

COMPTE RENDU/BOOK REVIEW

MARK C. TAYLOR, *Tears*. SUNY Series, "Intersections: Philosophy and Critical Theory," Rodolphe Gasché and Mark C. Taylor, Editors. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989. 263 pages. Paper \$17.95, Cloth \$54.50.

It looks like a book. It is bound and ordered and marketed like a book - very nicely, too: with 12 chapters, a relevant color-photo cover, 20 figures and extensive endnotes. But it is not, the "author" (!?) insists in a letter to the Press editor serving in lieu of an introduction, a book. Am I then absolved from writing a book review and instead, should I choose to continue this bit of deconstructionist posturing indulged in by our reluctant scribe, "authorized" to supplement this schmorgasbord of hors d'oeuvres sans oeuvre or culinary climax, these 12 occasional pieces "ordered" at random without any "unity, thematic or otherwise," with my own pointless series of re-remarks and chance associations? Such "non-books" can only stir the sportive Dionysian in a contemporary reviewer's soul. Freedom from meaning is a heady thing, a great release. Let us go by the hortatory maxim of Camus' Absurd Hero: "Multiply what you cannot - or will not - unify."

But like any good god, Apollo dies hard. First, there is the perversely unifying terse title, Tears. Then there are the reiterations, which quite naturally overlap, crisscross and converge in all their attempts to diverge. As Our (id) Father Derridada himself repeatedly states, "we cannot escape logocentrism" (p.96). We need not slight the différance when we note that it is no longer the old ontotheological monologocentrism but instead a heterologocentrism. The new thought-experiment of the postmod squad is the eternal recurrence of difference. Nietzsche's heuristic fiction was far easier to think, more bearably heavy of being. What if what you now experience will absolutely never recur? What will recur will be completely different, and so unto eternity. Accordingly: "If difference is to return eternally, it must always return differently" (p.97). This is the unthinkable and unspeakable 'thought' of le pas au-delà (the step/not beyond) on the margins of philosophy, where words fail but nevertheless can be written. "Deconstruction strives but always fails

to write this disaster" (p. 97). The terms come from Maurice Blanchot, that "too-little-known French writer-critic" (p. 80) who more often than not is given the last word, despite/because of the pervasive presence (!) of formidable figures like Heidegger/Derrida:

The tear (rip, rift, crack, fissure, fault) is accordingly the tear of absolute difference, "the archaic tear - the preoriginal wound - castration" (p.14) which accounts for the torn and tattered texts of Derrida and company. Because of it, Taylor chides his colleague, Fred Gasché (oddly working at odds with his suggestive surname), for attempting to discern the identity in the scatter of Derrida's writing. The tear proliferates in the abundance of illustrations, in figures as well as in verbal plays, of primeval ruins and postmodern architecture sometimes suggesting the nightmarish postnuclear ecology of a thoroughly fissured earth of ravines, gulfs, trenches (comfortingly called Marianna), faults (San Andreas) and fissures from which the wastes (manmade or not) of the earth spew, like the lava from Kilauea. "From what crack does the repressed Moder [moldering slime] return - always return? Is this crack the fault of modernity [modish and progressive as it is] that marks the opening of the postmodern?" (p.35). Not that the rot of modernity is replaced by a postmodern cleanup; it is simply brought out into the open, ogled and supplemented by other, more deeply suppressed leavings of rot. Cleanliness here is the purity of crudity, giving vent to the stench of the fart (p.53) and other secretions from our secret crevices. If God in Genesis beheld his creation and found it to be very very good, then what is the a/theological sense of shit? "Shit is the trace of our mortality. The stench of shit is the aroma of our own decay. What is most unacceptable about human existence is that it ends. The repression of time is the denial of death" (p.154). Or inversely, the tear of time is the tear of death, the castration of life, that ultimate threshold of pain which as a 'between' neither is nor is not. Death is the deadline that can never really be met, as Epicurus well knew.

With the oozing issue of fissures - one of the essays bears the title "Secretions" - comes the supple(mental) rend(er)ing of the coincidental homography in English of "tears" secreted from the tears of duct-openings, like the tear trickling from the eye of the rebellious giant Mimas (p.8 and figure 3), just the eye lying amidst the

devastation tracing his rending combat with the Olympian deities. Read it and weep. For, as inured as we may have become to its comic relief riven by a "lacerating laugh," de(con)struction is still a sorry thing, a disaster to cry about, the para-site of the Supreme Holocaust. Are its tears our *tears*, or is the vice versa? No matter: We are at least spared the *tares* to *stare* at - like Derrida's notorious anagram on la carte (*trace, écart*) postale - which presumably would spring up from the titanic trickle furrowing the desert(ed) wasteland.

The disaster that haunts the Derridean texts, synoptically put, is entropy, the irretrievable tendency toward dispersal and scatter, the eternal recurrence of difference. The ultimate issue of the facticity of time is its tendency of decadence (Verfallen), which is sometimes tear-fully rendered here in Hebraic-Freudian fashion as the "castration" of time's power, a slip of the knife rending even being itself impotent. Entropy looms time and again in phenomena like decay, refuse, ruins, noise, anarchy, the "polymorphous perverse" (p.36), sewage 'systems', miscarriages of sense, the nightmarish monstrosities of the late-night horror show, the accidental vomitings of the surrealist dadaist id, the scraps and shards of traditions. The Derridean waste management of texts is at best the makeshift staplings and grafts of the bricoleur, never the cohesive unity of the hermeneutic engineer. Time is ultimately a drifting away to, in Rickert's oddly apt phrase, a "heterogeneous continuum," the empty tombe (fall/tomb: Bataille's play on the French, p. 23) hollowly tolling with the death knell (glas) of the hallowed western quest for unity. Time is inevitably a tomb harboring death, decay and dispersion.

Heidegger sometimes calls this wear of time "errancy" to oppose it to the more comprehensive lure of "mystery" (Ge-heimnis). It is already telling that Taylor tends to discount the awesome attraction of mystery and instead emphasizes the repulsive "monstrous" - one might almost say 'obscene', de trop - aspects of the mysterium tremendum et fascinans (p. 106f) in the one essay devoted primarily to Heidegger, "The Nonabsent Absence of the Holy" (Ch.8). Ultimately, however, the interest shifts from cosmic mysteries of sublime proportions - Kant's Third Critique is rehearsed in the end - to the more intimate family secrets (heimliche Geheimnisse) which crypt the individual home and heart(h). Taylor performs a Heimlich

maneuver on Kierkegaard, guardian of the churchyard crypt, to disgorge the secret of secrets secreted in his heart of hearts, the undigested leftover of the sins of the father passed on to the offspring, like Oedipus to Antigone, or Abraham to Isaac. Or was it more like David to Solomon, Bathsheba's son conceived out of wedlock? For Kierkegaard's mother was maidservant to his father's first wife, whose death led quickly to the conception of the father's first child, Kierkegaard's sister. What then was the youngest son's relation to this mother/maid who was never quite wife to his father and so never quite at home, ever unheimlich? Is this the secret of Kierkegaard's cryptic writings? The recent biographies of Heidegger suggest similar secret parallels: his identification with his proto-Nazi distant relative and kinsman, Abraham a Sancta Clara, and his extra-curricular intimacies with his students. Perhaps a third family scandal might even be included in future biographies: the story behind the deathbed and posthumous decisions disposing of his leftover papers, with disastrous results on his Collected Edition.

Fortunately for us, Taylor carries over some of his old interests from the days when he was still comfortable writings books about the Hegel/Kierkegaard difference. This and the Heidegger/Derrida difference in fact rift out a historical outline in which some of his best, i.e. least crypt-ic essais are located. Two of the historical essays (7 and 8), which radiate backwards and forwards in time from the twin foci of Hegel's Differenzschrift (the identity of identity and difference) and the later Heidegger's notion of Unter-Scheid (the dif-ference of identity and difference), provide important historical leads to deconstructive différance. In returning time and again throughout his non-book to this Heideggerian essay on "Language" glossing Trakl's "A Winter Evening," Taylor, usually a zealous and even irreverent seeker of tears, displays an untypical sense of propriety and deference to the abstract side of Heidegger's treatment of the "tear of dif-ference," and so misses (represses?) the massive opening introduced by the hyphen/hymen of the "Unter-schied" in these blatantly pregnant passages on the labor of dif-ference. Accordingly, not just the deathpangs that he notes (p.39) but also the lovepangs and especially the birthpangs of parturition, parting, penetration and withdrawal must be considered. In fact, the "pain of the threshold," the pain of entry and exit, coming and going,

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genesis and phthora, in short, of the ins and outs of life, love, and death, suggest a diffuse vaginal enfolding rather than the pointed phallogocentric orientation that Derrida equates with monologocentrism. For what does the "intimacy of the under-part (Unter-Schied)" remember if not the lower cleavage of our matriarchal origins aus der Scheide (vagina)? The abyss of being is a black hole, a chthonic indifference which differentiates in concealment into the womb, and not the tomb, of time. It is the diffuse chiasmic "inter-section" (Unter-Schied) "between the parting" and among the folds which gestates the intimate matrix (Mitte: read "Mutti," thus "house of being") of genesis, gender, genus and generality partitioning the basic bearings and gesticulations of our language. The much discussed Event of unconcealment, the birth of sense in human experience, the fertile It which gives and yields in giving, is accordingly an Event which contextualizes or "regions" as It destines, apportioning the text and reach of the temporal while (Je-weiliges) along which each of us is sent. The comparison with Derrida is therefore not to be taken, at least at first, from the admittedly possible miscarriages of monstrosities of nonsense, but from the owning of eachness, at once an-archic and contextualized, in which the most incipient identity of difference and difference of identity is born. Heidegger's last word is still a formal descendant of his early starting point in the Scotian doctrine of the analogy of being, with its inherent regard for absolute difference. Analogical unity is a mean between the extremes of pure univocity and pure equivocity, where absolute indifference and absolute difference join to form a single matrix or field. Thus, beings taken to be properly apportioned in their being assume a relative sameness of being while never losing their absolute difference. Heidegger's lifelong task is that of articulating this "time-space-field" of radical individuality bordering on the equivocal, of drawing a fitting linguistic matrix in which to say the unsayable individuum ineffabile.

How to part , "to take one's leave" and let go: "Do not go gentle into that good night"... or stealthily, with nary a whimper? How to close a pointless non-book? Taylor in fact gives us three identifiable endings, the first two in a double fold concluding a lengthy but Unconcluding Postscript addressed to a book writer and entitled "p.s. fin again," placed near the beginning of his collection/collocation, following a brief letter to another book writer

enfolding a "reply/repli" on how to "fin again/ begin again" (p. 5) especially those errant missives duly enveloped/ invaginated and posted in the postPost age. To begin with, he repeats the ending of his previous "book" of *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology*: "It (un)finished - Amen - Sobeit - (p.s.)." That is immediately followed/folded by a text which "almost ends" Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, that model non-book, just before it re-returns to its own beginning: "Far calls. Coming, far! End here. Us then, Finn, again (p.72). But "far" is "father" in Danish, clearly not a clean Finn-ism. So let us instead end at the very end (p.231), which begins by quest(ion)ing the final essay title: "How to do nothing with words. Write to betray nothing. An end "beyond" the end of theology. An end that never arrives but always betrays." Betrays what? The "liminal experience of the nonexperience" of the sacred, which is not God or the (w)Hol(1)y, let alone healthy, but the undisgested remainder leftover from the repast of the logocentric tradition. The sacred which approaches when gods fail betrays itself in the language leftover in the wake of the mo(u)rning of the death of God, rewritten "in an expenditure without return" to signify "nothing," i.e. that there is nothing beyond, le pas au-delà.

To part is to start again? Is that possible, after all that has been said and done? Is the frenetic energy of the Dionysian, "full of sound and fury," so playfully dis-gorged here from the spent text and entropy of the tradition, leftover sustenance enough to "begin again" to wake Finn-egan? "Time is bearing another son. Kill Time!" claims Dylan Thomas. Ass-ez. Basta. Cut! Done. Fertig. Genug. Halt! (IJK etc.).

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