

BOOK REVIEWS

Climbing Parnassus: A New Apologia for Greek and Latin. By Tracy Lee Simmons. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2002. xvii, 268 pages. \$24.95 US.

Classicists these days are as much in the business of explaining (or defending) what they teach as they are in conveying the essence of Ancient Greek and Roman culture to their students. They will, therefore, identify immediately with the occasion of Simmons' book: his regret that the cornerstone of the Western educational tradition has become so dislodged from the popular consciousness. But Simmons did not write *Climbing Parnassus* primarily for classicists. His stated goals are first to "elucidate the centuries-long corner that Greek and Latin held on school and university curricula," and secondly "to exhort" and "to defend, by witness and running commentary, this long path to the formed, cultivated mind" (Preface xvi-xvii). As Simmons himself admits, the newness of his apologia is found not in the specific arguments that compose it (since many of these are as old as the tradition itself), but rather in their application to a modern American context.

For the ancients, Parnassus was the mythical dwelling place of the Muses, daughters of Zeus and source of divine inspiration for literary artists. For Simmons, the mountain emblemizes the spirit and substance of ancient *paideia*, which, with various mutations through the years, informed the Western theory and practice of liberal education up until the early twentieth century. In Simmons' view it is not merely the exemplary character of Greek and Roman literature that makes the tradition of classical education so worth defending. Instead, he takes a steeper approach to his popularization, stressing the heavy emphasis this pedagogical system placed on *form* as well as content. He points out that the long, tedious process of learning difficult languages like Latin and Greek was viewed as the necessary preliminary to the proper contemplation of their literatures, not as optional enrichment for those who encounter them first in translations—the usual mode of experiencing the Classics today. Paramount to the traditional concept of classical education is the notion that minds trained early in the appreciation and control of linguistic subtlety will acquire an habitual "elegance," which is both an intellectual precision and an aesthetic sensibility based in balance and proportion. Greek and Latin are highly inflected languages and are therefore eminently suited to such training; their complex syntaxes require students to have an explicit understanding of the full grammatical, as well as semantic, dependence of every word in a sentence. The ultimate goal of the hard climb towards linguistic mastery is absorption of classical literature in the original. This in turn yields a true humanistic insight; the wisdom of a lofty prospect.

Such wisdom may be considered inspired, but it is conferred only upon those who have raised themselves to it by a willingness to endure drudgery. It is emphatically not a set of utilitarian skills or a fuzzy, hyper-democratic relativism, the goals attributed by Simmons to the two worst educational paradigms afoot today. But neither is it the attainment of specialized philological scholarship in the "scientific" mode, which paradoxically rose to its zenith just as common classical education began to decline in the early twentieth century.

The theme of holy mountaineering further provides Simmons with a conceit for the structure of his book, which first critiques the state of a society with inadequate educational paradigms, next leads the reader "upwards" through a history of Classical education through the ages, and finally surveys the whole scene from above, with a reprise of some of the initial observations and an attempt to show how more widespread classical training would improve the population at both an individual and a societal level. The pervasive metaphor of transcendence, as well as the specific content of the four main chapters of the book, is evident in their titles: Introduction: "A Few Notes at Base Camp"; Chapter One: "Bent Twigs and Trees Inclined: Liberal Education, the Humanities, and the Quest for a Common Mind: The Foothills of Classical Education"; Chapter Two: "Prospect from the Castalian Spring: The Long Ascent of Classical Education from Ancient to Modern Times"; Chapter Three: "Traveling through the Realms of Gold: The Balms of Greek and Latin." The book also has a Foreword by William F. Buckley Jr., a Preface, a bibliography and an index.

Simmons' book is distinguished from other recent defences of the Classics by its relentless insistence on the primacy of linguistic training. While he believes that college Classics courses taught in English translation are fine in their way, he thinks that because they are not part of a complete Classical Education built on early language study, they can potentially do the disservice of merely relativizing the discipline he affirms to be essential. Though his intent to vindicate the least appreciated aspect of the field will certainly make most classicists thrill, the question of how well he reaches those in real need of persuasion remains. Sometimes this flaw seems the result of argumentative strategy, rather than the inherent difficulty of explaining an obscure subject. Thus, in the final chapter, Simmons provides those without Latin and Greek one of the best illustrations I've seen of how Latin works as a language and how its study can provide the student with the right mental preparation for tackling literary content in the original. But it would seem to come too late in a book aimed at a reader not already in the know. It might have helped such a reader to have had this exemplary illustration earlier, for example in the preface and Chapter One, when he or she is forced to take Simmons' assertions on the restorative "balms of Greek and Latin" at face value. In Chapter Two, Simmons' eminently readable history of Classical education, the problem of audience is manifest in a different way. Simmons shows how the linguistic core of Classical education persisted through the fascinating variances of preference for Greek over Latin, of this author over that across the ages,

but nowhere is there a really sustained reading of any ancient text. A close look at some representative text might have helped to explain the necessary connection between the extreme effort required to learn the original languages and the supreme value of their content.

Throughout, Simmons takes the high road in more than one sense. While asserting that Classical education has always been and should remain an elite pursuit, he acknowledges that we no longer equate high social class with the high intellectual mettle required for classical training. Yet Simmons disavows any notion at the outset that he has written a practical prescription for getting the Classics back in the schools, and he likewise eschews any descent into the particulars of the broader educational debate and its ramifications into questions of politics, class, wealth, and access. The result is a damn-all statement of position that has the virtue of being undeniably clear and thought-provoking. Nevertheless, Simmons' tone vacillates between a militant enthusiasm and the wistful melancholy of one who has tasted the sweet fruit of a tree he knows is dying.

Generally, Simmons is a pleasure to read. As a journalist by profession (and a professor of journalism), his writing is consistently lucid and engaging; as an Oxford MA in Classics, his style is at the same time deeply informed by the tradition he espouses. In bolstering his arguments Simmons makes one constantly aware that he keeps distinguished intellectual company (C.S. Lewis, T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden are favourites), even if his quotation of others is occasionally excessive and his own tendency towards aphoristic utterance sometimes cloying.

The weaknesses of Simmons' book make it unsuitable, in my opinion, as a stand-alone read for outsiders wishing to understand the broad relevance of Classics today. He has nevertheless written a substantive defence of the idea of classical education well worth consideration. Indeed, this book has attracted a good deal of attention since publication (it was selected by *Choice* as Outstanding Academic Title for 2002), and thus can be said to have had some success in its stated purpose of bringing the old arguments (which he undeniably frames in fresh and fascinating ways) to a new audience. Simmons has things to teach the old audience as well. The present reviewer, himself a Classicist, came from *Climbing Parnassus* not only with an elevated sense of his role in the academy, but also better armed for his own day-to-day apologetics.

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Dante and the Orient. By Brenda Deen Schildgen. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2002. xii, 208 pages. \$34.95 US.

The last twenty years have witnessed the growth of interest in Western views of the Orient, including not only the modern period of colonization but also

extending back into the more remote past. There is undoubtedly a great disjunction between the modern encounter of East and West, when the European colonizing nations were in a position of military, political, and cultural dominance, and the medieval encounter, when the position was reversed. During the twelfth through fourteenth centuries, Islamic philosophy and science were at the vanguard of Western intellectual movements, Oriental luxury goods were highly desired commodities, and the crusaders venturing into the Near and Middle East were repeatedly thwarted in their efforts to take (and hold) Jerusalem. Schildgen's work is thus part of an ongoing effort to write a history of Western attitudes toward the East, focusing on the ultra-canonical figure of Dante, who is often seen as *the* representative poet of the Middle Ages.

In spite of her title, *Dante and the Orient*, there are really two dimensions to Schildgen's investigation: Dante's perspective on the Islamic world, and his attitude toward India, which Schildgen identifies as the "good Orient" (105). Accordingly, the chapters move from a general survey of "Dante's Geography" (Ch. 1) to two chapters on Western views of Islam, "The East in the Latin World" (Ch. 2) and "Dante and the Holy Land Crusade" (Ch. 3), concluding with two chapters on Dante's India, "Dante and the Indus: The Salvation of Pagans" (Ch. 4) and "Miracle and the Marvelous: Dante and the Wonders of the Orient" (Ch. 5). Each of these is quite self-contained, printed with its own notes at the end of the chapter, which may explain why the dual focus on Islam and India as two very different aspects of the Orient goes largely unstated. Instead, Schildgen argues that Dante's depiction of Western crusaders who fought heroically against Muslims actually has little to do with Christian views of Islam: "whereas the Islamic world is not his immediate concern, Latin Europe ... is the location of his anxieties" (92). Her argument is on especially weak ground when she claims that the presence, in the *Paradiso*, of Charlemagne, Roland, Renoart, William of Orange, and even Godfrey of Bouillon does not indicate Dante's interest in the conflict between Christianity and Islam; instead, it "demonstrates his focus on Europe" (81; cf. 71). The only part of the East that matters to Dante, according to Schildgen, is the more distant eastern frontier of India; but even this is significant only as a symbolic space used to define Western theological concerns, not as an actual geographical location. The Islamic Orient is irrelevant, in this reading, while the Indian Orient is simply a "poetic mechanism" (106).

The book is not a comprehensive study. It is comprised of just 112 pages (excluding notes), nearly half of which have appeared in print elsewhere. Of the book's five chapters, two (and part of another) were originally published in *Dante Studies* (116 [1998], 111 [1993], and 113 [1995]). The previously published work, especially that found in Chapters 4 and 5, is among the strongest and best-documented material to be found in *Dante and the Orient*. The earlier chapters, especially the foundational chapter on medieval geography, are very much weaker. The reader is likely to be puzzled by endnotes which have little to do with the chapter's content, or which offer a

citation for only one of several works described in the text. For example, the statement that "Dante knew the basic geography found in works by Augustine, Orosius, Isidore of Seville, and Honorius of Autun" (20) is followed by a note citing only a very lonely Honorius (40n7); there are an especially large number of discrepancies of this kind in the first chapter. Several errors indicate a superficial knowledge of medieval intellectual history: for example, in a single passage, the *Liber Floridus* (a manuscript compilation) is wrongly described as an encyclopedia and the *Philosophia* of William of Conches is cited in place of his *Dragmaticon* (20). The nature of the errors in the discussion of medieval science and philosophy suggests an excessive reliance on secondary sources, probably Nardi and LeGoff. Similar weaknesses appear in the use of modern theoretical sources: a discussion of Dante's Florence includes a note citing Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey without any indication of how their work is relevant to Dante's poetry (or even any page numbers [13n3]). A reference to Benedict Anderson's "imaginary [sic] community" (7) also betrays a certain superficiality in Schildgen's research, as does a note citing "Spivak, *In Other Worlds*, and Babha [sic], *The Location of Culture*" (14n17). In sum, this is an uneven book, some chapters insufficiently researched, others insightful (though reprinted). Throughout, Schildgen's fluent and lucid style is a pleasure to read.

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Poetry, Enclosure, and the Vernacular Landscape, 1700–1830. By Rachel Crawford. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. xiii, 318 pages. \$90.00.

Ways of thinking about space changed radically in England during the long eighteenth century—a change that is apparent in the shift from valuing openness and spaciousness to valuing enclosure and confinement, from the boundless views of landscape gardening to the bounded kitchen garden, from common grazing lands to the increasing enclosure enacted by Parliament, from free-ranging, lengthy georgic poetry to the shorter lyric and romantic bower poem. So argues Rachel Crawford in this highly imaginative and extensively researched study of changing attitudes in poetry, landscape gardening, agricultural reform, industry, and other spheres. The appeal and the challenge of this wide-ranging study are in its interdisciplinary breadth, as Crawford moves deftly among these various areas of thought and activity, exploring the different ways in which space assumes importance. Crawford says she draws her inspiration from Coleridge's notebooks, especially from his tendency "to draw alien things together in reshaping moments of surprise, wit, and affection" (xi). Her approach to the cultural history of the eighteenth century emulates Coleridge in this way and benefits from it.

Critical interest in landscape poetry, going back to Dr. Johnson, has expanded greatly in recent decades, encompassing political, social, and nationalistic concerns. Crawford builds on her predecessors—Raymond Williams, Stuart Curran, Clifford Siskind, and many others—and focuses on her particular thesis of the changing conceptualization of space, a highly abstract issue which she grounds thoroughly in the details of agrarian tracts, gardening manuals, poems, and a variety of other primary documents.

Enclosure of agricultural lands serves as the main emblem of the changing views towards space. Most of England's fields had already been enclosed before the eighteenth century, as Crawford points out (45–48), increasing private ownership and removing common lands for grazing and planting available to the lower classes. Nevertheless, the open-field system continued to represent "an older, simpler England occupied by a 'bold peasantry'" (12), so that when Parliament enacted enclosure in the years following 1760, a great debate arose between those wanting to hold onto a pastoral Old England and those who favoured a progressive, scientific, and productive agricultural reform. The argument against enclosure is best known today through Oliver Goldsmith's "Deserted Village," where the peasantry of sweet Auburn is deprived of its means of subsistence by a greedy and debauched aristocracy. Even though Goldsmith attacks the abuse of enclosure, not enclosure per se, Crawford shows how the poem came to be used to arouse opposition to parliamentary enclosure (40–43), which was blamed for a host of ills. Not supporting one side or the other, Crawford is interested in the shifting epistemology of containment and the discourses to which it gave rise.

Corresponding to the agricultural shift is the change in principles of landscape gardening as attention was redirected from the unbounded prospect of the great estate to the enclosed space of the kitchen garden, a change that Crawford traces through treatises by Stephen Switzer, Thomas Fairchild, Humphrey Repton, J.C. Loudon, and others. She then draws a parallel between the shift from the expansive form of georgic poetry, widely favoured in the earlier part of the eighteenth century, to the contained form of the lyric that became predominant by the end of the century, and the sonnet form that was revived at that time. Chapters on John Philips' *Cyder* (1708) and Richard Jago's *Edge-Hill* (1767) show how these georgic poems represent the changing thinking about landscape, agriculture, and industry—an overall shift from expansion towards the contraction that becomes fundamental to Romantic thought, according to Crawford. She uses "This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison" and "Nuns fret not at their Convent's narrow rooms," along with a dozen other poems by Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, and Hemans, to exemplify the concentration, intensity, and immediacy of such containment. Sublimity here arises not from distances vast beyond comprehension as in the previous century but from confined spaces that open up imaginatively (vertically) to reveal the infinite. McCracken also explores the association of sexuality with lyric poetry, with the bower, and with contained spaces in general.

This book refines and extends earlier studies of poetry and the landscape in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, raising the approach to a theoretical level concerned with the epistemology of space. It also presents some challenges to conventional characterization of the period, notably in its argument about the pre-eminence of manner, surface, and artifice in Romantic poetry, so that “art stands in for nature—for artifice, which places art higher in the system of values than nature, is the hallmark of confined forms” (184). Despite the counter view that art should be subordinated to nature, and manner to matter (as in Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* XIV), Crawford argues that “artifice results from an appropriation of nature so profound that nature becomes art” (185).

Sometimes Crawford seems to stretch her analogies too far, but even then the connections are usually exhilarating, offering possibilities of more fully grasping the thinking of these 130 years as it evolved into more complex forms. This book provides a wealth of information and offers a theory of conceptualization that draws together literary, agricultural, horticultural, economic, legal, political, scientific, moral, and philosophical realms of discourse, showing how they interact with one another in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century culture.

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Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida. By Giovanna Borradori. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003. xvi, 208 pages. \$25.00.

On the tragic morning of September 11, 2001 the author of this book, Vassar College Associate Professor of Philosophy Giovanna Borradori, was fifty blocks from the unfolding disaster at the World Trade Center, separated from her husband, a news journalist who was covering the event, and her two children who were attending school. Her shocking proximity to the event prompts Borradori to write in her introduction, “Mine is the story of a philosopher in a time of terror. Like every other story it is uniquely woven into the life of the narrator”(x). It is the desire to derive some meaning from the event, combined with a strong sense of philosophical introspection, that motivated Borradori to bring together in one volume two of the leading voices in the so-called modernism/postmodernism debates of the last quarter century: Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida. Habermas was at home in Stamberg, Germany on the morning of September 11, watching the events transpire on television while Derrida was in Shanghai, China, giving a series of lectures. Both agreed to appear side-by-side in the same book responding to a series of questions in parallel fashion but without actually engaging in a face-to-face

dialogue. The timing of the publication of this intellectual exchange could not occur at a more vital moment in the history of modernity. Yet, as a result, the book is marred by a series of unfortunate editing errors that suggest a probable rush to publication. The bombing of Pearl Harbor is said to have occurred in "1943" (50), the publishing date of Habermas' famous essay "Modernity: An Incomplete Project" is given as 1883 (185), and the date of Habermas' acceptance of the Adorno Prize for that essay is given as September 22, 2002 "only eleven days after the attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon" (185). Despite these obvious factual errors the book is an important text for augmenting our understanding of the mutual antagonisms that have been directed towards the rival positions within the modernism and postmodernism debates.

Borradori's experience on September 11 prompted her to raise serious philosophical questions about the nature of terror and terrorism: Has classical international law become obsolete in the face of the new subnational and crossnational threats? Who is sovereign over whom? Is it useful to evaluate globalization through the notions of cosmopolitanism and world citizenry? Is the political and philosophical notion of dialogue, so crucial to every diplomatic strategy, a universal tool of communication? Or is dialogue a culturally specific practice, which might sometimes be simply inadequate? And finally, under what conditions is dialogue a feasible option? She poses these and other likeminded questions to Habermas and Derrida in two separate interviews linked by extensive commentary by herself. After a brief introduction, the book is divided into two parts: Part One consists of a dialogue with Jürgen Habermas followed by an essay by Borradori entitled "Reconstructing Terrorism—Habermas," then her dialogue with Jacques Derrida followed by her analytical essay "Deconstructing Terrorism—Derrida." The contrast of "reconstructing terrorism" with "deconstructing terrorism" teases the reader with a sense that, for the first time, we shall be privileged to a fiery exchange over the nature of terrorism and its relationship to modernity. After all, in his famous 1981 essay "Modernity—An Incomplete Project" Habermas pilloried Derrida for his "irreconcilable anti-modernism" and for being a contemporary young neo-conservative whose line stretches back through Michel Foucault and Georges Bataille. Such stinging characterizations became the hallmark of a series of broadsides leveled by representatives of the modernist-postmodernist rivalry towards one another in the eighties and nineties. Readers therefore should be surprised by the manner in which Borradori diffuses the antagonism by posing their confrontation not through each other but through their rival interpretations of Walter Benjamin. Thus Borradori stages a meeting of the minds that disables the earlier polemical positions of both camps while pointing towards new commonalities in the approach to terror and terrorism in the aftermath of September 11.

As a result of these dialogues, obviously staged within a relatively short period of time after September 11, Borradori clearly considers the polarization of these philosophers into Enlightenment and counter-Enlighten-

ment camps to be a red herring. More specifically, the debates over modernism and postmodernism in the 1990s skewed the relationship of their positions to one another but now, after the trauma of September 11, these positions can be revealed to be closer than was ever thought before. "One cannot but be persuaded," Borradori argues, "that Habermas and Derrida share an allegiance to the Enlightenment" (16). Pointing towards their shared inheritance of Kant and the Enlightenment tradition, Borradori notes that this means "for Derrida as it does for Habermas, that the Enlightenment is not dead" (140). However, the shared philosophical heritage was apparent years before the destruction of the World Trade Center and Habermas himself tried to recruit the intellectual legacy of Michel Foucault to a more Enlightenment-friendly spin following Foucault's death in the mid-1980s. Thus, what I think Borradori is construing as the strength of this book—the bringing into constructive dialogue of two such previously opposed rivals—is ultimately a disappointment for the very reason that the call for a renewed commitment to Enlightenment criticality falls short of the critical self-examination required.

For this reason I think that the criticality that Borradori was seeking in bringing together these responses to her questions by Habermas and Derrida would have been better served by including a philosophical perspective on these questions that did not adhere to the same Kantian Enlightenment legacy. For example, in the book *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (2000), the authors Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek stage a much more argumentative and riveting exchange that fortunately preceded the pall cast over critical debate following September 11. As Žižek observes, Derrida and Habermas would both "probably adopt the same left-of-center liberal democratic stance in practical political decisions" (127). "What if," Žižek asks by way of contrast, "there is an acknowledged proximity between them? And what if the task today is precisely to break with the terrain of shared premises?" (326)

From my perspective this is the more challenging and fundamental question facing the Left today. One can only hope that the staging of a constructive dialogue over this question at some point in the near future will help to reanimate the debates on the left and encourage the broadest range of discussion possible over the legacy of Marx, Kant, and Hegel and the fate of modernity. In that context *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* will play a vitally important role.

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Taking on the Tradition: Jacques Derrida and the Legacies of Deconstruction. By Michael Naas. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003. xxx, 211 pages. \$21.95 US paper.

In his *Taking on the Tradition: Jacques Derrida and the Legacies of Deconstruction*, Michael Naas, an important American translator of Derrida's work into English, focuses his series of essays on how Derridean deconstruction approaches the problem of being inextricably bound to a tradition which it must resist. The title's notion of "taking on" the tradition involves both a positive embracing of this necessity and negative repudiation of its given assumptions.

Naas, a student and friend of Derrida, approaches Derrida's notoriously difficult work with the literary sensitivity one would expect of a translator who has struggled with the impossible task of transferring Derrida's endless plays on words and intertextual allusions into a foreign tongue. Naas focuses his exegesis upon what he calls the "performativity" of Derrida's writing—the inseparability of the literary form and the content of each of Derrida's essays, which are in turn intimately connected with the literary form and content of the text Derrida is deconstructing. As opposed to simply evaluating the truth of Derrida's arguments and claims, Naas shows effectively that the only way to grasp the content of Derrida's commentary upon the tradition is through careful attention to its literary form and rhetorical style, a point central to Derrida's own approach but too often neglected by his own commentators. Naas' fine interpretations reveal that however much the disparate threads in a Derrida essay may appear haphazardly assembled, each work is as meticulously crafted as the classical texts he deconstructs.

The first section of Naas' book focuses upon Derrida's reception of the Greek origins of the tradition, specifically, Plato, Aristotle, and Homer. These essays are particularly helpful for understanding many of the central themes of Derrida's work, such as speech, reading and writing, the structural indeterminacy underlying the arbitrariness of every decision and determination, and thought's inescapable dependence on metaphor. The second section focuses upon Derrida's reception of twentieth-century French intellectual thought. Chapters 4 and 6 offer extremely helpful analyses of what implicitly guides and connects Derrida's various treatments of Michel Foucault and Emmanuel Levinas respectively. Naas' treatment of Derrida's interpretation of Freud's conversion to telepathy will be hard to swallow for those who have not fully embraced Derrida's playful style, on account of its adoption of the telepathic tone of Derrida's own piece on Freud. Yet at the same time it is perhaps the essay in which Naas most nearly approaches being structurally consistent with just how radical deconstruction claims to be. The difference between form and content, intentional and accidental, external sound and internal meaning are dissolved, and the essay is accordingly very difficult to follow. As such, it is perhaps most truly performative of its own radical meta-

physics, and thus provides an occasion for an evaluation of deconstruction apart from the apparently repressive structures of rationality handed down to us by the tradition. In the third section, Naas moves from exegesis to an exploration of the future possibilities opened up by Derrida's thought, through his own interpretation of friendship in Homer's *Iliad* and hospitality in American immigration policy.

As is perhaps fitting for a perspective which seeks to undermine the unity of the book, *Taking on the Tradition* is a disparate collection of essays written at different times, in different contexts, related very loosely by the theme of Derrida's reception of the tradition. The lack of a tightly woven common thread linking the various essays is also a side-effect of Naas' overarching thesis about how one should read Derrida, since Naas claims that Derrida has no general theory, but adopts a particular approach and style dictated by the internal logic of his subject matter. Despite Derrida's vigorous demand for attention to the particularity of each context, there emerges through Naas' excellent studies a pattern which reveals the slightly formulaic character of Derrida's writing, as well as an ontology underlying his various sceptical treatments of the tradition. According to this implicit Derridean ontology, underlying everything is a primordial, indeterminate anti-substance which defies the law of non-contradiction yet which is the source prior to all determinate oppositions, thus guaranteeing that any determinate position will be one-sided and reductive, or, in Derrida and Naas' language, violent and unjust. Notwithstanding the indeterminate openness to an unforeseeable future preached by deconstruction, Naas inadvertently brings out how Derrida's response to a particular theme or text is often relatively predictable.

Although undeniably valuable as a guide to the literary richness of Derrida's writing, *Taking on the Tradition* falls short in a few areas. Naas artfully uncovers the correspondence between style and content in Derrida's essays, but leaves unexplained the philosophical import and necessity of these correspondences beyond their cleverness and aesthetic effect. Further, although many passages in Naas' book are admirable for their clear and lucid explanation of difficult texts, Naas' own writing often echoes Derrida's cryptic style. Though he frequently emulates the opacity of Derrida's writing, Naas does not generally apply what he identifies as the double aspect of Derridean deconstruction to Derrida's texts themselves (Naas' argument for the structural correspondence between Derrida's approach to reading texts and his approach to ethics is one of the finest examples of careful interpretation in the book). The first aspect of this double reading is a traditional, historically contextual, and rationally rigorous reading which attempts to capture the authorial intention in the text. The second, deconstructive aspect seeks to uncover the unspoken presupposition in the text which simultaneously grounds its logic while escaping and overturning it. Naas shows how Derrida critically uncovers this tension even in such authors as Blanchot, Levinas, and Foucault with whom he most closely identifies both personally and philosophically. Naas' own approach is almost purely reverential, and

while criticism of an author should not be the standard of philosophical rigour, a more critical stance seems to be demanded by the Derridean claim that one does justice and pays tribute to an author by "remaining faithful to an ambivalence within thought insofar as it reflects the ambivalence of the things themselves ... in taking account of the ambivalence rather than in trying to overcome, rectify, or master it" (69). Naas' analysis would benefit by locating Derrida more within the tradition itself, rather than seeing in his position a complete perspective that is able to stand outside of the one-sided oppositions which he uncovers at every turn.

For a book on Derrida's relation to the tradition, Naas' essays lack a consideration of how Derrida's stance on truth relates to earlier forms of scepticism in the philosophical tradition. Scepticism is of course not foreign to philosophy but absolutely integral to it, and while Derrida's scepticism in relation to the philosophical tradition is more complete than modern scepticism, it shares much in common with ancient forms of scepticism. Naas wants to examine Derrida in his singularity, but a consideration of his relation to the tradition must also address the question of his place in the history of philosophy. Despite these complaints, most of the essays in Naas' book are to be highly recommended, both to students approaching deconstruction for the first time, and to Derrida scholars who have struggled to make sense of some of the most important works in his corpus.

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Economy of the Unlost (Reading Simonides of Keos with Paul Colan). By Anne Carson. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999. 147 pages. \$14.95 US.

Anne Carson's *Economy of the Unlost* is an unsettling, brilliant, very demanding meditation on the "negative theology" (6) that informs what the author considers the most profound mode of poetic attention: the art of "seeing what is not there, and not seeing what is" (73). Carson opens with an intimate "Note on Method" in which she describes her own activity of poetic seeing (and not seeing) as a "dashing back and forth between [the] darkening landscape where facticity is strewn and a windowless room cleared of everything I do not know" (vi). "Once cleared," she continues, "the room writes itself. I copy down the names of everything left in it and note their activity" (vii). But we quickly learn that naming is inappropriate to this aesthetic place—almost a betrayal of it—and that what is really left after the clearing are "vibrations," the afterimage or light trail of receding possibilities, the yearning "residue of [a] greater life" (95).

Tending these wistful vibrations, restoring thickness to the absence they mark, is the primary aim of poetic attention conceived as an "act of memory that ... transform[s] what is innumerable and headed for oblivion

into a timeless notation. Excising all that is not grace" (117). Carson speaks unabashedly of poetic seeing as implicated in larger motions of grace and salvation, though we must resist the temptation to save grace by naming it positively as an insistent presence. Grace appears *negatively* in the dark illumination of *clearing away all that is not grace*; it is the paradoxical suddenness of appearing disappearance, the "gold trace [left] in the mind" (95) by the receding 'what might have been' as it vanishes in the forward glare of what is true or 'actually the case.' Honouring the meagre (but inestimably full) tracings of grace "convince me," Carson writes, of "something essential to human language, to the give and take of being, to what saves us" (95). Carson's negative poetics endeavours to "remind us that human meaning does not stop with the physical facts" (93), and that "position[ed] alongside the world of things [is] an uncanny protasis of things invisible, although no less real. Without poetry, these two worlds would remain unconscious of one another" (59).

Of course, Carson is well aware of our helpless dependence on positivity—on nouns and naming—as both irresistible and necessary. Accordingly, she assigns three names to the vibrations stirred by her poetic clearing. Two of these names refer to poets, one ancient and one modern: Simonides of Keos, a Greek poet of the fifth century; and Paul Celan, a Romanian Jewish poet of the twentieth. The third name designates the poetic technique and vision of 'negation' or 'negativity,' which serves at once to harmonize and separate the ancient and the modern, Simonides and Celan. Carson defines negativity as the "collusion of the present and the absent on the screen of the imagination" (102), an "attunement to the invisible ... counterworld that lies behind the facts and inside perceived appearances" (60). Simonides elicits this counterworld in his repeated use of the 'double-negative,' a poetic trope which establishes *what is* through coincident negative allusion to *what is not*. For example, Simonides conveys the positive fact of a woman's weeping by saying that she appears "with cheeks not unwet by tears" (101). In another instance, Simonides evokes the positive presence of a pervasive sound or noise by asserting, negatively, that "No leaf-shaking blast of wind arose that would have prevented the sound from spreading far and wide" (101). As employed by Simonides, poetic negation restores to view the dialectical wholeness of a positive presence attended by the ghostly image (indirectly palpable in words) of alternative outcomes. The "interesting thing about a negative," Carson writes, "is that it posits a fuller picture of reality than does a positive statement ... a person who speaks negatively can be said to command and display a more complete view of things than one who makes positive assertions" (102).

Carson remarks that Simonides' "lack of despair is noteworthy" and that his poetic negations rest upon a buoyant faith that "knows how to clear away everything ugly, blameworthy, incommensurable or mad and manifest what is worth praise" (121). For the modern poet Paul Celan, whose parents vanished without a trace into Hitler's "concentrationary universe" (115), this

"function of praise is denied" (126). Celan's blank despair, born in a world of positive horror where "Nothing itself came forward to be known" (118), confronts the possibility that no poetic "measure can order, cleanse, or salvage this community" (129). This despair, Carson adds, "is not just personal; [Celan] despairs of the word and that implicates all our hopes" (121). More pointedly, how is it possible for German words, the language in which Celan crafts his poems, to continue to "hold good" (121) after being complicit in nightmare? Although Celan's poems "do not pretend to partake of happier process or positive change ... he does set up an act of attention—pulled out of oblivion—that moves there and back and leaves some residue of greater life" (99). Celan accepts that the "poet's act" remains a motion of grace, a counterfactual effort "to cleanse words and to salvage what is cleansed" (36). For the modern *reader*, however, interpreting this effort necessarily "involves a gratuity. Whether you call [the poet's act] a waste of words or an act of grace depends on you" (129). It is here that Carson's own sentiment of despair—what might be called the 'postmodern' despair of relativism—abandons Celan's insistent faith that grace, far from depending upon the 'gratuity' or fiat of the individual poet or reader, holds good above and beyond any wilful ascription of value. In his Bremen speech of 1958, Celan has this to say about the German language passing through nightmare:

This thing, language, remained unlost, yes, in spite of everything. But it had to go through its own loss of answers, had to go through terrifying muteness, had to go through the thousand darknesses of deathbringing talk. It went through and gave no words for that which happened; yet it went through this happening. Went through and was able to come back to light 'enriched' by it all. In this language I have tried, during these years and the years after, to write poems (Carson 29)

Far from conceiving the poet in romantic terms as a promethean creator of value, Celan claims that language holds good, is resilient to its own loss in darkness and death, independently of the poet's subjective strivings. Celan's courageous wager on behalf of an impersonal grace that abides in language "in spite of everything" offers a hopeful, negative counter to the current positive despair of relativism.

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