. Hartman has never hidden his unhappiness at having to earn his bread among American undergraduates; he obviously has never listened to their language.

These quibbles are not so trivial as they may seem. They touch on the deep problem of a book Denis Donoghue calls on the dust jacket, "in effect, [Hartman's] autobiography. It is immensely moving, a beautiful testament." I can assure the reader not a single personal revelation about Hartman's life makes its way to its pages, but one understands Donoghue's intention. This is a book that wants desperately to be serious and to be taken seriously; it is very much a testament to and of the author's sensibility and obsessions, especially of course the apocalyptic Holocaust. Yet it seems to be written to a phantom audience, a "public" and very much an American public, for whom Hartman has declared himself "public intellectual" ("a.k.a. man of letters," as he states in the Preface to his earlier and much better book, *Minor Prophecies: The Literary Essay in the Culture Wars*), whose main task is to counter the "professors and their jargon," especially the jargon of Derridean postmodernism. But Derrida is this book's guilty conscience and brings it back constantly to the difficult and excruciating problematic of linguistics, especially in the matter of the unspeakable in history: how not [to] speak?

How dare not to speak, but how not to speak so as not to reduce truth to mere words and a further phantomization. In a book much about ghosts and phantoms, Derrida is the unshakeable antithetical spirit, forcing Hartman into a discourse only a few will be likely to penetrate.

What counters the professors and their jargon? The jargon of the professors understood here, for convenience of argument (since there is some jargon Hartman likes) to be the “noisy and explicit” rhetoric of culturalism; culturalism understood as a parochial, sectarian, potentially antisocial identity politics, now seemingly triumphant in the university. What counters the professors is a question of speech, a question of “our speech.” But it is on that question that the book founders and all its strange contradictions are exposed. If Hartman had the political conviction of his essential master, Georg Lukacs, “our speech” would be somehow Wordsworthianly derived from the mute suffering of the indigenous peoples of the planet, whose lives, languages, cultures, are being ruthlessly destroyed by the final, “corporate” phase of technological imperialism. A proper speech is speech that retains the truth of silence, the silence of truth, without which language is only a noise. But Hartman does not share that politics and appears contradictorily to see an “ominous development” in a “new convergence of culture and politics centered on the myth of rural virtue.” Instead Hartman rather clumsily tries to recuperate an innocence and “authenticity” out of a strange amalgam of the “muteness” represented in Wordworth’s “Michael,” Thoreau’s *Walden*, and a Jodie Foster movie with the ominously Dickensian title of *Nell*. Even Hartman senses the dead end there.

As near as I can make out of this fantastically convoluted text—one can’t imagine what it must have been like in its original lecture form—what he finally comes to is something we have all heard many times before: There must be a canon (“more of an immune system than a vulnerable reflection of national ideology,” but is the metaphor happy?); there must a “disciplined and articulate elite comparable to Plato’s guardians” “to pass that achievement on, to keep it from mutability or entropy”; there must be a “religious perspective or its totalizing equivalent” immune from deconstruction. Within this structure the interpretation of poetry, even the “itsy-bitsy spider” rhyme of Jodie Foster’s *Nell*, will preserve our sympathy and humanity. It’s called a liberal arts education; they sell it for a price at Yale.

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